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Histories in Slavery

Questioning Memory through *Shetkaryacha Asud*

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ABSTRACT

Memory is useful in interrogating the limits of the term history, if history is a form of political communication and what this would mean for its conceptual underpinnings. History as seen through the eyes of Mahatma Phule's *Shetkaryacha Asud* (Cultivator's Whipcord [1881]), could be useful here. In the period following British occupation of the subcontinent, Phule tries to understand the cultural and social changes around him. Born into a lower caste family, Phule, pioneered the attack on the institutions of Brahmanism and their dominance within both agrarian societies and colonial administration. Inspired by Thomas Paine's Rights of Man, *Shetkaryacha Asud* is representative of collective memory through an interaction of different kinds of historical factors that interact with each other.

The paper would be looking at the interpretation and reception of collective memory and its related communication through Phule's works. This paper depends on critical discourse analysis that has its basis on caste. Within the paper I try to question the notion of history and memory. Phule looks at historical methodology as a socio-cultural process with pragmatic interventions in the present. History here is seen as a conscious, ideological and political assertion.

KEYWORDS
caste, South Asia, memory, peasant, history

The son of an unknown lower-caste family, Jyotirao Govindrao Phule, pioneered the attack on the institution of Brahmanism and their dominance within both agrarian societies and colonial administration. Born in Pune, in the then Bombay Presidency, shortly after the East India Company's assumption of power in Western India, Phule lived and worked in rapidly changing times. With the defeat of the last ruler or *peshwa* of the Marathas, Bajirao II, at the hands of the British East India Company, a new era of governance, rule of law, and communication came into being.

Changes in status of the larger system of hierarchies, within which the Hindu society was constructed, presented a number of issues. The caste system, which signified an institutionalisation of Brahmanical dominance, meant that only certain social groups could access literacy and learning owing to their ritual purity, while on the other end of the spectrum were the Shudras and Atishudras, who were only seen fit to serve the role of servants and as providers of material support due to their impurity. Between these two varnas or caste groups were the Kshatriyas, or warrior castes, and the Vaishyas, or the merchant castes. Even though the agricultural castes included a number of Shudras with substantial landholdings, their material prosperity had no effect on their location on the caste hierarchy (Weber 1958).

With the coming of Christian missionaries, men like Jyotiba Phule could finally access education, hitherto reserved for only the Brahmins. This brought in new opportunities to bring in fundamental changes in attitudes towards their status as Shudras.

History, on the one hand, brings intellectuals who share the weight of the contemporary crisis in the discourse of remembering as concerned citizens. As experts of the past, they have to explore the changing faces of identity and the uncertainties that resulted from the period following the British occupation of a large part of India in the mid-nineteenth century and the challenges of coming to terms with accelerating rates of social and political changes brought about by the colonial regime. On the other hand, the study of memory as an exercise is purely academic in its origin and outlook. It allows academics to answer to the philosophical legacies of moments in time gone by.

This combination of social relevance and intellectual challenge explains the popularity of studies of collective memory. Memory has become a central concept within the humanities and social sciences. It could, thus, be useful to look at the limits of the term "history", if history could be indeed a form of political communication, and what this would mean for its conceptual underpinnings. History as

seen through the eyes of Mahatma Phule's *Shetkaryacha Asud* (*Cultivator's Whipcord*), written in 1881, is useful in this regard.

Inspired by Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1792), Phule's work is representative of collective memory through an interaction of three kinds of historical factors: intellectual and cultural traditions that are instrumental in framing our past; memory makers who communicate and adopt these traditions; and memory consumers who receive and transform these artefacts according to their needs and group interests. This work could indeed be understood as a kind of intervention within the larger prospect of writing history for the subcontinent as well as a resistance to the hegemonic voices that have had the right to speak for Indian pasts.

We, as interpreters of collective memory, are placed in a precarious position. Collective memory is not history but it is a construct made of elements similar to the ones that make up history. Phule's work, then, is an exercise in creating and communicating a kind of collective memory. His construction of the contemporary becomes socio-historical transformed into a pragmatic intervention within the contemporary. It could be seen as a result of conscious manipulation as well as unconscious absorption through political mediation. If we compare Phule's work to the more "academic" subaltern studies school of historiography, this becomes one of the more important distinctions. *Shetkaryacha Asud* represents a new approach to "popular consciousness".

***SHETKARYACHA ASUD* AND ITS MEMORIES**

In the period between 1882 and 1883, Phule wrote a number speeches and lectures which were later collected together in a single manuscript and presented to the Earl of Dufferin, the governor-general of India. This manuscript, which was about five chapters long, came to be known as *Shetkaryacha Asud*. The first two chapters of the book appeared in *Din Bandhu* newspaper in a serialised fashion in 1883 under the editorship of Narayan Meghaji Londhe. Following this, Londhe refused to publish the last three chapters as he felt that they were extremely critical of the British government's policy towards cultivators and could bring trouble for the newspaper (Phadke 1979). The book was eventually published after Phule's death. It was intended as a form of communication to influence British policy,

presenting the cultivator's case within their realties. Simultaneously, it was aimed for the rural audiences of the Satyashodhak Samaj.[1]

A lot of effort within the book went into look closely at the elements of material life, including social and economic aspects, which the rural audience could be receptive to. The account was simple, presented in the words of an imaginary cultivator who lays out his difficulties of acute poverty and indebtedness. Phule does not implicate himself as a poor cultivator in the way that he describes the conditions of the non-Brahmins. The cultivator is seen as someone who has to fight for his/her survival and meet the quotas set up by creditors and government officials with poverty and dereliction being part of his/her house, family, and livestock. It is also made amply evident that this condition that the cultivator now faces has not always been the case, and that his determination and self-respect were waning only now. This kind of assertion, it seems, brings about a fracture in the way in which the lower castes are visualised: from common historicity of one oppressed community to a group who are united by their shared social experiences.

The deprivation that a cultivator faces is seen in relation to the idyllic lives of Brahmins, who were employed by the British government. For instance, in one part, Phule describes the cultivator's diet, which would have all the signs of abject poverty including *bhakari*s and watery (lentil) in the afternoon and maize or *jondhali* in the evening. This is compared with the Brahmin's diet, which he calls a wedding feast with its array of rich, extravagant dishes (Phule 1969: 233–9).

Other than their labour, the peasants are seen to form rural communities with cooperation and honesty that result from shared social experiences. Phule asserts that such rural communities should be the basis for government institutions rather than literate elites whose interests lay in different spheres.

Contrasting the productive and unproductive groups within the background of British institutions, Phule blamed the British rule for increasing the problems of poverty and discrimination among the peasants. But his real motives did not lay in just laying down the effects of the British rule; he also

[1] Also called Truth-Seekers' Society. This was a social reform organisation founded by Jyotirao Phule in Pune, Maharashtra, in the year 1873. The society's focus in lay in reforming education and creating social and political access for underprivileged groups, especially Shudras, Dalits, and women.

aimed to present the unequal distribution of resources between the peasant classes and the bourgeoisie. This naturally included an analysis of Brahmanism and changes within the caste structure through colonial intervention.

Phule focused his critique of the colonial regime on its focus of setting up bureaucratic structures that were made up of either European or Brahmin officials in its upper echelons, being both incompetent and corrupt. These groups enjoyed work benefits, the cost of which had to be borne by the toiling peasants. For instance, local taxes that were collected for providing primary education to the masses aided those institutions that helped Brahmin children the most (Phule 1969: 231).

The systemic incompetence hurt cultivators the most. Thus, they were more concerned with their own survival rather than gaining knowledge about their surroundings. Further, their inability to converse in Marathi meant that they had to rely on intermediate officials who themselves were corrupt and exploitative (Phule 1969: 249).

In spite of these difficulties, Phule believed that the British administration had the potential to restructure rural society and the key to this change would have to be through education. He planned in setting a standard of justice in society through which anyone who did not labour to earn a livelihood would be termed a parasite. This was done to check the hegemony of the moneylender, and this was instrumental in the non-Brahmin polemic in the 1890s and later. To a certain degree, this showed the growth of the non-Brahmin movement from its initial base among the urban literate class to more rural centers that were concerned with village agriculture. However, Phule remained concerned with the oppressions of the oppressive Brahminic religion. Phule critiqued the Agricultural Relief Act of 1879, as a follow up of the Deccan Riots of 1875 and the Bombay Government Report (1875) into their causes (Phule 1969: 230–1). The British government, in fact, had very little reason to charge the small moneylenders, they instead charged a large rate of interest on the subcontinental debt as a whole. When there was exploitation by the moneylenders, Phule felt that the bureaucracy was to blame. The Act of 1879 simply resulted in a situation where "no self-respecting moneylender will now let a cultivator even stand at his door" (Phule 1969: 209).

At an earlier stage, Phule had stated that untouchables within the lower-caste community were the touchstone of a genuine caste-free society. It is evident from his later organisational work till his death in 1890 that he never forgot this fact. One of the first leaders of the untouchable movement was

Gopal Baba Valangakar, a Mahar from Ravadula, near Mahad in Konkan. Through his brief stint in the army, he had received rudimentary education. In 1888, he published a pamphlet called *The Elimination of Untouchability* and, in the same year, founded "The Society for Removing the Stigma of Non-Aryan Origin". He suggested that untouchables were initially Kshatriyas who had become polluted by eating meat during famines. This a clear case of tension as the other non-Brahmin thinkers generally equated Kshatriyas with those having Aryan origin. This was despite the fact that wider structure of resistance was against the hegemonic Hindu hierarchies.

Phule also realised, as seen through his writing at this phase, that the issues of the peasants and those of the untouchables had to be seen through different lenses, even though their problems derived directly from the Brahmanic religion itself. In a separate unpublished work titled "The Tale of the Untouchables", he looked into the misery of the untouchables in relation to their material conditions in life and the kind of lower-than-human status that the Hindu society had accorded them. It is clear that he never gave up the ideological stance that all non-Brahmin castes could be included in the Kshatriya category, which was an exception to the non-Brahmin polemic of the 1890s. Phule was adept in his use of symbols to establish the Satyashodhak Samaj as a representative of the peasant class which went beyond the publication of *Shetkaryacha Asud*.

WRITING PEASANT HISTORIES IN INDIA

The notion of race that we see prevailing in the nineteenth century came to dominate the ways by which we visualise caste/tribe within the country and to that effect the concept of the peasant was imagined in such a manner. C.A. Bayly (1997: 4) clearly states that "race science" became a "more insistent theme in India after 1840" (which in turn became of utmost importance by the 1870s for instituting acts against tribes and peasants to the end of procuring cheap supplies of labour). British historians like W.W. Hunter and H.H. Risley do contend that caste and "race are all but the same thing" (Bayly 1997: 228). This kind of consideration goes a long way in paving the road for the discipline of anthropology to become the "principal colonial modality of knowledge and rule" after 1857, and, from 1870, it becomes the primary object of social classification and ordering (Dirks 2002: 45).

For example, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* by E.T. Dalton came out in 1872, and focused on caste in a manner of ethnological account. H.H. Risley's *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* was published in 1891,

and, in 1896, *Tribes and Castes of the North Western Provinces and Oudh* prepared by W. Crooke was brought out. However, as stated by Dirks (Ibid: 48), "the spirit of caste attained its apotheosis with the census", which began in the year 1872. The commitment to "race science" by the British authorities as an accurate "modality of knowledge" deeply influenced the rulers and the subject alike. O'Malley (1913: 440) states that people did come to perceive the census as a measure to ascertain "the relative status of different castes and to deal with questions of social superiority". He noted further that:

> No part of the census aroused so much excitement as the return of caste…. Hundreds of petitions were received from different castes- their weight alone amounts to one and a half maunds- requesting that they might be known by new names, be placed higher in order of precedence, be recognized as Kshatriyas. (1913: 440)

This resulted in census operations leading to rise in caste consciousness (Bandyopadhyay 1992: 31). Different caste groups started organising sabhas since 1887 to formulate and promote caste interests (Jha 1977: 14–17). One of the primary objectives of these associations was upgradation of caste status and recognition of the same as lying close of the Brahmins. The status or rather the caste status became the distance between that particular caste and that of the topmost castes, considerably reinforcing Brahmanism. Bernard Cohn (2004d: 241–2) further adds that

> Most of the basic treatises on the Indian caste system written during the period 1880 to 1950 were written by men who had important positions either as census commissioners for all of India or for a province. Among them were A. Baines, E.A.H Blunt … J.H. Hutton, D. Ibbetson … L.S.S. O'Malley, H.H. Risley.

He states further that it would not be an exaggeration to say that down until 1950 scholars' and scientists' views on the nature, structure, and functioning of the Indian caste system were shaped mainly by the data and conceptions growing out of the census operations.

In matters of conceptualising the village and the peasants, it may be said, according to L.B. Alayev, that Thomas Munro was one of the first social thinkers to refer to "village community" in 1806 (Gopal 1987: 19). The conception of the village as a political society in itself was an early nineteenth-century conception. It was posited to be a "body of co-owners of the soil", followed by the construction of the village as an "emblem of traditional economy and polity" within the national struggle, partly

influenced by R.C. Dutt's *Economic History of India* published in 1902 (Cohn 2004b: 158–9). However, it was the efforts of Henry Maine and Karl Marx that the conception of the village and its peasants was incorporated within the discipline of world history (Dumont 1966: 80). The *Land Systems of British India* was a massive work written by Baden-Powell, which was published in 1892 and empirically contradicted the views forwarded by Maine regarding the classification of villages and the patterns of land ownership. But compared to Maine, he changed little in his approach: He still looked at the changes from an evolutionary perspective. Bernard Cohn (2004b: 162) argues that "the Victorian students of Indian village were interested in the village as a type from which they could infer evolutionary stages and which could be used to compare similar developments or stages in other parts of the world."

Various reports, such as those on famines and riots, and district-wise survey settlement reports, which elaborated on the conditions of the peasantry, were also prepared during this period which added to the knowledge base regarding rural India. At this time, we also see a large number of both European and Indian Indologists translating the ancient texts of differing epistemological systems. These comprised of scholars such as Max Müller, Griffith, McCrindle, R.G. Bhandarkar, Radha Kumud Mookherji, and K.P. Jayaswal. Various centres of research were also set up in Pune, Benares, and Kolkata. For example, from 1788 to 1884, in Kolkata, 414 essays on antiquities, 140 essays on coins and gems, 143 essays on history, 305 essays on languages and literatures, and 127 essays on religion, etiquette, and rituals were produced in *Asiatick Researches* and *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Chakrabarty 2008: 9). In 1848 and onwards, we see the Bibliotheca Indica series being published. Such work, as stated by Ramakanta Chakrabarty (Ibid: 10), "motivated by the spirit of delving deep into unknown historical facts or the spirit of discovery". Indian Thought, which started to be published in Benares at the start of the twentieth century, was well received from both Indian and European scholars (Jha 1976: 109). R.G. Bhandarkar in Pune worked out new methodologies for studying the "search for the glorious past", establishing the method of "reliable evidence" and objectively working "towards the demystification of history" (Gottlob 2003: 26–7). In addition, a considerable amount of vernacular texts were also produced in languages like Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Assamese, Marathi, and Tamil (Chatterjee 2008: 1–24). Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's writing (in Bengali) deals with issues of colonial subjugation and historical value. The Bengalis, at this point, were urged to write their own history as the notion of Indian modernisation having "inner space for

indigenous culture" had to be considered (Gottlob 2003: 30–1). These writings continued to inspire constructions of knowledge on Indian society, culture, and history. *Bihar Durpan*, written by Ramdeen Singh in Hindi and published in 1881, consists of a detailed account of the socio-economic conditions and lives of people of early colonial era (as quoted in Robb 1996). *Aina-i-Tirhut*, written by Bihari Lal "Fitrat" in Urdu and published in 1883, contains a varied description of historico-socio-economic conditions of the region Mithila, basing his argument on documents and surveys of villages that proved to be the primary source of data. Within Fitrat's account, we find descriptions of varied historical sites like tanks and ponds, zamindars, *kothiwal*s[2], scholarship traditions, indigo planters, conditions of agriculture, and peasantry (Jha 2001). The production of the volumes of *Linguistic Survey of India* by George A. Grierson helped understand the variety in languages/dialects and subdialects of people within the country. *Bihar Peasant Life*, also written by Grierson and published in 1885, is still a classic when it comes to understanding the peasant world in North India. Thus, we can see that the works of both Eastern and Western scholars help us in broadening our historical horizons when it comes to production of texts. This added to the conception of India being based on ancient knowledge and achievements, as differing discourses came to be widely recognised. The Brahmanic texts were valued for explaining customs and understanding rituals and so on (Kosambi 2002: 3–4). This understanding about the socio-economic and cultural arenas in different gazetteers, survey settlement reports, census reports, and other documents prepared by O'Malley, Stevenson-Moore, and Baden-Powell helped produce an understanding of historical sociology (Mukherjee 1977: 22–3).

T.K. Oommen is one of the few social thinkers in the field whose study has been the "privileged field of … lifelong academic expressions, debates and writings" (Singh 2000: 73). While studying the peasant struggles in Malabar region and the Travancore-Cochin princely states (parts of Kerala), he reconstructs the process of mobilisation against the imperial regime that, in turn, led to rise of new issues and forms of protest under the influence of leftist parties (Oommen 1985b: 35–53, 180–254). He produces this text based mostly on secondary sources of information, but in addition to this, he also takes the help of vernacular literature (in Malayalam) in this context. He states that the Moplah uprisings (33 in number) in Malabar from 1836 to 1921, along with the Tebhaga, Telangana, and Naxalite movements, is one of the most widely studied agrarian movements within India (Oommen

[2] Kothiwal or Kotwal is a title, sub-caste and surname in India. From Mughal times, the Kotwal title was given to the rulers of large towns.

1990: 114). Another thinker, D.N. Dhanagare, is also seen to be working within this sphere with publications of works based on Telangana (1974), Tebhaga (1976), and Moplah (1977) movements. In addition to this, he also studied peasant movements in Uttar Pradesh (1975). In the context of his studies, he has stated:

> My purpose was to historically reconstruct social origins of a given movement and to understand its lasting impact on agrarian power structure … my findings challenge the validity of the thesis on "passivity of the Indian peasant", propounded by Barrington Moore Jr., as they also question the empirical validity of the "middle peasant thesis" advanced by Eric Wolf and Hamza Alavi. (Dhanagare 2006: 26)

His rigorous enquiry of appropriate historical records, such as gazetteers, official reports, private papers, and regional literature, helped him to disturb the image of the peasant created before him. Historians like Pushpendra Surana (1983), K.L. Sharma (1985), and Hira Singh (1998) work on ideas of the peasant struggle in Rajasthan within a certain historical framework. Surana studies the Bijolia movement that arose in erstwhile Mewar during 1917–22 against landlordism. He postulates on how religion helped in creating a sort of peasant consciousness (Surana 1983: 70–2). K.L. Sharma, on the other hand, studies the sociopolitical structure in the Rajputana estates in the medieval era, during the protest against absolutist powers, i.e., the ruling chiefs from 1913 onwards. He states that various organisations like *lok* parishads and *praja mandal*s[3] that not only worked for public welfare but were also instrumental in raising peasant consciousness (Sharma 1985: 122–33).

William R. Pinch is also seen to be doing an extensive survey of historical records right from the beginning of the eighteenth century, analysing the activities of the Vaishnava sects in the context of non-upper-caste peasant movements in Northern India in the process. He studies the Yadavas' politics for upper-caste identity for a time period ranging from the 1890s to the 1920s and the structural and

[3] The Praja Mandal movement was a part of the Indian independence movement from the 1920s in which people living in the princely states, who were subject to the rule of local aristocrats rather than the British Raj, campaigned against those feudatory rulers, and sometimes also the British administration, in attempts to improve their civil rights.

cultural politics of Kurmi, Kushvaha, and Yadava involvement in agrarian radicalism from the historical period of the 1920s to the 1940s.

Thus, we traverse through time and space in terms of narratives. These bring up certain questions, those that relate to the peasant's consciousness, who they are and if their identity forms a fracture or a composition.

MEMORY AND *SHETKARYACHA ASUD*

If we consider the work within collective memory, we must go through the work of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1925) as a primary theoretical reference point. He understood "collective memory" as the shared representation of the past. His emphasis lay on looking at the importance of everyday communication within the creation of collective memories, and his interest in looking at the discourse of imagery within the historical themes resonates very well with the questions of historical representations.

For instance, Phule constructs the account of *Shetkaryacha Asud* in the form of a personal communication, where we follow the peasant to his house, we see the place where he has his meals and lies down to sleep. Through a furthering of communication between Phule and the peasant, we also come to know that the peasant had been going through a lot of difficulties since he had been unable to pay the bribe to the Brahmin official, unlike other villagers, who had then resultantly taxed the land at a greatly increased cess. We are told that there had been a shortage of rain that particular year and that at the same time, his father had died. The funerary expenses, coupled with the drought, meant that the peasant had to borrow money to meet the cess amount, with his lands pledged against the debt. The rate of interest that the moneylender had charged on the debt was so high that he was unable to pay it back, resulting in the debt being foreclosed. It was useless to resist as the bureaucracy—the moneylender and the Brahmin were all caste fellows (Phule 1969: 233–9).

Many historians are uncomfortable at Halbwach's anti-individualism. Winter and Sivan (1999) argue, "Durkheimians held tenaciously that individual memory was entirely socially determined", and, thus, we see that they write the individual off of the role within the history of collective memory. This makes Halbwachs frequently quoted, as historians try to seek distance from their role model to address one of their primary puzzles: the role of individual action in history.

In order to find answers to this end, sociologists have either tried to use "occupied" conception of collective memory, which academics have also called "social memory" (Fentress and Wickham 1992), "collective remembrance" (Winter and Sivan 1999), and "popular history making" (Rosenzweig and Thelen 1998) or have refused the need for new terminology and instead opted for the old conception of the "myth" (Gedi and Elam 1996). The plethora of terms have led the scholars to develop their own expression to understand the social base or social function of the collective memory under consideration. Therefore, the discipline of memory studies has come to include terms like "national memory", "public memory", "vernacular memory", and "countermemory" (Hutton 1993).

Phule solves this problem by maintaining a personal atmosphere within his account, getting into the fabric of the history, economics, or politics he is looking at. He writes: "At last, heaving a great sigh in the midst of his tears, the cultivator fell asleep. I wiped my own eyes, and went to look outside." (Phule 1969: 233) Following this, he pens a close description of the cultivator's house, his piece of land, and elements of his domestic and social life, which when communicated with any rural popular audience would click almost instantaneously. He describes the courtyard, piles of garbage, empty jars of grain, makeshift cow pen with a few mangy cows, an old woman lying down next to the vegetable waste, a baby crying nearby and sending a trickle of water across the floor (Phule 1969: 239). The domesticity that is described within the work gradually slides into the poverty that marks its every corner, and the loss of will that accompanies it is also made evident: the unclean oven; the ashes beneath mixed with excrement from the cat; the betel juice-stained walls; the walls holding leaky stone lamps, a pair of worn out sandals, old underwear, with dust and cobwebs occupying every part of the household. Phule concludes the description with the entry of the peasant's aged mother, cursing her family's situation and the Brahmanical hegemony emerging in ancient times and being reinforced by the colonial regime that brought their honest family to their knees (Phule 1969: 233–9). What Phule is seen to be doing here is giving his audience something that they can experience within their everyday environments, but it is communicated with a polemical twist.

Much of the more engaging research in memory is seen to revolve around the term "cultural memory", which is useful to maintain and develop Halbwach's emphasis on the material basis of memory (Crewe and Spitzer 1999). Within this kind of a framework, it also useful to look at Assman's positioning of communicative and cultural memory. He places the former as a part of everyday communication that is connected to the meaning of the past characterised by contestations, resistance, instability, and non-

specialisation. Such communication has a lifespan of 80 to 100 years and are shaped strongly by contemporary events. Cultural memory"comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose cultivation serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image" (Assman 1992: 132). It is made up of objectified culture, including texts, rites, images, buildings, and monuments, which are designed to recall fateful events within the collective history.

Assman differentiates between potential and actual cultural memories as well. He posits potential cultural memory as that in which the representation of the past is stored in archives, libraries, and museums. However, it is in the mode of actuality when these representations are adopted and given new meaning within new social and historical contexts. These differences tell us that images of the past travel through a whole range of elements, including the communicative memory and the realm of actual cultural memory. But within this process, they transform depending on their intensity, social depth, and meaning (Assman 1992). His concepts remind us that notwithstanding their power to communicate concern for historical events to future generations, collective memories have a bias towards the present; they are focused on matters of time, space, and resources of communication to events that happened during the lifetimes of their producers and consumers. Lutz Niethammer (1999) locates collective memories on the side of the "floating gap" between memory and history.

In *Shetkaryacha Asud*, Phule constructs the history of caste as well life in village society but his motivation in doing so is primarily to make a political statement within his present. He, in the process, directs heavy criticism at the Brahmo Samaj and Prathana Samaj, societies for religious reform. As these organisations had a majority Brahmin membership, he considered them to be Brahmanical assertions to establish a certain kind of leadership at the provincial level. Within the organisations' ideology and control, subjugation of lower-caste groups was implicit. Phule deals with religious doctrine, social composition, and institutionalised religion through two issues of a short-lived periodical that he started in 1885 called *The Essence of Truth* (Phule 1969: 280, 294). These issues were written in the form of a communication between a Shudra and a Brahmin member of Brahmo Samaj, whom the Shudra attacks mercilessly in matters of ideology. During the course of the conversation, the Shudra asks the Brahmin about who the Samaj considered to be the true "Brahma": the one who had given the world Manu, the author of a plethora of degenerate books, or someone who the Brahmo Samajists had cleverly labelled as "Brahma", the original creator of the universe, one who had transcended all kinds of human constructs. The Brahmin argued that aim of the Samajists was to

separate truth from every religion, be it Hinduism, Christianity, or Islam, and act according to it, but later stated that they had still not arrived at any set ideology. The Shudra's reply to this brings home the fact that a strong consciousness of religious doctrine becomes the foundation of social hierarchies. Thus, we see that Phule makes use of both memory and perceived history to construct what can be called social memory, not with the sole aim to represent his material reality but also to construct a strong polemic to bring about radical social change. To further substantiate his point, he states:

> Why should we Shudras and ati-Shudras, any more than Pandita Ramabai, put any trust in what you say, until you Brahmos have prepared such a book? Because another bold trouble-maker like Parashuram or Nana Peshwa might come along at any time, and lend his weight to another devilish Brahman like Shankaracharya, who would tell us once again that everything written in the books of the Aryan Brahmans came from God: and what power would the Mangs and Mahars have to refute? (Phule 1969: 284)

Historians have been forced to reconsider the place of identities and social locations when it comes to rise in the academic pursuit of memory. While historians continue to assert that "in its demand for proof, history stands in sharp opposition to memory", there is reason to believe that the epistemological gap between history and memory is narrower than we had anticipated, as is the gap between academic and non-academic representations of the past (LaCapra 1998; Lowenthal 1985). History, then, should be conceptualised as a particular type of cultural memory, which Peter Burke puts as "neither memories nor histories seem objective any longer. In both cases, we are learning to take account of conscious or unconscious selection, interpretation and distortion. In both cases this selection, interpretation and distortion is socially conditioned" (Burke 1989: 44). Memory, when considered within history, becomes one of the more interesting theoretical challenges to the field.

Rather than fixing the problems of conceptualising the difference between history and memory theoretically, scholars have argued for a historical approach to social memory, an approach that sees these differences emerge within the present times and spaces and within particular purposes. As Matsuda (1996: 16) has tried to put it, "memory has too often become another analytical category to impose on the past; the point should be to rehistoricize memory and see how it is so inextricably part of the past."

Communication within Social Memory

We now understand memory and the way it relates to communication to exist in different paradigms, especially through the realisation that memory is not just a cognitive exercise but a phenomenon of the larger community, wherein we see the notion of community coming up. Barbie Zelizer (2001: 185) implies that memory could become a part of number of different kinds of groups—ethnic, familial, caste, or even the nation states. This kind of an understanding, as stated earlier, goes by different names, namely, public memory, cultural memory, and social memory. The difference between these labels should not be ignored as they signify variations within intellectual positionalities. Despite this, we see that the perspectives that these different names offer have their primary focus on the collective or communal nature of memory rather than its individual nature, for instance, as in the idea of a generation's memory. In Phule's time, the worry must have been how the 1857 mutiny would be remembered in the coming ages. How will the mutiny be represented to future generations? Will it be a mutiny at all? Whose history is it that will be remembered? Probably not the disadvantaged and marginal communities. Who will be the heroes of the war and who will be the villains? Whatever the particular question may be, the basic part of communication here is representation, which is at the core of how people remember. Andrea Huyssen suggests that memory is dependent on the ability to represent an event, a person, a place or an idea that one encounters: "The past is not there simply in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory" (Huyssen 1995: 3).

The example of the 1857 mutiny and the way it is deemed to be remembered should not lead us to think that collective memory and history are one and the same. Although we find similarities in its basic elements, they are indeed different at certain points, as Pierre Nora (1989: 8–9) states:

> Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to be long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what Is no longer…. Memory insofar as it is affective and magical, only affects those facts that suit it…. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism…. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can conceive the relative.

We can then say that history is produced by historians while memory becomes a performance within social collectives. History becomes the preferred mode because of its methodological legitimacy; collective memory is seen to be an emotive and political act. One of the more basic assumptions of collective memory studies is its pragmatic nature when it seeks to look at the past within the framework of the present.

There are a number of ways in which communication, in direct or indirect ways, is said to affect the performance and reception of collective memory.

First, language forms the basis of both communication and social memory with its associated social codes and symbol systems. We live within language systems; it both predates and prefigures us. The native language or the dialect, be it Khandeshi or Konkani Marathi, allows us to take part in communicative exchanges with those who speak the same tongue. The language systems in turn carry with them parts of the past and help us in giving structure to our partial understandings of the world around us. It constructs our "truths", our history is largely shaped by the language that we come to speak. Friedrich Nietzsche ([1873] 1989: 247) put this in a way which suggested that "the legislation of language [that] enacts the first laws of truth".

As such, the importance of language in matters of history and remembering is telling. Language, thus, cannot be taken as a neutral and transparent instrument to communicate past fictions, but, in a sense, it shapes and constructs the past in many different ways. The language that we speak comes to us shaped by years of culture and economics. If we come to memorise through language then we remember politically and in certain partialities, according to resources and constraints that we may face through our use of the linguistic medium. It would also be important to note that we remember in collectivities through our languages and symbol systems.

Communication is also seen to be dependent on a number of background assumptions. It can be seen that two speakers of a common parlance must share certain cultural characteristics. For instance, within the Pune district of 1874, the words "Kunbi" and "Maratha" are synonymous in conversation because these castes are mainly in possession of the land, but on the other hand, in the districts of Solapur and Khandesh, the relationship between "Kunbi" and "Maratha" is not so simple and the presence of a number of other land-owning castes requires the usage of more accurate language. The landed castes in Solapur and Khandesh referred to themselves as Marathas and later started calling

themselves Deckhani (Sinclair 1874). These labels are a product of how we learn from and understand the past, whether they are part of our interpersonal communication or a part of our cultural history. Communication as such asserts itself on the past at least implicitly. We must come to terms with the fact that the ways we come to interpret the past are shared by our linguistic groups to a certain extent. In fact, we are seen to depend on these assumptions whenever we form communicative messages (Campbell and Jamieson 1977).

Communication is cumulative in a way that a message reconfigures that which has gone before it. This is one of the basic claims of memory studies—in which we see certain kinds of remembrances—that reconfigures our understandings of the past which is based on the politics of the present. Michel Foucault (1972: 124) argues that:

> Every statement involves a field of antecedent elements in relation to which it is situated, but which it is able to reorganize and redistribute according to new relations. It constitutes its own past, defines, in what precedes it, its own filiation, redefines what makes it possible or necessary, excludes what cannot be compatible with it. And it poses this enunciative past as an acquired truth.

Each message that becomes part of our communication thus alters the way we understand the message, the context that comes with the message, and also the kind of understanding we have for messages that have come before it. Each message thus becomes relational in the way it defines every other related message in matters of legitimacy, astuteness, ethical defensibility, soundness, or their opposites. So, the assertions that are marked within communication of the present moment intervene within its contexts, redefining and reconstructing the present and its elements. For example, in *Shetkaryacha Asud*, Phule argues that the original Kshatriyas, the ancestors of the land-owning Marathas, had, like the Aryans, come from Iran. Here, Phule is seen to construct history that would help his present political agenda. He states that they had come as friends and lived in harmony with the Shudra kingdoms already established, helping them fend off the subsequent Aryan offensives:

> The representatives of the ninety-six families from Iran each established their own kingdoms, and by all cooperating with each other they managed their political affairs without any difficulty, and so for hundreds of years there was nothing to spoil their prosperity, and in the kingdoms of the Dasyus, Astiks, Ahirs, Agras, Pisacas, and

> Matangs, all the people were very happy and the dust of gold seemed to hang in the very air. (Phule 1969: 221)

Social memory performs a cumulative function, wherein it alters our way of understanding history within the popular discourse.

Directly connected with notions of challenging hegemony in history and historiography is the fact that communication is often related to struggles over power. Communication is not just a simple act but a kind of "commodity" with a form that is known to bring about certain kinds of changes. Resultantly, communicators compete for—among other things—the power to represent the past within their own narratives and to also serve the purposes of the present.

Phule, in a collection of ballads or locally known as *pavada*s titled *Priestcraft Exposed*, talks about "who ruled and how in this blessed land of Hindustan before the Brahman conquest". In the collection, he writes of a happy community of Kshatriyas ruled by their leader King Bali and by officials called "Khandobas", prominent among whom were Bahiroba, Mhasoba, and Martand (Phule 1969: 136–7).

Within these, Phule included a number of figures, symbols, and rituals from popular religious beliefs. Phule carefully traces the general domestic practices and beliefs in his contemporary times to an idyllic pre-Aryan society. For instance, the practice of presenting a *tali* or a dish of offerings to Khandoba, he states, originated under King Bali's rule:

> When King Bali had some work of importance to devolve upon his Sardar's, he would hold a session of his court, and spread out some turmeric powder, coconut and a roll of betel leaves on a platter, and say "Whoever has the courage to take up this work should pick up this roll of betel leaves." So, the man who had the courage to see the task through would take the oath "Har, Har Mahavir", apply the turmeric to his forehead, pick up the coconut and the roll of betel leaves and raise it over his head, thus signifying his acceptance of the task. Bali would give the work to this man. Then this warrior would take Bali's orders, break up camp and move in upon the enemy. From this, the name of the rite came to be tal ucalane. The corruption of this is tali ucalne. (Phule 1969: 106–7)

Phule herein constructs a complex system of meaning and challenges in the assertions of mainstream historiography and the then-emerging field of Indology.

Conclusion

When we try to understand communication as collective memory, it allows us to look into a number of broad disciplinary phenomena encompassing interpersonal exchanges, historical texts, and popular cultural practices. It, in fact, leads to a transformation of social realities that change the context of the said communication, such as a song, a popular poem, or a folk tale, and begs us to look at history from its own right.

If we try to look at Phule's work from a collective memory perspective, it allows us a peek into a number of levels of abstractions, from the language Phule uses to write his work to the assumed genre identities the work constructs and the ways it tries to enact power. It is because of its twin-fold focus on the "what" and "how" of remembrance that it changes the contexts within which we try to construct and understand historical identities; it forces us to think about those things that have not been said and the politics behind its negation. Forgetfulness is an important operation within his construction of memory as well.

Shetkaryacha Asud gives us an opportunity to acknowledge the ways historical representations are negotiated, selective, present-oriented, and relative, all the while having the core notion that the experiences *Shetkaryacha Asud* embodies cannot be manipulated at will (Assman 1992). The work is effective in a way that it asserts "memory's imbrication within cultural narratives and unconscious processes is held in tension with an understanding of memory's relation, however complex and mediated, with history, with happenings, or even and most problematically perhaps from a postmodern perspective, with 'events'" (Radstone 2000: 10). Thus, Phule's work could be said to become a part of collective memory in opposition to history as it meets the ground between conceptualising society and social change.

In spite of a dearth of varied methods, empirical investigations of collective memories are not methodologically advanced by just an academic exercise of looking into the past with its related artefacts. As impressive as such an effort would be, it does not brings us closer to understanding the social and cultural dynamics behind the production of that particular act of collective remembrance. Interdisciplinary ambitions within humanities and social sciences should be addressed closer towards communication and cultural studies. An analysis of methods within these disciplines is likely to yield more tools to understand how collective memory is constructed in the present as well as the past.

Finally, we must try to understand the processes through which history is received, through which potential memories are converted into actual collective memories, when a large number of standard narratives and images in relation to the past is constructed and embraced. Is this the point of historical consciousness? The study of collective memories can be furthered by the process of communication between memory makers, memory users, and the accompanying discursive elements and traditions of representations. The hermeneutical triangle that is formed "implies an open dialogue between the object, the maker, and the consumer in constructing meaning" (Kwint 1999: 263). All these elements should be central concerns in analysing the actors within the histories of collective memories. This kind of an approach could also provide a framework to differentiate between the plethora of potential collective memories and the relatively lesser number of instances of successful memory construction.

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