The Death of Ghasiram Kotwal: Power and Justice in the Maratha Kingdom

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Introduction

On 31 August 1791, Ghasiram Savaldas (Ghāśīrām Sāvaldās), the Kotwal (Kotvāl; police chief) of Pune (Punte)—capital city of the Maratha kingdom under Peshwas—was stoned to death by a crowd enraged at his long history of evil deeds. This spectacular event in Maratha history, told and re-told over the centuries in many different versions, has achieved the status of legend. The stories told about Ghasiram Kotwal have in common one central theme: They are all tales of social justice achieved by common people in their fight against a high-ranking government official's abuse of power.¹)

This essay aims at examining the relationship between power and justice in the Maratha kingdom, by studying the Ghasiram Kotwal incident in its historical, political, and cultural context. This paper will first describe the Maratha state's view of its obligations to the people it ruled, and then will determine the actual role played by the Maratha state and its people in maintaining laws and meting out justice.

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Rājadharma: The Maratha Kingdom’s Concept of Legitimacy

The lofty idea of rājadharma, the righteous behaviour and duties demanded of a king, was developed in ancient India. Rājadharma was supposed to provide protection for the king’s subjects, as the Manusmṛti states (Bühler’s English translation. The terms in square brackets are added to the texts by the author for explanation, while the terms in parentheses are original):

7-3 For, when these creatures, being without a king, through fear dispersed in all directions, the Lord created a king for the protection of this whole (creation).
7-35 The king has been created (to be) the protector of the castes [varṇa] and order [āśrama], who, all according to their rank, discharge their several duties.

The king, however, cannot protect his subjects without certain tools. Thus, the Lord created danda (punishment, the original meaning is stick) and gave it to the king (Manusmṛti: 7-14). ‘The whole world is kept in order by punishment [danda], for a guiltless man is hard to find; through fear of punishment the whole world yields the enjoyments (which it owes)’ (7-22). The punishment inflicted by a king is called rājadanda (Kane: IV 72). The ideas of rājadharma and danda are, therefore, closely related. The Manusmṛti even states that a king who deviates from rājadharma is destined to be destroyed by danda (7-27).

Shivaji (Śivāji), the founder of the Maratha kingdom, seems to have made the concept of rājadharma the basis of the Maratha state’s legitimacy or its right to impose virtuous rule. In 1674, when he founded the Maratha kingdom, Shivaji instituted a ministerial system called Aṣṭapradhān (eight ministers), which consisted of Mukhya Pradhān (prime minister), Amātya (financial minister), Saçiv (secretary-general), Mantrī (councillor), Sumanta (foreign minister), Senāpata (commander-in-chief), Paṇḍitrāo (chief paṇḍit), and Nyāyadhīś (chief justice). The duties of the Paṇḍitrāv and Nyāyadhīś were prescribed in the kāṇūjābatā (regulations) promulgated at the time of Shivaji’s coronation as follows (the terms in parentheses are added to the translated texts by the author for explanation):
Paṇḍitrāv (chief paṇḍit)

He has authority on all matters pertaining to dharma (sarva dharmādhiśhā). He shall inflict punishment (śikṣā) by discriminating dharma from adharma. He shall honour the learned. He shall put his sign of assent on the papers prepared in relation to ācāra, vyavāhāra, and ṭhāyaścittā. He shall perform dāna (gift-giving for Brahmans), sānti (appeasement of gods), and anuṣṭāna (rituals) on the proper occasions.

Nyāyādhiś (chief justice)

He shall put dharma into effect and hand down decisions (regarding lawsuits) taking into consideration nyāya and anyāya done in all the territories of the kingdom. He shall put his sign of assent on judgements.

(APY No. 2)

Thus, the Maratha kingdom’s concept of legitimacy involved the maintenance of dharma and nyāya by discriminating dharma from adharma and nyāya from anyāya. As a duty to the people it ruled, the Maratha state was obliged to protect dharma and nyāya. This was a continuation of the ancient idea of rājadharma which saw the king as having been created by the Lord to protect his subjects.

This concept of rājadharma can also be found in the provision which states that Paṇḍitrāo should take charge of matters relating to ācāra, vyavahāra, and ṭhāyaścittā. Ācāra (norm of conduct), vyavahāra (lawsuit), and ṭhāyaścittā (purification of sin) were the three great divisions of dharmaśāstra established by the Yājñavalkya Śrīmrtī, and successive dharmaśāstras followed this example. The Mitākṣarā, a well-known commentary on the Yājñavalkya Śrīmrtī written by Vijñāneśvara in the northern Deccan in the early part of the twelfth century, consisted of these three divisions. The Maratha kingdom seems to have taken the ideas of ācāra, vyavahāra, and ṭhāyaścittā from the Mitākṣarā, as the Mitākṣarā wielded great influence in the precolonial Deccan. Since Paṇḍitrāv was in charge of matters pertaining to ācāra, vyavahāra, and ṭhāyaścittā, it can be assumed that the Maratha kingdom accepted rājadharma as described by dharmaśāstras as the basis of the state’s legitimacy.2)

In 1720, Bajirao (Bājrāv), the eldest son of Balaji Vishvanath (Bāḷāji Viśvanāth), the Mukhya Pradhān of the Maratha kingdom (in office
succeeded to his father’s office. He gradually usurped the power of Shahu (Śahū), then king of the Maratha kingdom, and put the Maratha kingdom under his control. Under Bajirao (in office 1720–1740) and his son-and-successor, Balaji Bajirao (Bālājī Bājārāv, in office 1740–1761), the Maratha kingdom emerged as the most powerful state in the Indian subcontinent and eventually caused the decline of the Mughal Empire. During this period, the title ‘Peshwa’ (Peśvā) began to be used instead of the formal title, Mukhya Pradhān. When the Peshwas of the Maratha kingdom established their own government with Pune as the capital, the Maratha kings were reduced to mere figureheads virtually confined in the small palace in Sātārā. The Peshwas belonged to a Brahman caste (Konkanastha or Cittpavan), and so the Brahmanical idea of rājadharma based on dharmaśāstras was further strengthened under their rule. The appearance of the ancient term rājadanda in public documents of the Peshwa government proves this tendency (Kotani: 192–95).

Though the Maratha kingdom’s concept of legitimacy was based on rājadharma, it is unrealistic to assume that the relationship between the Maratha state and its people was actually governed by this idea. An analysis of the Ghasiram Kotwal incident will illustrate the actual relationship between state and people/society in the Maratha kingdom under the Peshwas.

The Death of Ghasiram Kotwal

Ghasiram Savaldas (1742–91) was almost continuously the Kotwal of Pune from 8 February 1777 to 31 August 1791, the day he was killed (Sardesāī, Marāṭhi Riyāsat, 480). Thus, he was popularly called Ghasiram Kotwal. His family belonged to the Gaud or Kanoja Brahman caste. His father was said to have migrated from northern India and settled in Aurangābād. Ghasiram, though the son of an obscure immigrant, was promoted to the high position of Kotwal of Pune by Nana Fadnavis (Nānā Phadnavīs), the most powerful person in the Peshwa government at that time. In 1772, Madhavrao Peshwa (Mādhravāv, in office 1761–72) died of an illness and was succeeded by his younger brother, Narayanrao (Nārāyaṇrāv). The next year Narayanrao was assassinated and his uncle, Raghunathrao (Raghunāthrāv) became Peshwa. Nana Fadnavis, as well as other leaders of the Peshwa government, opposed this succession since
Raghunathrao was suspected of having been involved in the assassination of Narayanrao. In this troubled period, a son was born to Narayanrao posthumously, and this infant became Peshwa in place of Raghunathrao. In the name of this infant Peshwa named Madhavrao Narayan (Mādhavrāv Nārāyaṇ, in office 1773–1795), Nana Fadnavis held the real power of the Peshwa government. Thus, Ghasiram could be promoted to a high governmental post by gaining Nana Fadnavis’ favour. For this purpose, it was said, Ghasiram gave his own daughter to Nana Fadnavis (Poona Gazetteer: 409).

On 31 August 1791, Ghasiram Kotwal was stoned to death by an enraged crowd who blamed him for the death of nearly thirty Telugu Brahmans. A letter written two days later by an unknown writer—most likely a Brahman of Pune who had access to the Peshwa’s circle—to the Joshi of Bārāmātī, a town about 150 kilometres southeast of Pune, contains a detailed and reliable description of the incident (the terms in parentheses are added to the translated texts by the author for explanation):

Thirty-five Telugu (Tailanga) Brahmans were on their way home from the city of Pune and came to the ‘Tank (taḷēm) of Ghasiram’ on Śrāvāṇa vadya 30 (29 August 1791). They began to prepare their evening meal four ghaṭakā (one ghaṭakā is twenty-four minutes) before sunset and ate their meal two ghaṭakā after sunset. They were making preparations for departure four ghaṭakā after sunset, when five or seven pyādās (policemen) of (Ghasiram) Kotwal appeared on the scene and carried them to the Kotwal office in Bhavanipeth (correctly, Budhvārpieth). In the Kotwal office, thirty-five Telugu Brahmans were locked up in an underground jail that had no ventilation. Thus, twenty-one people died of suffocation.

On the third day (correctly, the second day) after their confinement in the jail, Mānājī Phākače (a high-ranking official), who lives near the Kotwal office, became curious about an uproar in the jail and went to the jail. He broke the lock (to find many Brahmans dead). He sent a messenger to Madhavrao Narayan Peshwa with news about the death of the Brahmans. The Peshwa sent four pyādās (foot-soldiers) and one kārkūṇ (clerk) to investigate, while Ghasiram Kotwal went to the house of Nana Fadnavis and humbly stated: ‘Twenty-five or thirty Komatis (Komaṭī is a caste in Tailaṅgana) were staying near my tank and were committing rob-
berries in the city (Pune), so they were arrested and confined in jail. They ate opium, and as a result, they died. Their dead bodies will be buried if you issue such an order.' Nana answered: 'A karkūn has been sent to investigate. I will speak about what is necessary when the karkūn comes (here after finishing his investigation).'

Having said this, Nana went out to visit Belbāg (where there was a Vishnu temple he had erected). Ghasiram Kotwal brooded over the matter and succeeded in getting permission to bury the Brahmans' corpses by making a false statement. Then he returned home. Meanwhile the Peshwa sent for Nana. When Nana came to the palace (vādā) of the Peshwa, he asked Nana: 'Ghasiram killed the Brahmans. An inquiry has been made into the matter. What sort of punishment will be inflicted upon him?' Nana answered: 'When Your Majesty's order is given, I will obey it.'

Nana then sent for Ghasiram. After Ghasiram's arrival at the government office (sarkārvādā), Nana returned home with him. Nana ordered Bhatjitatya (Bhatjitatya) to inquire into the matter. He asked Ghasiram: 'Why did you confine the Brahmans? What was the reason for killing them? Tell me the truth.' Ghasiram Kotwal answered: 'They were confined because they were thieves. They died of opium eating. I am not telling you anything false.' At that time, the Peshwa's order demanding that Ghasiram be severely punished was received. Meanwhile, 1,000 or 1,500 Brahmans had gathered around the house of Nana and began to behave in various threatening ways. Bhatjitatya explained the entire situation to Nana. He had Ghasiram's hands tied behind his back and put him under the guard of the soldiers.

The Telugu Brahmans' fury was, however, not quelled by this! (They said:) 'We won't return home until Ghasiram is tied underneath an elephant's foot (to be stamped to death).'</p>

Acting as a go-between, (Nyāyādhiś) Ayyāśāstrī informed them that he would punish Ghasiram next day as they wished, but they did not accept this. They tore Ayyāśāstrī's clothes and dhotar. The Peshwa was also firm in his determination to punish Ghasiram. Thus, in the first prahara of night (six to nine o'clock at night), an elephant was brought there and Ghasiram was bound to its back. They went in procession through the entire city of Pune and arrived at Ramna
The circumstances surrounding Ghasiram Kotwal's tragic death are sufficiently clear from this letter. Ghasiram Kotwal was made to go through the city of Pune to Ramna on an elephant's back and was detained there in shackles. The next morning he was seated on a camel's back facing the tail and carried to the Kotwal office in Budhvarpeth where five lines were cut into his head with a razor and red lead powder (sendūr) was rubbed into his head. Then he was carried again on a camel's back to Garpir. The procedure up to this point must have been the ordinary procedure followed in the Maratha kingdom when executing a criminal sentenced to death. Such extraordinary acts as making a criminal sit on a camel's back facing the tail, cutting five lines into his head, and anointing his head with red powder showed that he was a criminal about to be executed. In an ordinary case, he would have been executed by the order of the state official in charge in Garpir. In this case, however, the state official did not order the execution of Ghasiram. Instead, he left the punishment of Ghasiram to the crowd led by the Brahmans. As a result, Ghasiram was stoned...
to death by the people themselves. The Ghasiram Kotwal case was unusual because the government official stopped midway, before he completed the execution.

The akhbār navīs (news writer) of the Hyderabad kingdom, the successor state of the Mughals in the Deccan, who was stationed at the Peshwa's palace, wrote about the aftermath to a government official in his akhbar (newsletter) of 4 September 1791:

Ghasiram Kotwal died. His dead body was left on the ground at the far end of Garpir for two days. He had not been cremated. After much entreaty, the government granted permission for his cremation. Five maṇ (maund) of firewood were given (by the government) for his cremation. The brothers of Ghasiram's wife (mehunā, which can also mean the husbands of Ghasiram's sisters) and others, in all five to seven men, set Ghasiram's (dead) body in the fire. Ghasiram's wife, two sons, a daughter-in-law, mehunā, kārkūn (clerk), divān kārbhārī (agent), jamadār (head-police), and pyādās were all arrested. Among these, two sons, divān kārbhārī, and others played a leading part in the incident. Their feet were bound in chains. There was a purse of money in his house. The counting of the money and a thorough search (for more money) are now in progress. Whatever is found will be forfeited. There has been no delay in nominating Rāgho Viśvanāth Goḍbole to supervise the Kotwal office. When the situation becomes clear, a new Kotwal will be appointed. I will keep a close watch on this matter. The very thought of Ghasiram's unbelievable behaviour is just horrible. The true scope (of his evil deeds) is now becoming known to the public. His pāpācaraṇa (sinful deeds) are excessive and have continued up to the present. When his behaviour was finally revealed, there was no place for him to remain any longer. The inquiry is still going on. I will write a letter when the entire situations become clear. In the underground jail, twelve Brahmans out of the thirty-four confined were still alive (when found). Of these, five Brahmans and one Brahman woman, in all six Brahmans, died later. Thus, in total, twenty-seven Brahmans died, if you add those who died later to the original number of dead. (P A: III, A. R. No. 210, pp. 167–168)
The akhbārnāvis seems to have miscalculated when he reported the total number of dead as twenty-seven instead of twenty-eight. Twenty-eight would appear to be the total, since twenty-two died earlier and six later. The letter to the Joshi of Bārāmati, however, stated that the early toll was twenty-one of the thirty-five Brahmans confined. If this is so, the total toll is twenty-seven after all. It is important to note that one Brahman woman was included among the six Brahmans who died later. This means that Brahman women were also included in groups of Brahmans making a long journey. As the letter to the Joshi of Bārāmati shows, women were required to perform domestic chores like preparation of food even during a journey. Thus, there were probably women among the twenty-one (or twenty-two) Brahmans who died in the jail.

The following section of the akhbārnāvis’s report makes clear that the Peshwa government’s main concern in the Ghasiram Kotwal incident was impounding the riches accumulated by Ghasiram as a result of his abuse of power:

A brother of Ghasiram Kotwal, who had been in Aurangābād, came to Pune yesterday. He was also imprisoned. A search for Ghasiram’s treasures is continuing. Rs. 70,000 in hālī sikā, Rs. 40,000 in Chāndaṅa sikā, 4,000 mohor (gold coin) and ornaments of gold and silver as well as money deposited with a sāvkār have been so far discovered in Ghasiram’s house. (P A: III, A. R. No. 210, p. 170)

The Ghasiram Kotwal incident must have been closely related to the distribution of dakṣiṇā, a very well-known ceremony performed annually in the month of Śrāvaṇa during Peshwas’ rule. The dakṣiṇā distribution began on Śrāvaṇa śukla 5, the day of nāgapañcamī (the festival worshipping snake), and continued for three or four days in the square called Ramna which was situated at the foot of Parvati Hill (where Ghasiram Kotwal was put in shackles). At the time of dakṣiṇā distribution, 20,000 to 30,000 Brahmans, not only from various parts of Maharashtra, but from more remote places like Vārānasī, gathered in Pune to receive dakṣiṇā. Although one lakh of rupees (Rs. 100,000) was set aside each year for dakṣiṇā, only a small amount of rupees could be distributed to each Brahman. (For example, seven rupees were given to a learned Brahman, but only one rupee was given to an ordinary Brahman. P A: I, A. R. Nos. 73, 74 76.) Even though the amount of dakṣiṇā distributed to each Brahman
was small, a great number of Brahmans came to Pune from remote places, probably because they benefited in other ways. For example, when some problem pertaining to the interpretation of dharmaśāstras arose, a meeting of learned Brahmans was convened at this time. In 1736, a dispute broke out between Pathare Prabhus (Pāṭhāre Prabhūs) and Brahmans of Konkan because Pathare Prabhus were performing vedokta rituals (rituals performed with recitation of mantras of Vedas). To settle this dispute, there was a meeting of learned Brahmans from Vārānasī, Śriṅgeri, Paīṭhāṇ, and other places. Those attending the meeting decided that the Pathare Prabhu caste was a saṃkara jāti (mixed caste) and so was not qualified to perform vedokta rituals (ASS: VI66; Kotani: 212–213).

The Telugu Brahmans involved in the Ghasiram Kotwal incident must have come to Pune to receive daksinā. After staying in Pune for a few weeks, they were about to return home. Their confinement might have been related to a sort of curfew observed in Pune in those days. At nine o’clock, a gun placed on Bhamburda Hill was fired to warn people to retire to their houses. After a reasonable time, the patrols began. Everyone still on the streets was arrested and taken to the Kotwal office (Poona Gazet-
teer 409, n. 6). The ‘Tank of Ghasiram’ where the Telugu Brahmans were arrested, was situated near Ghasiram Kotwal’s house in the southeastern suburbs of Pune. Though this area was outside of the city proper, pyāḍās of Ghasiram Kotwal were patrolling, probably to keep watch on his house. They found the Telugu Brahmans near the ‘Tank of Ghasiram’ and arrested them. The ‘Tank of Ghasiram’ was three or four kilometres from the Kotwal office in Budhvārpeṭh. The Telugu Brahmans must have been forced to walk to the Kotwal office at night.

Ghāśirāmi Żulūm

The Ghasiram Kotwal incident reveals much about the relationship between state and people/society in the Maratha kingdom. The nature of this relationship should become clear by answering the following two questions:

Question 1: Why was the anger of people immediately directed at Ghasiram Kotwal, culminating in his death by stoning, though he himself did not have a direct hand in this incident?
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As shown in the aforecited document (akhbārnāvīś’s newsletter), Ghasiram’s two sons and divān kārbhārī played a leading part in this incident. Ghasiram himself seems to have known nothing about the arrest of the Telugu Brahmans until there was an uproar the next morning. In spite of this, the people’s anger was wholly directed at Ghasiram Kotwal. The reason for this was the following circumstances.

The people were angry at Ghasiram because he had abused his great power as Kotwal and inflicted much zulūm (injustice, oppression) on the people. Thus, the phrase ‘Ghasīrāmī zulūm’ was in wide use among the people and meant extremely oppressive deeds (Sardesāī, Marāṭhī Riyāsāt: VII482). The Arabic term zūlūm, with the term ‘adl as its opposite, had been introduced into Marathi through Persian and slightly changed in form to zulūm. The Islamic distinction between ‘adl and zulūm corresponded to the Shastric distinction between dharma and adharma or nyāya and anyāya, which were the basis of the Maratha kingdom’s concept of legitimacy. As Persian terms were very popular in India in those days, the term zulūm (zulūm) was more commonly used among people than the classical words adharma or anyāya to refer to the injustice, tyranny, and violence of a powerful man. This led to the creation of the term zulmi (oppressive, tyrannical), an Indianized word derived from zulūm. As it was commonly believed in those days that Ghasiram was zulūm incarnate, the word Ghasīrāmī meant zulmi or even zulūm itself (Bhide: 236). With this as background, it is not surprising that Ghasiram Kotwal was blamed for the cruel treatment inflicted on the Telugu Brahmans. There was so much anger directed against Ghasiram that Nana Fadnavis, who had at first tried to protect him, was finally forced to comply with the will of the people.8)

Question 2: Madhavrao Narayan Peshwa, though he did not hold much real power under the regency of Nana Fadnavis, ordered Nana to punish Ghasiram severely, and the Nyāyādhiś, the head of the judicial administration of the Maratha kingdom, promised to punish Ghasiram the next day in the manner demanded by the people. Nonetheless, the people rejected this plan and instead sought to impose the punishment themselves. To put it conversely, the Maratha state was quick to give up its obligation to punish Ghasiram itself, thus upholding rājadharma, and ceded this responsibility to the people under the leadership of the Brahmans. What was the
reason for this?

In the Maratha kingdom, the state/king did not have a monopoly on the maintenance of law and justice. Rājadharma (law and justice maintained by the state/king) constituted only part of the entire law and justice system in the Maratha kingdom. The local society in the Maratha kingdom had its own ability to maintain law and justice, and this functioned independently of the state by means of various communities (district community, village community, caste community, and so on). In this way, deśadharma (dharma of the local society) and jātidharma (dharma of caste) were maintained. To say more concretely, the meetings of district community (gotasabhā), village meetings (pañcāyati), and caste meetings (jātisabhā) maintained the respective dharmas (Kotani: 24-27).11)

Brahmans played a conspicuous role in the maintenance of various dharmas in the Maratha kingdom. Brahmans performed rituals for the king and state, and by so doing Brahmans affirmed rājadharma. The Peshwa government distributed dakṣinā and dāna to Brahmans as a reward for this service. Brahmans also occupied a special position in the local society as Dhramādhikārī and village vatandār Joshi/upadhyā.12) As a result, the Brahmanic ideology permeated down to influence to a certain degree the spiritual orientation of ordinary people in the local society. Thus, Brahmans were the point of contact between the state and the local society/people.13)

Because of this unique role of the Brahmans, the Peshwa government relinquished its obligation to uphold rājadharma by punishing Ghasiram. Instead, the Peshwa government entrusted this obligation to the people under the leadership of the Brahmans.

**Conclusion**

The Ghasiram Kotwal incident proved that the people in the Maratha kingdom under the Peshwas had their own idea of zulūm. They used this idea to claim the right to punish a man in power whom they considered zulmī and thus put themselves above rājadanda (punishment to be inflicted by king/state) of the Peshwa government. Rājadharma of the Maratha kingdom could not function independently of various dharmas of society in the actual process of inflicting danḍa (punishment) upon a man of zulūm. What was revealed by the Ghasiram Kotwal incident was the limits of
rajadharma of the Maratha kingdom in actually maintaining laws and meting out justice, limits imposed by various dharmas of the people themselves.

Notes
1) Ghastram Kotval, written by Moroba Kanhoab in 1863, viewed the deeds of Ghasiram Kotwal as a typical example of misadministration in precolonial India, following the view of Grant Duff (III 134). Moroba Kanhoab (1813-71), of the Pathare Prabhu caste, served as a judge at Ahmadabad's Small Cause Court in the Bombay Presidency. He became a social reformer (sudharnavadi) under the influence of modern Western ideas like those of the Enlightenment. He played a leading role in the widow remarriage movement in the Bombay Presidency when he was the vice-president of the Mumbai Punarvivah Uttejak Manal. In 1870 he himself remarried a widow of his caste but was found dead in a well with his wife in the following year, probably killed by 'traditionalists' of his caste (Jambhekar: III 405-406). To a social reformer like Moroba Kanhoab, Ghasiram Kotwal was a symbol of India in its 'premodern' state, before it was influenced by Western ideas.

In 1972, more than a hundred years after Moroba Kanhoab's book, Vijay Tendulkar's drama, Ghastram Kotval, was first staged in Pune. This drama has enjoyed great popularity and is still performed, after more than 500 performances in India and abroad. In the 1970s, Indira Gandhi gave herself the powers of a tyrant, culminating in the promulgation of the Emergency in 1975. Tendulkar's drama, in which Indira Gandhi could be substituted for Ghasiram, was seen as a criticism of her actions.

2) For more on the concept of rajaradharma, see Kane: III 1-16. As the organization of the state developed, rajaradharma came to encompass not only the righteous way of life required of a king but also the righteous rule of the state under the king. The Maratha kingdom employed this expanded definition of rajaradharma as the basis of its legitimacy.

In upholding dharma and nyaya, the duties of Pa disgusted and Nyayadhish seem to have overlapped. The main duty of Pa disgusttrav, however, was centred on the performance of such rituals as prayascitta for purifying sinners of their sin after punishment. The main duty of Nyayadhish was the actual administration of the law in punishing criminals.

3) According to the Poona Gazetteer (pp. 369, 409) and Kincaid & Parasnis (p. 405), Ghasiram Kotwal belonged to the Kanoja Brahman caste, but Sardesii (Marath Riyyasat: VII 481) says that he belonged to the Gau Brahman caste. The Gau Brahman caste of north and northwestern India is composed of the following five sub-castes: Gau, Sarasvat, Kanyakubja, Maithila, Utkala. Of these five sub-castes, the Kanyakubja is derived from the name of the old capital, Kanyakubja, the present-day Kanauj. Kanoja must be a corrupt pronunciation of Kanauj. Thus, Ghasiram must have belonged to the Kanyakubja sub-caste of the Gau Brahman caste.
4) One *prahara* is one-eighth of a day, that is, three hours. The first *prahara* of day refers to the three hours from six to nine o'clock in the morning, but *prahara one of day* means nine o'clock. In the same way, 'the first *prahara at night* is six to nine o'clock in the evening, while *prahara one of night* means nine o'clock at night.

5) Rampā was an extensive enclosure at the foot of Parvati Hill in the southern suburbs of Pune. Madhavrao Narayan Peshwa used to visit the Mahadev temple on Parvati Hill and often enjoyed watching the fights between tigers and elephants in Ramna. The annual ceremony of *dakṣinā* distribution to Brahmans in the month of Śrāvaṇa was also performed in Ramna.

6) According to the *Poona Gazetteer*, Ghasiram 'was bound by a cord held by a Mahar' (p. 409) when paraded through the city. This is not surprising since men from Untouchable castes like the Mahar often played an important role in executions.

7) Gārpir is the name of a Muslim saint (*gār* meaning quartz or flint) who is said to have settled in Pune in the last decade of the thirteenth century. Later, the area around Gārpir's grave developed into a Muslim graveyard that was also called Gārpir (*Poona Gazetteer*, 368). Under the Peshwa government, Gārpir referred to a much larger area, mostly open space, where people or armies gathered on various occasions. Tents of the Peshwa's army were pitched in Gārpir during the *simollaṅghana* (crossing of the border), a ritual performed by the Peshwa government on the day of Dasara (PA: II, A. R. No. 117, pp. 50-52). It is not certain that criminals sentenced to death were always executed in Gārpir.

8) A verbatim reading of the aforecited document (the letter to the Joshi of Bārāmati) seems to indicate that only Brahmans, or only Telugu Brahmans, accused Ghasiram of *zulūm*. In fact, non-Brahman people of various castes, including even some Untouchable castes, must have taken part in this incident, as indicated by the term *Ghāṣṭrāṃi zulūm*. The people's fury against Ghasiram, ending in his death by stoning, may have been partly fueled by the fact that he was originally a north Indian Brahman.

9) Madhavrao Narayan Peshwa committed suicide in 1795, probably because he could not endure the highhandedness of Nana Fadnavis. It is said that in ordering the execution of Ghasiram, Madhavrao Narayan was able to defy the wishes of Nana for the first time (Sardesai, New History of the Marathas: III 259-260).

10) Under Peshwa rule, the office of Paṇḍītrāv existed almost in name only as an office under kings to perform royal rituals. Nyāyādhīś, on the other hand, continued to function as the head of the judicial administration of the Peshwa government and in addition was responsible for the former ritualistic duties of Paṇḍītrāv.

11) District community was a local self-governing community composed of, in general, fifty to a hundred villages with Deshmukh as its head and Deshpande as its scribe. The states in the precolonial Deccan substituted the district community for the local administrative unit of the state, as they lacked their own
local administrative system.

12) The various members of the local society in precolonial Maharashtra each had their respective vatans. The peasants of a village community had the vatan of peasant, and bārā balāṭe or bārā balāṭedar, who were the village servants, had respective vatans of the village servants. Bārā balāṭe, in general, included Joshi (priest), Sutar (carpenter), Lohar (ironsmith), Kumbhar (potter), Nhavi (barber), Parit (washer man), vatandār Mahar, vatandār Mang, and vatandār Chambhar. The division of labour within communities in precolonial Maharashtra was determined by the relationships among various vatandars. Thus, this system of the division of labour can be conceptualized as the Vatan system. Brahmans had a strong position in the Vatan system since they served as the village vatandār Joshi, who performed village rituals, and at the same time the upādhyā, who performed such domestic rituals for the villagers as marriage ceremonies and funeral rites. In the local society, there were many vatans above the village level, such as that of the Dharmadhikārī. Dharmadhikārī, the headman of Brahmans residing in a sacred place or big town, performed the purification ritual of prayāścitta on sinners who wanted to expunge sins from their bodies (Kotani: 222–255).

13) In recent years, the view that the kingship ideology of auspiciousness played the pivotal role in regulating social relationships within a kingdom has been put forward against the so-called Brahman-centric view of L. Dumont in which pureness-impureness ideology has been assumed to have played the pivotal role (e.g. Inden 1985). It is, however, doubtful that there existed something like the kingship's ideology distinguishable from and independent of Brahmanical ideology.

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