

THE QUOTIDIAN REVOLUTION



Vernacularization, Religion,
and the Premodern Public Sphere in India

Christian Lee Novetzke



Columbia University Press
New York

Preface

The Shape of the Book

This book is about the moment in recorded history when literary Marathi appeared in medieval India. Situated in Maharashtra of the thirteenth century, the book traces this history by examining Marathi inscriptions and the first two extant texts of Marathi literature, the *Līlācaritra* (c. 1278 CE) and the *Jñāneśvarī* (c. 1290 CE). This study also explores the lives of the two key figures associated with those texts, Chakradhar (c. 1194 [1273 departure from Maharashtra]),¹ the founder of the Mahanubhav religion, and Jnandev (c. 1271 [1296 entombment]),² who later becomes a key figure of the Varkari religion. The book presents these figures and texts as emblems of the process of vernacularization in Maharashtra, using them to argue that through this process public culture was invested with the idioms of the “everyday” and the quotidian became valorized in public and political expression. Vernacularization was compelled by a critique of social inequity as a result of this emphasis on ordinary life. This critique of social inequity, and the literary sphere engendered by vernacularization, inaugurated the first trace of a nascent public sphere in the region.

The book is divided into three parts, each composed of either two or three chapters, bounded by an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction presents the book’s key subjects and materials, and surveys the primary ideas, concepts, and debates the book engages. Part 1 provides a view of what I call the Yadava century, the period presided over by the Yadava dynasty in the region of Maharashtra from 1189 to 1317 CE. The primary textual and archival evidence for these three chapters is the Marathi

inscriptional record of the Yadava state, as well as, secondarily, social, cultural, economic, and religious historical evidence that can be gleaned from the *Līlācaritra* and the *Jñāneśvarī*.

Part 1 begins with chapter 1, which explores the sociopolitical world of the Yadava century that served as the context for Marathi literary vernacularization. The Yadavas, also called the Sevunas, were a non-Brahmin dynasty that helped stabilize their political territory by creating a clientelist Brahminic ecumene. Select members of that ecumene were awarded land and grants for temples, monasteries, and other institutions, given at the beneficence of the Yadava state as rewards for certain kinds of textual production and other services. The Brahminic ecumene of the Yadava century was primarily composed of Brahmin literary and ritual experts engaging in traditional Brahminic activities, though other high castes, such as Kayasthas and Guravs, also participated. The Yadavas, like many polities of the age, used these gifts of state to create distinct spheres of entitlements throughout their political geography. This nonthreatening, nonmilitarized Brahminic ecumene helped stabilize the political sphere in the Yadava century. As a system it served the political aims of the non-Brahmin Yadava state, displaying a downward flow of power from Kshatriya or “King” to Brahmin.

Chapter 2 uses the inscriptional record left by the Yadavas to counter a common assumption made by historians that Marathi vernacularization was underwritten by Yadava political support. I find no evidence for this widely held claim, but instead show how the inscriptional record and other aspects of the Yadava century suggest that the royal court, while it did not support Marathi literary production with official state funds, did appear to regard Marathi as a language of significant utility in accessing the vast quotidian “public” that surrounded and populated the Yadava realm. We will see that the indifference to Marathi displayed by the royal court and its Brahminic ecumene allowed greater freedom for new religious communities to adopt Marathi as a means to reach a nonelite population. At the same time, the social value of literacy, a feature of the Brahminic ecumene, led the Brahmin figures at the center of literary vernacularization (Chakradhar, the early Mahanubhavs, Jnandev) to compose a new literature in Marathi.

Chapter 3 provides a necessary prelude to the next two parts of the book through a survey of the social contexts and received biographies of

Chakradhar and Jnandev. This chapter supplies the remembered biographical data and likely public memory of Chakradhar and Jnandev that help shape the context of the four chapters that follow. The chapter also argues that meaning coheres around these received biographies in a way that stabilizes their “value” in a particular kind of spiritual economy of the age. The three chapters of part 1 thus provide a vision of the preconditions of vernacularization in medieval western India.

Part 2 focuses on the *Līlācaritra*, using the text primarily as a historical archive for the cultural sphere in which vernacularization emerged and a nascent Marathi public sphere formed in the thirteenth century. Though the *Līlācaritra* is the first instance we have of Marathi literature, what it records is its own prehistory—it details the conditions for its own creation. I consider the *Līlācaritra* to be an example of something like historical literary realism as it seeks to convey a high level of historicity and real-life encounters, even while it is a text of *bhakti*, of religious devotion to Chakradhar. Indeed, the authors of the *Līlācaritra* took great pains to precisely recall the life of Chakradhar by drawing on their immediate memories of his life and teachings. So attentive to historical correctness were the compilers of the *Līlācaritra* that they present recollections of their leader that display not only his glorious traits, but his peculiarities as well. If part 1 of the book described the preconditions for the vernacular turn by portraying the cultural and political landscape of the Yadava century, then part 2 is configured as a study of the portrayal of vernacularization, the cultural memory of this moment, as preserved in the *Līlācaritra*.

Chapter 4 observes the attention to historical detail in the *Līlācaritra* and this allows us some access to the social conditions that were arrayed around vernacularization in the decades just before the full advent of Marathi literature. In the *Līlācaritra*, we learn that the greatest site of contention for this evolving vernacular sphere was not the literary-political world but rather a contention with the gurus and godmen who competed in a religious market for followers and patronage, often around the social economies of temples. Chakradhar is not only emblematic of a religious innovator, but is one of the most radical of his age, for he promoted a new religion that rejected caste and gender difference in principle. Chapter 4 studies the cultural practices of caste and gender that pervaded everyday life in the mid-thirteenth century and were recorded by the early Mahanubhavs in the *Līlācaritra*. If vernacularization directly engaged caste

and gender differences at least rhetorically, then attention to these questions of social ethics is vital for understanding the cultural politics at work at the core of a new literary world in Marathi. I show how the early Mahanubhavs grappled with these social issues, both within their community and outside in the ordinary world.

Chapter 5 tracks how this rejection of social inequity inspired, or even compelled, the use of Marathi as the medium of communication for the early Mahanubhav community. I give several reasons for the use of Marathi to record the life of Chakradhar in the *Līlācaritra*. In writing a historical text, the early Mahanubhavs wished to preserve the language their founder was remembered to have used, which was Marathi. This was a language understood as feminine and “imperfect” in the taxonomies of Sanskritic linguistic hierarchy, yet it perfectly suited his audience, especially the female followers whom the early Mahanubhavs wished not to alienate. The choice of Marathi for the preservation of the key text of the Mahanubhav religion was a practical one made around the ethical conviction to leave a text intelligible to the larger quotidian world that did not know Sanskrit. However, Chakradhar’s ethical urge toward inclusiveness—of women, low castes, and those deemed “Untouchable”—led him afoul of the Brahminic elite of the Yadava century, according to the *Līlācaritra*. His story ends with a purported public trial and his own exit from the region of Maharashtra and also from recorded human history.

The two chapters of part 2 demonstrate that the cultural origin of vernacularization was not at the nexus of literature and royal power. Instead, the materials examined here proclaim a desire to communicate as widely as possible the teachings of a new spiritual figure in the Yadava domains. The early Mahanubhavs created the first work of Marathi literature as an extension of the radical social ideals of their founder, not as a project to create a new literary idiom in Marathi.

Part 3 of the book turns to Jnandev and his *Jñāneśvarī*. The two chapters in this part of the book use the *Jñāneśvarī* to see how, in the contexts described in parts 1 and 2 of the book, a work arises in Marathi that evinces a high self-consciousness about its literary, religious, and social aims. In chapter 6 I discuss the rationale that Jnandev gives in his text for the innovative use of Marathi rather than Sanskrit as his medium. Contrary to the intentions of the Mahanubhavs, Jnandev takes the language Krishna is said

to have spoken, which is Sanskrit, and shifts Krishna’s religious and ethical message into a new linguistic medium, Marathi. Jnandev claims that he uses Marathi for the sake of “women, low castes, and others,” which is the constituency he believes the *Bhagavad Gītā* also exists to serve. I take this social formulation of “women, low castes, and others” not only to indicate those who did not have access to Sanskrit but also as a phrase that points toward public culture in quotidian life. While it may seem like a description of the “downtrodden” it was in fact a description of the vast majority of the population.³ Jnandev believed that the mission of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and of Krishna was to address all people, not just high-caste males. Transferring the salvational promise of the *Bhagavad Gītā* into everyday language furthered the *Bhagavad Gītā*’s own ethics according to Jnandev. He often imagines his text situated at the “crossroads” of towns and cities, that is, in the public square where the creation of the *Jñāneśvarī* is the re-creation of the social conditions for public expression itself. In this chapter I observe how the *Jñāneśvarī* serves as a manifesto for a very particular ethics around society and literature.

In chapter 7 I draw out the contours of this social ethics in the *Jñāneśvarī* by tracking the relationship between statements about social equality and idioms of social inequality that were endemic to thirteenth-century Marathi. I follow how the *Jñāneśvarī* rejects social distinction by recourse to “cosmic reality” where all social and physical differences are dissolved. This ethics of transcendence occurs primarily in the first nine chapters of the *Jñāneśvarī* and tracks a similar argument in the first nine chapters of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. However, in the latter half of the *Jñāneśvarī*, Jnandev draws in colloquial Marathi that reveals the quotidian social prejudices of his age, though they are not his own prejudices. The *Jñāneśvarī* reveals a paradox, for the radical nature of putting this classic Sanskrit text in Marathi for all to access also means importing the language, colloquialisms, idioms, and other registers of social inequity that mark all languages. Vernacularization, located within the field of everyday life, simultaneously presses for greater social equity and reinforces other means of social difference. The *Jñāneśvarī* both explicitly rejects caste and gender difference in the context of cosmic reality, yet also testifies to distinctions passively through the colloquial use of Marathi. Vernacularization thus reveals a dual function: to expand the scope of social access by valorizing everyday

life, yet also to circumscribe such access by rehearsing the deeper habitus of social distinction in the quotidian world. The *Jñāneśvarī* reveals a sonic equality that existed in a world of deep social inequality.

The structure of these latter two parts of the book creates a mirrored dialectic. Part 2 moves from a discussion of an unequivocal social ethics of egalitarianism among the Mahanubhavs (chapter 4) to an ethical rationale for the use of Marathi and hence for the creation of literary Marathi (chapter 5). Part 3, conversely, begins with a discussion of an unequivocal valorization of a new literary Marathi sphere inaugurated by the *Jñāneśvarī* (chapter 6), but returns to the question of social ethics to find that a sonic equality precedes social equality in the early world of Marathi literary vernacularization (chapter 7).

The book's conclusion reflects on the quotidian politics of vernacularization in the centuries that followed the narrow band of decades that consumes the majority of the book. From the fourteenth century onward, Jnandev's sonic equality was transformed into a vision of social equality. His key hagiographer, the Marathi *sant* Namdev (1270–1350), is said to have composed sacred biographies in which Jnandev is portrayed in the company of low-caste people and women despite the fact that the *Jñāneśvarī* does not explicitly state that this social world surrounded Jnandev. This displays the vernacularization of Jnandev's public memory after his life, and thus the force of the "quotidian revolution" to draw its subjects into the gravity of its conceptualization of the "ordinary." Conversely, I discuss how the Mahanubhavs receded in the centuries after their founding, precisely because they increasingly rejected the quotidian world to become an ascetical sect, a kind of antivernacularization. The book ends with a reflection on how these ideas, formulated with materials from the thirteenth century, might accompany an analysis of the vernacularization of democracy and of the public sphere in India today.

I approach the subjects of this book with profound respect. My investigation of the lives of Chakradhar and Jnandev, of the *Līlācaritra* and other Mahanubhav texts, and of the *Jñāneśvarī*; and my many conversations with Mahanubhavs, Varkaris, and other believers have only raised my already great admiration for the historical figures, religious traditions, and texts that are the subjects of this book. Over the last fifteen years, several scholarly works, some written by non-Indians, some by Indians, have generated anger, protests, legal challenges, censorship, and even violence in India.

Because of these reactions, I have felt compelled to clearly state my own position, or lack of a position, on several subjects in this book. These statements appear throughout, and they may confound or irritate a reader, particularly a non-Indian reader, who will perhaps see them as irrelevant. But I offer them to clearly mark my sincere desire to avoid causing offense to anyone. If anything I write here were to offend anyone who holds dear the subjects of this study, it would be entirely contrary to my intentions or sentiments, and it would represent a personal failing on my part, and a failing that would be wholly my own responsibility and no one else's.



Introduction

The Argument of the Book

Democracy depends on the belief of the people that there is some scope left for collectively shaping a challenging future.

—JÜRGEN HABERMAS, "LEADERSHIP AND LEITKULTUR"

Imagine you are in India. The year is 1290 CE, in the month of May, and it is very hot. You and your husband work a parcel of land each, along with your children, but you won't begin work until the rains come, and you are eagerly awaiting the rains, by which you live. Near to your land is a monastery where learned Brahmins produce texts in a language you and your husband do not understand; people of your caste do not generally learn the language of the Brahmin scholars, even though you speak with them in the common language of the street and bazaar. A portion of your land's yearly yield goes to support that monastery, a portion goes to the local ruler, and a portion you may keep for your own use and trade. In the afternoon, when the sun is too strong to stay in the open sunshine, you join a group of others gathered near a temple where there is a large banyan tree that offers cool shade. A man is sitting under the tree, and you recognize him as a learned man and a Brahmin. He is giving a speech in the language of the field and the market, not the language of the monastery, and this surprises you. Though his language is different, his subjects are the same as the ones taken up in those realms of learning that are unintelligible and inaccessible to you. He is speaking the common language of the region, but his subject is extraordinary. He is talking about the salvation of your soul and the end to life's suffering. As you listen, you notice the monastery on the hill behind the tree, beyond the preacher, and it comes into a new focus in your eyes, as if it has moved closer to you.

This is a book about the cultural politics surrounding a momentous yet enigmatic period in Indian history. During the thirteenth century, western

India witnessed the emergence of literary Marathi, one of the key languages of India. For the first time in Indian history, Marathi took the shape of literature. It did so in relationship to high literary forms of Sanskrit, but also in relationship to the idioms, colloquialisms, and oral texts of the region in the local language of everyday life. I argue in this book that this new literary idiom led to the creation of a public discursive field where we find vibrant debates about the social inequities of language, caste, and gender. These debates, articulated in the words of the quotidian world, ostensibly opened up a sphere of ethical engagement across the social spectrum. It was by no means an equal sphere, however. And it was certainly not a democratic one. This is a time and a place far removed from modern liberalism, and certainly from what Elizabeth Povinelli and others have identified as the liberalism of “settler colonies.”¹ But a public debate did emerge, and, restricted as it was, this debate was occasioned by several vectors of social difference and transformation. One vector was a critique of the social restrictions that surrounded the “cosmopolitan” language of Sanskrit. This was a world to which, in general, only high-caste males had access. Another vector involved the observation and discussion of the routine practices of social difference that make up the world of everyday life, everywhere and for everyone.

Across South Asia, before and after this period, many other regional languages developed literatures in a general band of time we can regard as the vernacular turn. This is a period spanning the fifth to the fifteenth centuries, and the history of each language presents its own unique set of conditions. In some cases, vernacularization happened first through the documentary and literary activities of royal courts.² In Maharashtra, however, the production of a new Marathi literature occurred in the field of everyday life, outside of the royal court of the Yadava dynasty (1183–1317 CE) and its reigning state ideology. Far from the courts and institutions that received royal patronage, this new literary world was produced at the crossroads of towns and cities, among networks of villages linked by trade and roving preachers, under trees, outside temples and monasteries, amid farms and homes.

The earliest Marathi materials are situated in what we would now call the field of “religion.” These texts engaged with the salvation of the human soul as their primary object. In the service of this goal, these texts challenged social difference. Importantly, these early Marathi literary works

were composed in the context of devotion or *bhakti*, a devotion to deities, exalted individuals, and even society itself. At the same time, the concerns of the mundane world were hardly muted. This new literature observed political machinations, theorized social difference, and generated new aesthetic norms. And the social space in which Marathi literature emerged, with its debates about social equality front and center, existed properly within the realm of the public, in the spaces in between the many social fields of privacy and privilege that mark the medieval era in India. I refer to this new stratum of social discourse—existing independently of courtly culture, political elites, religious institutions, or other exclusive structures—as a nascent public sphere.

Though this nascent public sphere bore the hallmarks of literary aesthetics it came into existence not primarily as a literary or aesthetic endeavor, as happened elsewhere. Rather, this new literature was propelled by an essential critique of cultural inequity in relationship to religious salvation, social divisions, and political life. Despite these avowedly critical stances, the remembered agents of vernacularization also reveal an ambivalence about the scope of change that vernacularization might bring to society. Though the immanent critique of social inequity posed a challenge to the normative social ethics of the age, in ways both explicit and implicit, the agents of vernacularization also curtailed the viable scope of social change. For example, the Mahanubhavs' salvational messages were broadcast widely through Chakradhar's tireless lectures and discourses, yet the radical egalitarianism of the community remained restricted to a closed sphere of initiates. And though Jnandev offered the possibility of hearing the salvational message of the *Bhagavad Gītā* in the language of everyday life and for everyone, he did not propose a radical social reorganization of society. Marathi literary vernacularization enters into a quotidian revolution, but contained within the revolutionary process are mechanisms of restraint and control. This is a revolution measured in centuries, not days or years, and it moves in line with the pace of everyday life: consistent, constant, but cautious of change too rapidly enacted.³ Like the proverbial frog in a well, the quotidian revolution moves two steps forward and one step back.

To make the arguments of this book, I use as my historical archive the two oldest literary texts extant in Marathi. These texts self-consciously represented the “vernacular turn” and did so, in part, through a social

critique. The first text is the *Līlācaritra*, a prose collection of biographical vignettes said to have been composed in 1278 CE by the followers of Chakradhar (c. 1194 CE). Chakradhar was something like a spiritual entrepreneur or what I've called elsewhere a "venture spiritualist."⁴ He gathered together a set of followers around an innovative spiritual social order and carved out a new economy of spirit and salvation. Chakradhar founded a group who called themselves the Mahanubhavs, "Those of the Great Experience." They were renunciates who held Chakradhar to be God and the world to be a snare of sensual pleasure. The second text is the *Jñāneśvarī*, a Marathi commentary and quasi translation of the famous Sanskrit text *Bhagavad Gītā* or "Song of God." The *Jñāneśvarī* is said to have been composed in 1290 CE by the Marathi *sant* Jnandev (c. 1271 CE),⁵ also called Jnaneshwar, who was another spiritual innovator of the age. His innovation was to draw into Marathi one of the key texts of Sanskritic Hinduism and thereby reconfigure the cultural capital not only of the text but of Marathi itself. The *Jñāneśvarī*, though not the first work of Marathi literature we have, is often considered Marathi literature's founding text. This is because Jnandev supplied a moral core drawn from the Sanskritic world in a form intended to be intelligible to all people in the region. The *Jñāneśvarī* is therefore at the heart of the "imagined nation" of many Marathi speakers living in India and abroad today, just as Shakespeare's works may be for English speakers or Tagore for Bangla speakers (of all religions) across the globe.

From these two figures, Chakradhar and Jnandev, and the two texts, the *Līlācaritra* and the *Jñāneśvarī*, I draw a genealogy of Marathi vernacularization. I see these texts not as points of origin, but as evidence of a process that was already well underway; the texts and their authors articulate the quotidian revolution rather than inaugurate it; they speak to a world of change already swirling around them.

I delve into these two works—and surrounding materials as well—to uncover how each text represented the impetus and ethics of its own creation as well as the social conditions in which each emerged. I show how the texts self-consciously address a collection of issues involving language, caste, and gender, but also how they restricted the inherent and explicit critiques therein. Part 1 of the book establishes a context for these texts by sketching an image of the social and political structures of the late Yadava society in which the two texts are said to have emerged. This engagement

provides a social, political, historical, and cultural basis for the textual analysis that follows. I argue that this navigation of the tension between normative social ethics and prevailing everyday social norms engendered what we tend to identify as the key feature of vernacularization—literary production in a regional language invested with idioms and representations of power.⁶ Power, however, in the context of Marathi vernacularization, was configured not at the apex of the royal court, but within the far more messy and contingent world of the ordinary. This is also a world notoriously occluded from historical sources. We will examine how common social mores were challenged by vernacularization, even while the prejudices and practices of the vernacular world turned upon its new literary idiom to control the very transformative forces they set in motion. *The Quotidian Revolution* is about this momentous time and the cultural politics that attended this change.

Terms and Concepts

This book draws upon a range of terms and ideas to help explain the vernacular literary turn in Marathi and its cultural significance, in the thirteenth century and later. These ideas include theories of vernacularization, everyday life, and the public sphere. In addition, I draw upon social phenomena that are stock features of scholarship on South Asia, yet remain highly contested and reconfigured concepts. Among such concepts, caste, gender, and religion are perhaps the most challenging. Here I briefly discuss what I mean when I use these ideas and terms, although the full expression of their meaning is in the body of the book itself in relation to the specific historical, social, and literary materials that I will discuss. The use of any critical keyword, especially a highly contested one, remains inherently incomplete. My aim is not to shut off other possible meanings and interpretations, but to orient the reader to my use of these keywords.

Vernacularization, Religion, and the Everyday

Fundamental to the story I want to tell is the concept of vernacularization. In particular, I want to highlight the distinction between an investment in a vernacular language as a public communicative medium, on the one hand, and the larger social process that infiltrates and influences this process, on

the other. In a very general sense, vernacularization means the written, and later literary, use of a regional or “natural” language rooted in a given place, and the effect this use of language has had on a given culture and polity. It is not only language that is available for “vernacularization” but also other expressive idioms, like art, dance, music, and all other spheres of affect (gestures, clothing, etc.). Politics, courtly manners, and diplomacy all take on the valences of a vernacular character as well. Vernacularization is a kind of indigenizing of a broad range of discursive mediums across a semiotic landscape that includes literature, arts, architecture, politics, and so on.

In my engagement with vernacularization I draw on the exemplar provided by Sheldon Pollock’s *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*. Pollock refers to the mere written use of a regional language as “literization.” This is distinct from the creation of a new literature in a language, with a system of aesthetical distinction, which he calls “literarization.”⁷ Pollock also situates these two processes, and particularly the latter one, in the second millennium CE, making of vernacularization a historical period as well. In common usage, then, vernacularization also refers to a period in time—apparently shared simultaneously between Europe and India, and elsewhere, from the fifth to the seventeenth centuries—that marked a transition from the use of a “cosmopolitan” language without a strong regional circumscription, such as Latin or Sanskrit, to the use of a regional language or a vernacular, such as English, French, Marathi, Kannada, or Bengali. In this way, vernacularization names a time period, an aesthetic, and a period of social change much as the terms *modern* and *postmodern* do today. Part of the brilliance of Pollock’s work is to read vernacularization well beyond its literary context, rather as a force like modernity, a force invoking broad social and intellectual change.

According to Pollock, this transition is often registered in multiple domains, particularly in repositories of written records: royal courts, religious institutions, and elite literary worlds. As he incisively notes, vernacularization is almost always a display of “power” in some form or another. It may be the power of courts and empires to enunciate their dictates to their subjects and rivals or the power of religious leaders to express their texts and practices to their followers and distinguish themselves from contending traditions or the power of literary elites to recondition the aesthetics of literature and power within the literary field. Of course, the

various spheres where literacy obtained (and more could be summoned) were not, and are not now, mutually exclusive. For this reason, Pollock succinctly summarized vernacularization as the “literary and political promotion of language” in multiple spheres at once.⁸ He considers the process of vernacularization to be “a transformation in cultural practice, social-identity formation, and political order” that caused a change “by which the universalistic orders, formations, and practices of the preceding millennium were supplemented and gradually replaced by localized forms.”⁹ It follows that vernacularization is a process that displays the relationship between power, language, and place. Hence Pollock’s study is fundamentally about the politics of language, literature, and imagining the world in which people live. Though Pollock does not use this term, I take the potent mix of power, language, and place to point toward a *public*.

Pollock situates vernacularization, in general in South Asia, within elite spheres of courts and other royal institutions. Yet this scope of power and the political is a point on which I differ from him. In his work *power* tends to connote the operational force of politics within the field of kingship, royalty, and courts. His empirical historiography amply shows the court to be a vital epicenter for the process of vernacularization. He makes this close association between power and royal courts through a distillation of the Sanskrit term *rajya*, which he glosses as “the state of being, or function of, a king.”¹⁰ As Pollock rightly displays, vernacularization as a literary process has a deep utility in the field of kingly power. It serves as a harbinger for “a new kind of vernacular political order” because geographic region is entirely intertwined with political power at the core of monarchy and all other governmental forms.¹¹ A political space is conditioned by power almost by a tautological definition of the latter—politics is power, as they say. Foucault’s knowledge/power dialectic plays off of this common conceit. However, power here is not solely exercised by courts. There is a power exerted also by the force of public sentiment, even well before any modern notion of a liberal theory of politics. And the discursive recourse of this general public is its expressive idiom, its vernacular language, and, later, its literature. Where Pollock examines power configured by courts, I examine power configured by publics outside (though not exclusive of) the royal court, which, in the Marathi case, involves the field of religion.

In Pollock’s commanding work, royal courts were a key location for the vernacular literary turn, particularly as a process that reconditioned the

public discourse of kingship as well as the very nature of political thinking in South Asia. A central issue for Pollock in his study, as it relates to South Asia (he also discusses medieval Europe, amazingly), is to see how *rajya* exists in a dynamic relationship with changing fields of aesthetics or *kavya*. This latter term indicates “poetry and literary prose,” but also signals the conventions of literary aesthetics that will link the “cosmopolitan” literature of Sanskrit to new literary work in regional languages in the vernacular millennium. One of the chief functions of vernacularization among the elite fields Pollock studies is the reinvention of aesthetic formulae perfected and commented upon in Sanskrit sources, which are then transposed into regional languages and deployed by royal courts.¹² For Pollock’s purposes, a core subject of vernacularization is the way in which these two forces—*rajya* and *kavya*, kingship and poetics—interacted. This is where Pollock locates “power” in vernacularization, in the field of the royal court and its public expression of self and sovereignty, where language and power meet, molded into a new aesthetic of power in literature.

I share Pollock’s conviction that vernacularization reveals a history of power. However, I seek to shift the base of what constitutes vernacularization by restricting my study to a far more modest terrain and time: the relatively small kingdom of the Yadavas in the latter half of the thirteenth century. Pollock comes to his study through an impulse to see the connection between the elite Sanskrit literary world of the first millennium CE—the “Sanskrit cosmopolis”—and the transformed world of the second millennium, when regional languages largely replace Sanskrit at the nexus of literature (*kavya*) and royal power (*rajya*). My study, by contrast, involves a far smaller unit of measure: not two millennia, but rather a single long century, and not the scope of South Asia (as well as Southeast Asia and Europe), but a relatively small region controlled by the Yadavas in that century. However, I seek to use this relatively limited historical and geographic case to rethink vernacularization in what I hope will be an expansive way, perhaps forming a heuristic to be applied to other parcels of time and place.

Another key distinction between my work and that of Pollock involves the perceived audience attending to the vernacular turn as well as the intentions of its agents. Pollock’s study is, he admits, a study of “elites,” but, as he perceptively points out, “if concentrating on elite representations means we miss the role of ‘the people’ in history, we do capture

something of the ideas that ultimately transformed the people's world."¹³ I agree with this position; yet examining vernacularization in Marathi-speaking contexts in the thirteenth century forces us to see that the world of elites—the masters of court, temple, monastery, and scholastic institutions—in general did not appear interested in Marathi as a literary language. As part 1 of the book will show, the Yadava court showed little interest in supporting Marathi as a literary medium. To locate the transformation of the people's world in western India through literary vernacularization, we must look outside of the elite sphere of the royal court that is the location of Pollock's study. In particular, we must enter into terrains that are in general "nonelite." By the use of this term, I do not mean to say that the agents of vernacularization were not themselves elites or the product of elite culture. Indeed, Jnandev, Chakradhar, and many of the early Mahanubhavs were elite high-caste males. This fact is essential to understanding the origins of a new Marathi literature in the thirteenth century. However, these figures opted out of, or rather ventured out from, the institutions of the elite to which they had access, even while they moved in elite circuits. And they did so with the expressed intention of reading a nonelite audience in the field of everyday life. That the agents of Marathi vernacularization occupied this dual position—emerging from inside elite spheres in the Yadava century but opting to circulate outside of them—is a sociopolitical dynamic that is at the core of what made a new vernacular literature possible. This was a world betwixt and between, to echo Victor Turner (and Albert Camus), a liminal social sphere where spiritual and social innovators made productive use of the heterogeneous space they occupied, where they could articulate disparate worlds. In this arena arose questions of caste and gender inequity, questions that did not appear to be salient within the elite worlds Pollock studied.¹⁴

As I hope to show, my impulse to focus on and theorize the quotidian is shaped by my materials. My two key literary sources are outside the purview of royal courts, high literary culture, temples, monasteries, and rarefied trading classes. Yet the quotidian is not the same as the demotic or subaltern, a point I emphasize here. I think of the quotidian as the space in which elite and nonelite meet, even if these meetings are mediated and inherently uneven. Yet it is not a space of uniform dominance, as a court or a highly stratified institution would be. And while the space of the quotidian is conditioned by the social rules of a place—largely signaled by the

ideas of caste, class, and gender—the quotidian is also the place where these varying degrees of difference are negotiated and adjusted. It is the space of the “common” among classes, castes, genders, and religions. The materials examined in this book amply engage this space and the conflicts that arise in it. It is also therefore at times situated within something like the medieval English “commons,” a space shared by agreement among parties with various needs, here configured as the bazaar, the meeting of the roads, under the shade of a tree—the spaces in between. The distinction I will draw instead juxtaposes such common spaces with what I would call the private spheres of the royal court or court-sanctioned institutions such as monasteries and temples. I contrast these private spaces with the general cultural sphere of the “public.” I will say more about how I conceive of the public below, but here I only want to signal that the location of Marathi literary vernacularization is a process that occurs in public culture within the quotidian world. Seen from this vantage point, vernacularization advances across social contexts—courts, country, religion, economy, literature, and daily life—through a common mechanism rather than through political fiat.

With these ideas in mind, let me define vernacularization as *the strategic use of the topos of everyday life within a social, political, artistic, linguistic, and cultural process in which the quotidian (“ordinary,” “everyday”) expands at the center of a given region’s public culture.* In this process the features of vernacularization identified by Pollock—the “literary and political promotion of language”—involve an engagement with “Place” that is not only geographic but deeply geocultural.¹⁵ New vernacular expressive idioms grew from the public cultures of given regions. In other words, the common space was being represented discursively as a space of expressive language, of literature.

My reconfiguration of the idea of vernacularization owes a great deal to the highly innovative field of political anthropology. In particular, I draw inspiration from a vibrant strand of this subfield that explores the experience and transformation of democracy in contemporary India, often called the “vernacularization of democracy.” While I make no claim that the thirteenth century reveals a democratic political liberalism of any kind similar to what we (heterogeneously and unevenly) experience in modernity, I am struck by the continuity between the emphasis on everyday life present in thirteenth-century Marathi literary work and the experience

of democracy uncovered by political anthropologists. For example, in such political anthropology vernacularization is seen as the “deepening of democracy,” a process in which political discourse grounds itself in a highly stylized “local” cultural sense that emphasizes and valorizes “the common” person and “everyday life.” Emblematic of this work are the pioneering studies of Thomas Blom Hansen, whose political ethnographies in contemporary India, especially in Mumbai, register the “vernacularization of democratic discourses and procedures.”¹⁶ In particular, in his study of the Shiv Sena (a “nativist” regional political party of Maharashtra), Hansen finds that the vernacularization of politics indexes a belief in “the virtues of ‘the ordinary.’”¹⁷ The vernacularization of democracy, represented by the ascension of the Shiv Sena in the regional politics of Maharashtra, is viewed by advocates as a “triumph of the ordinary” itself.¹⁸ Hansen shows how the originator of the Shiv Sena, the late Bal Thackeray, though himself a figure of the “political elite,” expounds a “message of self-respect [that] feeds on elevating the lower castes and the ‘ordinary.’”¹⁹ Lucia Michelutti, following and expanding upon Hansen, sees vernacularization as “the ways in which values and practices of democracy become embedded in particular cultural and social practices, and in the process become entrenched in the consciousness of ordinary people.”²⁰

These ideas about how vernacularization recodes the political idioms of locality and place, and hence also of autochthony and authenticity, all calibrate to the “ordinary” in public culture. These insights resonate in this book, and I propose that one force propelling the changing political order in South Asia over the last seven hundred years is the expansion of the quotidian into the field of power. This is a process that was partly accomplished by the deployment of the trope of everyday life as a rhetorical device. Sometimes the speed of this force has been swift and momentous, as in India’s constitutional enshrinement of universal suffrage in 1950, and at others almost imperceptibly slow. But I do argue that vernacularization is a force as evident in thirteenth-century Maharashtra as in twenty-first-century India.

The resonance between vernacular culture and everyday life is apparent as well in ethnographic and historical studies of highly localized religious practices of modern and contemporary India that also feed back upon political culture. For example, Joyce Flueckiger identifies a “vernacular Islam” constructed around a charismatic female healer in South India,

which Flueckiger situates within the “public realm.”²¹ She identifies this realm with the term *chaurasta*, or “four roads,” what she calls “a public social space.”²² We will see Flueckiger’s *chaurasta* echoing from the thirteenth century when, in chapters 6 and 7, we find Jnandev locating the *Bhagavad Gītā* and his own commentary on that text at the *chauhata*, the “four corners,” of the town square, that is, the market. In histories of vernacularization as a literary-linguistic phenomenon, the everyday remains a central concern. Farina Mir, in her study of the Punjabi *qissa* genre in colonial India, and particularly the Hir-Ranjha story, finds that “vernacular culture” exemplified by the *qissa* operated within “the practices of everyday life,” and this genre helps us recover historical visions of those everyday practices.²³ In the anthropology of selfhood within South Asia, we have ample demonstrations of the way everyday life conditions social being as a process of the vernacularization of the self.²⁴ One might think of Anand Pandian’s exploration of the *manatu* or “heart” in the cultivation of virtue, Valentine Daniel’s study of the habitus of Tamil personhood drawn from everyday life, and Leela Prasad’s ethnography of ethics and everyday life in Sringeri in Karnataka.²⁵ Ritu Birla’s idea of the “vernacular capitalist” joined the modern capitalist networks of colonialism with the quotidian life forms of caste and kinship, which existed at the heart of “that everyday abstraction we now call ‘the market’ . . . a name for the colonial public.”²⁶ The vernacular and the everyday are revealed in particular in India’s many cinemas, as Sudhir Mahadevan has shown in his marvelous study of the bioscope and the “everyday” genealogy of India’s photography-film nexus.²⁷ The list could go on, revealing that a turn toward “everyday life” is a burgeoning enterprise in South Asia studies and outside of it as well.²⁸ In art, one can see the intricate everyday scenes painted by Sudhir Patwardhan, or the everyday urban landscapes of New Modikhana, Pune, painted by Sudhir Waghmare, like the beautiful work of art on the cover of this book. In all of these cases, religion, language, state, court, selfhood, and literature intertwine, cohering around an articulation of the public perception of the quotidian as a central feature of vernacularization, whether of literature or politics or culture itself.

I should note again here that I do not claim that vernacularization (or religion or *bhakti* for that matter) in thirteenth-century India engenders modern Indian democracy—it does not. However, I am inspired by the connections that scholars of contemporary political anthropology and other subjects have drawn between vernacularization, everyday life, and political

culture, revealing a consistent association with the valorization of the ordinary. At the same time, I do not believe that democracy, even in postcolonial contexts, can be reduced to the effects or aftereffects of colonialism or European hegemony. The modern world is no more *sui generis* in India or the rest of the postcolonial world than it was in Europe or America. Worlds of multiple modernities have multiple origins for their modernity. And so I do argue that woven into the heterogeneous braid of Indian modernity and democracy is the strand of thought and debate I examine in this book.

Given my emphasis on the quotidian, let me chart out here what I mean by this term and its several synonyms. I use the terms *quotidian*, *common*, *ordinary*, and *everyday* more or less interchangeably. While I am aware of the many shades of difference among these words, I tend to see them all within a semantic field similar to Charles Taylor's use of "ordinary life" as a way to describe a new location for cultural valuation and a new epicenter for cultural politics. Taylor locates this in late medieval Europe, from which emerged the building blocks of the modern secular age as he constructs it.²⁹ I adapt this usage to a very different time and context. In India during the Yadava century a new cultural politics surfaced, which revalued "the everyday" at the core of public culture, displacing the values of the literary cosmopolitan, for example, but also very mundane relations among people around caste, gender, and language. The emphasis on "ordinary life" is unmistakable in the materials I study in this book. I suggest that this new emphasis, represented through the power of literature, is part of the long history of India's present.

Similarly, I borrow from Michel de Certeau's ideas about "everyday life" as the cultural location where individuals, particularly nonelites, can slowly mold and reconstruct cultural conditions and the politics of their age, where they can resist or submit, according to their needs. In this context, I take inspiration in particular from de Certeau's idea that the realm of governmental power and elites is a world of "strategy." By this he names the state's power to create disciplinary systems by force—as simple as sidewalks or as complicated as penal codes and constitutions—that seek to channel the movements, actions, and thoughts of common people, of its citizenry (something akin to what Foucault has called "governmentality" and simply "discipline"). Conversely, people in everyday life respond with "tactics," according to de Certeau, to creatively rewire and alternatively use those channels—and this is often done beneath or beside the direct surveillance of the court, state, or elites.³⁰ Here de Certeau's idea about

how “the governed” work with or even subvert the political society in which they belong dovetails with James Scott’s ideas about the “weapons of the weak” or Partha Chatterjee’s recent arguments about how “popular politics” represent a “politics of the governed.”³¹ Indeed, it is for “the governed,” and not on behalf of the governing, that Marathi literary vernacularization claims to speak. Here is another close parallel with contemporary political conceits in India where the everyday person is valorized and “represented” through political systems. Similarly, those who govern did not inaugurate vernacularization in the Marathi context. As Ranajit Guha famously announced in the inaugural work of the Subaltern Studies Collective, “The politics of the people [is] . . . an autonomous domain.”³² I propose in this book to edge as close as possible to this imagined “politics of the people” and this “autonomous domain.” And though I do not portray this domain as autonomous in fact, it also was not subsumed entirely by the political, social, or religious forces of power that usually animate the historiography of medieval India.

As we will see, neither Chakradhar nor Jnandev is part of any of the formal social structures of the Yadava century, such as the Yadava governmental structure or the many religious and literary institutions it supported. However, as male Brahmins of high pedigree (as I think Chakradhar was), they are no doubt elites. Yet they evince no “strategy” in de Certeau’s conception of this idea, they have no access to “political power” to effect change through force; indeed, we will see stories of Chakradhar resisting and avoiding opportunities to tap into political power. Instead they both employ and engender a set of tactics—rhetorical and practical—that reformulate “the public square” through currents outside governmental forms, reconfigured in enduring literary monuments. Their lack of “will and power”—what de Certeau ascribes to those with “strategy”³³—is partly indicated by the fact that the tactics they inaugurate set in motion processes these agents of vernacularization and their public memories ultimately cannot contain. The social critiques they propose are not confined to the intentions we might attribute to them through a reading of the materials left to us today. In other words, tactics will work upon tactics; both the Mahanubhav religion and Jnandev’s pioneering text, not to mention his very biography, will go on being subjected to centuries of permutations and emendations by subsequent currents of vernacularization—a subject I touch upon in the conclusion.

And so we can add to these theories of everyday life the very power of the quotidian world to expand beyond the parameters of its inaugurators or champions. And sometimes, or perhaps always, this force will move social and cultural forms away from those original intentions. The politics of the people is, at least in this sense, not autonomous in that the public—past and present—folds back upon itself in a recursive fashion, a heterogeneous and changing set of social forces that cannot be described in the singular. Vernacularization, then, represents tactics that are endemic to its form and function, beyond the ability of its many agents to control; they are the maneuvers of everyday life.

If we consider vernacularization in relation to the topos of everyday life and, by extension, to an immanent critique of social difference, then this allows us to see that the process of vernacularization occurs long before vernacular literatures arise. It is deeply embedded in the discourse of the “cosmopolitan” itself contained in Sanskrit texts. The idea of a critique of social inequity, around caste and gender in particular, is a part of the textual histories of Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism and is present in epic literature (such as the *Mahābhārata* especially) and *purana* literature. Indeed, several key *purana* texts, though in Sanskrit, declare that they were composed for the benefit of “women, low castes, and others.”³⁴ The *Mahābhārata* also states its inclusion of women, low castes, and others within the sphere of its imagined community of receivers. As we will see in relation to the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Jnandev will declare that the text was explicitly composed for women, low castes, and others (*strishudradika*),³⁵ yet it could not reach this audience until it was retold in a regional language. From another point of view, the very representation of languages other than Sanskrit in the Sanskritic world already displays an engagement with this nonelite world—for instance, the vast array of Prakrits of various sorts assigned to female and low-caste figures. Add to these textual and traditional forms the many collectivities of renunciates, *sadhus*, *sannyasis*, and others who, alone and in groups, renounced all social distinction and desire, hence disregarding caste difference and often forming new communities that are socially heterodox. The seeds of vernacularization were planted deeply within the soil of the Indian cosmopolitan long before the recorded era of literary vernacularization arose.

If we move away from the idea that vernacularization is about a literary endeavor, but instead see it as a more encompassing social endeavor that is

marked by the strategic use of the topos of everyday life, then we can see the quotidian revolution to be an age-old process, inherent in the world of the Sanskrit cosmopolis over millennia.³⁶ In this way, we can notice that moments of literary vernacularization on the subcontinent are not ruptures but displays of the continuation of a very long process that I am calling a quotidian revolution. In other words, the strategic use of everyday life to critique social inequality did not originate in the thirteenth century. Instead, I am arguing that this was an ages-old critique that took a new form—a literary form in the Marathi vernacular; that it did so with the wind of a particular kind of historical critique at its back; and that this was a critique that the Brahmin males at the center of Marathi literary vernacularization seem to have known well.

As this is a book that also engages the academic study of “religion” in history, I must comment on Pollock’s position on the association between “religion” and the history of vernacularization. If Pollock’s work examined the language of the Gods in the world of men, this book explores the language of men (and women) in a world of Gods. Pollock argues in the introduction to his edited volume, *Literary Cultures in History*, that “religion . . . became and has remained virtually the single lens through which to view all texts and practices in the subcontinent, further distorting what little attention had been directed toward literary culture.”³⁷ By “literary culture” here Pollock does not mean literature devoid of themes of a “religious” or mythological variety, but rather the productive center and impetus for this culture, which is the court and its literary aims. In other words, Pollock is well aware that religions produce literatures and condition the literary, but his point is something more. Pollock references one of the chief features of Orientalist scholarship that Said and others had also registered—the association of “religion” and religious thinking (often read as nonrational, affective thinking in general) with the non-West.³⁸ Yet Pollock’s concern and corrective runs deeper. In the generally accepted history of vernacularization in the subcontinent, the role of a particular aspect of religion—devotionalism or *bhakti* expressed through song-poems and hagiography—had indeed come to stand not only as the sole representative of the earliest layers of literary vernacularization but also as the harbinger of vernacularization’s apparent social ethics of equality.³⁹ Pollock ascribes this association between vernacularization and religion in particular to a new misconfiguration in scholarship, a “disciplinary bias toward

religious studies” that eclipsed a clear vision of “the primary moments of vernacularization” in South Asia.⁴⁰ This leads Pollock to declare that “religion was largely irrelevant to the origins of South Asian vernacularization” because vernacularization was a “courtly project . . . largely unconcerned with religious differences.”⁴¹ However, where religion does enter the history of vernacularization, Pollock refers to this as a “second vernacular revolution,”⁴² by which he means that the primary pivot of the vernacular turn occurred, by and large, outside the sphere of organized religion and its literature and very precisely in the worlds of the court and literary elite.

There is no doubt that Pollock’s work further compels a corrective to any ahistorical, simplistic review of the history of vernacularization. I share his concern that “religion,” and in particular *bhakti* or “devotionalism,” too often functions as the epistemological limit point for all non-Western and premodern cultural contexts. Yet Pollock’s work itself evinces a far more circumspect perspective than these statements on religion suggest. The primary empirical context for his argument is the field of Kannada vernacularization where early materials suggest the courtly origins of Kannada’s vernacular turn.⁴³ Though Pollock gives us a sweeping statement about religion and vernacularization, he is too fine a scholar to let it remain vague. He does provide a more discrete list of the languages whose history conforms to the Kannada model. These are Assamese, Gujarati, Malayalam, and Telugu, which were “much more concerned with the terrestrial than with the transcendent.”⁴⁴

What about the remaining many languages of South Asia? The one literary history Pollock sets aside from his analysis as anomalous is Marathi. As he shows—and as this book concurs—he is entirely correct in seeing that Marathi literary vernacularization occurred almost entirely outside the sphere of the royal court, even while literization is evident only in the inscriptional record, which is common throughout South Asia.⁴⁵ In other words, it seems correct that the traces of literization are almost always confined to the production of courts or institutions supported by royal patronage. However, the first iterations of literarization, of new literatures in regional languages, show a greater variation, and the case of Marathi is emblematic of this variation. As chapters 1 and 2 will show, Marathi literization is recorded solely in inscriptions associated with royal courts, while Marathi literarization appears to flourish in the context of public culture and in the fields we refer to as “religion” and *bhakti*, and to do so relatively

independent of the Yadava court. This means that though the royal court has a role to play in Marathi literarization, it is neither the epicenter of this process nor its driver. Instead the Yadava indifference, or rather benign ambivalence, toward Marathi literature allowed this new discursive world to grow relatively unimpeded.

Yet it seems to me that Marathi is not alone in this regard. There are other languages with literary histories in which it is not possible to distinguish the “terrestrial” from the “transcendent” in terms of influences or locations for vernacularization. This is true of Punjabi, for example, and particularly apparent in the genealogies of Tamil and Hindi/Urdu—arguably the largest and most influential literary languages of southern and northern India, respectively. As with Marathi, in the histories of vernacularization of these three languages, too, the “secular” and “sacred” cannot be bisected.⁴⁶ Even in the case of Kannada, D. R. Nagaraj—writing in Pollock’s edited volume that explores the histories of particular literatures in South Asia—argues that the figures representing bhakti, such as the Virashaivas, rejected the court and temple cultures of their age. Hence they would have also rejected literacy and the elite aesthetics of literature. In other words, representatives of bhakti and “religion” excluded themselves *by design* from the field of “vernacularization” as Pollock traces it, an emergent elite literary aesthetic located in royal courts, or so Nagaraj argues is the case with Kannada.⁴⁷ If religion is irrelevant to literary vernacularization, it may be a result of the rejection of the royal court as literary epicenter by some religious figures. Thus, while Nagaraj does not appear to disagree with Pollock, he does seem to suggest that bhakti in particular was extremely important to the history of vernacularization in Kannada regardless of whether the first Kannada literary texts appeared at courts or elsewhere.

This suggests to us that the usual phenomenological content of the term *religion* is bifurcated. On the one hand, we have religion at its institutional level, the temple, and within a field of literary production of religious authority. On the other hand, we have religion a field filled by an engagement with everyday life, which may entail a rejection of the former idea of institutional-literary religion, or it may not. But the two designations of religion here are by no means cooperative spheres. They may be antagonists to one another, as in the case of Kannada, and perhaps in the case of Marathi too. To say vernacularization occurred outside the confines

of “religion” collapses too many variables. Instead, in such cases (perhaps in a majority of cases in fact), we have a complicated mesh of elite royal courts, institutionalized religious culture, and an intermediary high literary sphere in which religion or bhakti is as vital as any other aspect of a given cultural sphere. In this way I do not disagree with Pollock’s emphasis on politics, or even on courts, but rather with the way the term *religion* is forced to envelop fields that are, otherwise, in contention with one another. If a figure like Basava in the twelfth century sings songs about God but rejects God’s temple, where can we locate the sole representative of “religion”?

As chapters 4 and 5 will show, Chakradhar was a figure around whom bhakti circulated, but a figure whose relationships with religious institutions—monasteries and sometimes temples—and with rival religious figures—monastery leaders and other popular religious figures—were regularly antagonistic. And chapters 6 and 7 will demonstrate that Jnandev rejected a world of elite Sanskrit learning such as the Vedas—surely a “religious” sphere—in order to transpose elite salvational possibilities to a quotidian religious field. And yet Pollock’s corrective is, I hope, heeded in this book, for while “religion” may describe the social fields of Chakradhar, the early Mahanubhavs, and Jnandev and his text, I attempt to carefully delineate the specific scope of each figure, community, and text. If the process of vernacularization is fundamentally about expanding the sphere of everyday life and representing that expansion in expressive forms (literature, art, language, politics, etc.), then it is also about noticing difference and distinction in many areas of life experience.

Bhakti, Caste, and Gender

These forces of the social constructions of everyday life to which I allude, and which are taken up as primary subjects in the materials we will explore, centrally involve caste and gender. In the context of Marathi vernacularization, an explicit observation of and critique of inequities surrounding caste and gender in Yadava-era society will form a core subject. I appraise the form of a new literature—its aesthetics, for example—alongside its content, which in the case of new Marathi literature of the thirteenth century entails particular attention to inequities of caste and gender. I realize that for many readers an association among bhakti, vernacularization,

and critiques of caste and gender will sound like old wine in a new skin.⁴⁸ This is just the sort of conflation and assumption that Pollock rightly seeks to contradict when he tells us that religion and bhakti were largely irrelevant in the primary history of vernacularization. Indeed, this is a point that has been made by other scholars as well, and I too have made such an argument around bhakti, challenging the idea that it represents a cohesive social movement across India or that its fundamental function is “social justice.”⁴⁹ Instead, I have argued that bhakti primarily creates publics. In this process, caste and gender differences are sometimes a social problem and at other times an accepted aspect of the fabric of culture to be preserved and even honored. And though bhakti does not fully circumscribe the sphere we will engage in this book, it is central enough to warrant some discussion of its function here.

Jack Hawley, in his study of the history and historicity of “the *bhakti* movement,” shows us how the modern idea of a bhakti movement as a reformist movement is especially indebted to Hindi scholarship of the modern period, deeply ensnared in the social and political vicissitudes surrounding the formulation of Indian nationalism.⁵⁰ Yet Hawley also shows us that the materials these modern scholars accessed from the vast sea of bhakti compositions did engage caste and gender inequity, along with a host of other issues including religious animosities between Hindus and Muslims. Hawley reveals that—from Maharashtra northward to the Hindi heartland—one can trace lines of interconnection among various bhakti groups over time and space, just as Pollock traces commonalities of cosmopolitan and vernacular socioliterary orders across South Asia and beyond. Hawley coins this interconnection the “*bhakti* network” as opposed to a bhakti movement. To argue that bhakti presented a uniform critique of the inequities of society, a social movement in short, and that this critique alone compelled vernacularization, would be a gross mischaracterization. But, as Hawley shows us, we can see multiple commonalities within the wide sphere of the bhakti network that have had a tremendous influence on Indian society for a millennium or more. And, as we will see in the pages that follow, Marathi vernacularization is unmistakably situated in relation to the sphere of bhakti in complex ways, though it is not circumscribed by it. In this realm of devotionism, social inequity became a subject of public debate.

The material I study in this book forces my engagement with bhakti here. It will be apparent I hope that bhakti and social critique sit side by side in this case, as in many other cases documented throughout South Asia. As several scholars such as David Lorenzen and Jayant Lele have shown, bhakti often carries with it a social critique that seems linked to its theological and social form. It would be as wrong to say that bhakti is unequivocally and always a form of social protest as it would be to ignore the many examples of social protest enunciated in the language of bhakti.

Sanskrit writings during the Yadava period indicate that the royal court and other institutions were preoccupied with describing and regulating caste relations. In Marathi too, caste distinctions are a ubiquitous subject, as we will see. Two terms referring to caste were constant in public discourse in the thirteenth-century Maharashtra, both in Sanskrit and in the Marathi materials we will examine. These terms are *jati* and *varna* and, in addition, the words that designate a given *jati* or *varna*, both indicating practices of social distinction that,⁵¹ in basic forms, likely existed in India for at least three millennia.⁵² The process of social distinction can be tied to birth and regionalized occupation (*jati*) within a given political economy of space. Or the process can be broadened toward a traditional theory of social hierarchy (*varna*). The European term *caste* is a word I will use in this book at times to speak about *jati* and/or *varna*, though I will endeavor to make clear to the reader the referent in each case.⁵³ However, the use of this now English word since the eighteenth century in modern scholarship and in modern India evinces an entirely different history and practice—deeply embedded in colonial ethnology and postcolonial governance and politics. As Dirks and Cohn, in particular, have shown, political power conditions relationships and hierarchies between and among caste groups.⁵⁴ The romantic early British vision that somehow Brahmins controlled the mass of India's population by convincing them of the supremacy of their own ritual purity was entirely unraveled by the historical anthropology of caste and in the work of anthropologists like M. N. Srinivas.⁵⁵ I take this lesson about the interplay of political power and caste as fundamental to my analysis, but I also understand that caste mutates and fluctuates in meaning when in different contexts. For this reason, at many points in this book I will use *caste* to mean the collection of social practices and effects of *varna* and *jati*, but more often I will specify the terms used in the texts

under study here. Both *jati* and *varna* appear in abundance in our materials, and so I should explain how I understand these words.

The term *jati* is an Indic word that essentially means “birth.”⁵⁶ From this meaning, many other significations are derived, such as kind, genus, class, species, as well as natural disposition. For at least two millennia, the term *jati* has appeared in Sanskrit texts to indicate one’s position in society by virtue of birth in a particular lineage, race, family, traditional occupation, region, language area, and so on.⁵⁷ In this latter usage, the former meanings are enfolded such that *jati* indicates one’s “caste” as a feature of one’s birth and, for women, marriage. This in turn implies various things about the person based on their *jati* in that *jatis* will often be described as bearing certain regular social, cultural, and even physical distinctions. In contrast to *varna*, the practice of *jati* in India is a social fundamental, shared by almost all Indians regardless of religion—that is, *jati* is common to Indian Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and often Buddhists as well as Hindus. A *jati* can be as small as a few families in a given region or as large as a pan-Indian or even pan-religious designation.⁵⁸ Current estimates place the number of distinct *jatis* in India at around five thousand across regional, religious, and linguistic divides.⁵⁹

However, *jati*, while it implies difference, does not suggest an absolute hierarchy or ritualistic distinction. Indeed, *jati* terms tend to indicate (if they indicate anything) associations with traditional occupation (mostly lost in modernity), region, and language. In other words, *jati* is often bounded by a regional political and social economy rather than an objective social hierarchy, as is sometimes assumed.⁶⁰ This is perhaps in part why *jati* survives independently of a given religion or region. In this book we will see many references to *jati* in the texts and contexts we examine. I think of *jati* in these contexts as a *social ontology*, a state of being that conforms to the social forces of a given region. But, as we will see, while *jati* was fixed, its cultural meaning was in constant negotiation: What was the distinction or character of a given *jati*? Was one *jati* more or less ritually pure than another? Which *jatis* needed to be rearticulated in new contexts? Such questions animated the cultural politics of the thirteenth century, as they do today.

Our second term indicated by caste is the Indic word *varna*. The essential meaning of this word is something like its cognates in English, “varnish” or “veneer.” The word indicates a cover of some kind that projects

an outward appearance or color; it is a broad type. The word is both older than *jati* and more embedded within what we might call Brahminic Hindu orthodoxy conveyed through Sanskrit texts, especially the Dharma Śāstra or “social science” texts of classical and medieval India. The word *varna* first appears in the oldest text of any sort for which we have a discernible record within the subcontinent, the *Rig Veda* (c. 1700 BCE). And it endures into the modern period.⁶¹ The theory of *varna* is traditionally articulated as a fourfold division of society, but with emendation. These four aspects are typically expressed as: Brahmins or “ritualist scholars,” Kshatriyas or “warrior-kings,” Vaishyas or “merchants,” and Shudras or “peasants.” If *jati* indicates a social ontology, then we can think of *varna* as a kind of *social ideology*, a normative theory of social order itself.

The first three groups of the *varna* social ideology are often called “twice-born” or *dvija*, a reference to a “rebirth” ceremony in childhood, marking entry into the *varna* group. Twice-born *varnas* are often simply called “high castes” or, in contemporary nomenclature, “forward castes.” The term *Shudra* appears to have remained its own category, differentiated from the other three by virtue of not being “twice-born.” In common parlance today in India, groups associated with the *varna* of Shudra often adopt or are given the title “Other Backward Classes” or OBCs. This is a term that is used in the Indian Constitution, but one that does not reach its full definitional and ethnological-political power until the Mandal Commission Report of 1980 and the implementation of reservation policies for OBCs a decade later.

This fourfold division of *varna* probably became reified and theorized by the fifth century CE in a wide body of texts collectively known as Dharma Śāstra that examined the “science” (*shastra*) of “social-cosmic order” (*dharma*). As we will see, this genre of social thought was dominant in Yadava literary production in Sanskrit. It is in the context of the emergence of the science of *dharma* in the fifth century that we find the fullest articulation of the concept of “Untouchability,” particularly in the codification called the Laws of Manu.⁶² Though the rudiments of this idea are perhaps to be found in the Vedic identification of the *dāsa*, the “enemy” and “slave” of the Vedic Aryans, the concept as we know it today was formed fully, as a social theory, in this fifth-century context of Dharma Śāstra. The Laws of Manu has become emblematic of Brahminic social orthodoxy, an object about which leaders of the communities grouped under the term

“Untouchables,” such as the Maharashtrian political leader B. R. Ambedkar, have vented their deep anger.⁶³ However, a large body of literature of social orthodoxy promoted the idea of Untouchability within the larger context of caste (as varna, jati, and gender).⁶⁴ This larger literary heritage of a Brahminic orthodoxy became the primary subject for the Sanskrit and court-literary spheres of the Yadava period in the thirteenth century.

In contemporary India, the practice of Untouchability is unconstitutional. Those jati groups that historically suffered the stigma of this social practice in India are designated “Scheduled Castes” in the Indian Constitution, which also grants them reservations in government jobs and education, along with historically disadvantaged tribal groups (called “Scheduled Tribes”). Most people associated with “Untouchable” jatis have adopted other terms for their status, such as Dalit (“down-trodden”) or Harijan (“people of God”) or have renamed their communities, such as Ravidasis, or have retained their jati titles, though having divested those titles of association with the practices of Untouchability. In this book, we will encounter several jati names conferred the varna status of Untouchable, and these will include the communities identified by the names Mahar, Chamar, Chambhar, and Mang, among others. I should note here that these names do not mean “Untouchable”; they are merely proper nouns that mark jati names. Rather this status is ascribed to (and through the centuries inflicted upon) the people born under this ontological sign.

As one can imagine, varna’s fourfold division of human social order, particularly implying a broad sense of “occupation,” has given rise to a number of analyses that compare this theoretical social structure to the modern idea of class.⁶⁵ However, the degree to which varna has ever dictated a uniform economic class or influenced governance or social order is uncertain even while these are clearly related forms of social distinction. In the material from the thirteenth century engaged in this book, varna will appear alongside jati. But, in contradistinction to jati, varna is cited as a social theory that embeds within it a latent and pernicious set of exclusionary principles. One of the key features of the reinterpretation of varna in the Dharma Śāstra literature was the idea that only men from the first three varnas—Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya—would be allowed to hear Sanskrit, much less learn it and use it. At the core of the cultural politics situated between language and caste in texts explored in this book is the idea that the exclusion of Shudras, Untouchables, and in many cases

women, from the cultural sphere of Sanskrit is a social, and indeed cosmic, injustice. This injustice, as we will see with Jnandev, is tied to the idea that Sanskrit does contain a discourse of salvation that should be accessible to all people, the *Bhagavad Gītā* existing as a preeminent example. However, the critique Jnandev offers, we will notice, does not argue for the freedom of all people to learn Sanskrit or to participate in the “Sanskrit cosmopolis.” Rather, he argues that all people should be allowed to access that salvational discourse contained in Sanskrit through translations into the languages of “Place,” the *deshi*, which in this case, means Marathi. Jnandev’s compassion is palpable and moving in his text, even while his primary concern is for the soul and salvation of his listeners, and less explicit attention is given to the social change this might bring. A more muddled and difficult task is to understand how this broad theory of cosmic justice plays out in the mundane social contexts of *jati*, *varna*, and especially of gender, and how the quotidian world might absorb and transform with the literarization of its primary linguistic core.

Caste is regularly a term used to enfold *varna* and *jati* into one another, but it often leaves aside the force of gender difference, even while gender and sex are at the very heart of both *jati* and *varna* as practices and concepts.⁶⁶ One commonality through all iterations of caste as a set of social practices—ancient to modern—is the importance of gender to its functioning. Caste and gender are at all times inseparable. The classical Dharma Śāstra literature infamously states that women are all born as Shudras and that a woman’s *varna* is determined by the patriarchal matrix in which she lives, that is, an ontology that is always a question: who is your father, who is your husband, who is your son? A woman in this matrix is essentially without *varna* until it is granted to her by relationship with a man. And given that *jati* is based on birth (rather than the authorization of some dharma adjudicant), women are the ironic epicenter of the determination of *jati*—they literally engender *jati*, yet their own *jati* remains in flux in relation to men. As we will see in the materials to come, gender and caste are so intimately linked as to be in an shatterproof symbiosis. The materials I examine in this book amply show gender to be a central problem within the discourse around caste—*jati* and *varna*. While Sanskrit is made inaccessible to one of the four *varnas*, or to most of the numerous *jatis* of India, the simplest Rubicon is drawn by sex: almost all authors of Sanskrit texts or practitioners of Sanskrit rituals were (and are) men. And this is not

by chance but by design.⁶⁷ So any discussion of caste that does not discuss gender is fundamentally incomplete. This is an idea clearly expressed in the materials examined in this book.

The critique of caste and gender encoded in the discursive field inaugurated by vernacularization places these critiques at the core of the new literary idioms of Marathi in the thirteenth century. Importantly, this new idiom of Marathi explicitly seeks to widen the social field that constitutes its audience. The materials we will study in this book conscientiously sought to expand the scope of debates about caste and gender to the majority of people who were subject to its rules, that is, to the general “public” of the Yadava century. Jnandev in the *Jñāneśvarī* will name this group “women, low castes, and others” (*strishudradika*) and the early Mahanubhavs will identify this same group through numerous stories from the life of Chakradhar and other figures. While this may seem a term that designates the “downtrodden” or dispossessed, in fact it designated, and continues to designate, the vast majority of the population of India.⁶⁸ It is a central contention of this book that this new literary idiom—replete with a debate about social order, everyday life, language, and literature (in short, cultural politics)—creates a rudimentary form of a premodern public sphere, which is one of the many genealogical precursors to the modern Indian public sphere. As we will see, the new literary world of Marathi came into being in the context of debates and challenges to prevailing social orders, not only those of the Sanskrit cosmopolis but also of conventions in the social fabric of everyday life. The vicissitudes of social difference along lines of caste and gender, akin to what Rupa Viswanath has evocatively called “everyday warfare,” is a current of common and ordinary life that would form a natural core to a public debate about society.⁶⁹ And such a debate about society, equality, and humanity in public contexts is a hallmark of the modern public sphere in a modern liberal democracy. I argue here that one legacy of vernacularization is that social critique at least in part entered the public realm.

Publics, Public Culture, and Public Sphere

Some readers might find my engagement and arguments about a nascent public sphere to be a bridge too far. For such readers, my use of terms such as *public sphere* (not to mention *public* or *public culture* or even *state*) may be

too anachronistic and inappropriate because the premodern world remains “inassimilable to the logic of the modern capitalist world order.”⁷⁰ Yet my goal is to reach across territorial divides of time, place, and theory, to do what Whitney Cox describes as “controlled theoretical anachronism.”⁷¹ I adapt Cox’s term, echoing an idea of Gayatri Spivak, to say that my goal is perhaps more like a *strategic anachronism*.⁷² My use of the term *public sphere* here is meant to provoke an engagement *across* the normative rubrics of medieval and modern, Western and non-Western, divides rather strictly drawn in much scholarship on the public sphere, as I will note. In this sense, it is descriptive and heuristic, bearing some of the same characteristics as my use of *vernacularization* in the ways it is employed by contemporary political anthropologists and others who study the contemporary and modern periods. Because I am using the phrase *public sphere* in this way, I want clarify my usage.

One can scarcely invoke the term *public sphere* without reference to the pioneering work of the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas and his 1962 book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (translated in 1989), among much other work. Habermas presented the public sphere as an emergent cultural form of the eighteenth century in Europe that prefigured a transition from a feudal order to liberal democracy by creating public venues within the new bourgeois class of educated citizens where critical debates on all matters—culture, politics, arts, government—could be discussed. For Habermas, the European public sphere grew from conversations by this class of people in cafés, public houses (“pubs” or bars), and public squares, transposed into the public media of periodicals, literature, pamphlets, and art.⁷³ Thus, for Habermas, the public sphere is a highly literate and literary one that implies an emphasis on education that marked, in part, the bourgeoisie, the emergent middle classes of Europe. This public conversation reconfigures the very nature of politics and government form. Yet the history of change that Habermas traces involves a set of conditions unique to Europe, in particular Europe as a global colonial power. These preconditions tend to revolve around a primary rationalization of the global economy that provided important networks of extrapolitical and rationalized communication. This is a very particular history—a European history—of what I consider to be a generalizable social form—a public sphere. My hope here is to tell a different story. Habermas, for all the qualifications and conditions he hangs upon his brilliant idea of

a public sphere, provides us with really quite a simple definition. The public sphere, he says, is “a society critically engaged in public debate.”⁷⁴ Or, as I have quoted him, democracy, with a vibrant public sphere at its core, allows “some scope . . . for collectively shaping a challenging future.” A society engaged in debate, in public, and with a sight toward a collective future is the sense in which I import this term into my premodern, non-European context, and long before the rationalized market of colonialism would emerge. I will outline how I use the term *public sphere* in this book, but before one can speak of a public sphere, one must be able to identify the discursive existence of a public at all.

What is a public in my usage? I addressed this question at length in a previous work, and my use of the idea here conforms to my use of the term there and elsewhere.⁷⁵ By a public, here, I mean an open, social audience, one that attends to, but does not necessarily participate in, a capacious and circulating discourse within a given region, language, or other social context. This is a context of mutual intelligibility and access. Publics are constituted primarily by passive attention, and people often participate in them through consuming discourse and reflecting their engagement through affect. A public is defined by its open-ended address, available for attentive reception. A public is a social formation that is reflexive and organized by the circulation of a particular discourse of mutual concern.⁷⁶ A public can be of almost any size; it may be situated in a given historical time or geographic space, or it may be transregional and transhistorical. In most cases a public is maintained through media such as literacy, visual culture, art, or performance, though any medium for the circulation of ideas will do. And so a public is an open conversation. Indeed, a public often bears an idiosyncratic aesthetic, a way of imagining its particular “world” as well as a reflection of the world in which it is itself located, just as conversations have a flavor, a passion, and a context. However, participation in a public can be active or passive—it requires, as Michael Warner says, “mere attention” and so publics can include those who simply observe.⁷⁷ This will be an important point as we move through the socio-ethical universe of the thirteenth-century Marathi materials, for a promise of cosmic salvation is open to all in this context, but that promise does not extend fully to salvation from the vicissitudes of social segregation, prejudice, and hierarchy. The cosmic salvation possible through a text like the *Jñāneśvarī* will be available by attentive listening alone, and so anyone who

hears, regardless of caste, class, or gender, may benefit. A public, then, can cross social boundaries of caste, class, and gender, but it might not serve to unravel or even critique those boundaries in the process. In just this way, I have argued that bhakti, to give one example, has long existed as a “public,” a social sphere of inclusion but not necessarily of social change, a sphere of critique but not necessarily of correction or coercion.

Public culture, in my usage, is the cultural expression of a given public. It is culture “out in the open,” not the culture of private clubs, royal courts, selective organizations, institutions, guilds, or closed communities, or even of the home. Instead it names the culture surrounding and referencing the “common conversation” at the heart of any given public. The fact that “public culture” like “public memory” and just the term “public” itself comes to be associated with the efforts of modern governments to remember, represent, and control how they are viewed in the world is one very particular expression of the ways publics and public culture work. However, here, well before the modern liberal state, these terms cannot bear such significance. Yet the genealogy is clear, I think, and not necessarily too distant from our modern era. As the inscriptional record engaged in chapters 1 and 2 will show, the Yadava court and other governmental elites were quite eager to fend off the public that might threaten their reign, but also valorize that same public by associating themselves with it. The idea that governments, states, courts, and elites both fear the public and seek to be inserted in it, and even control its “conversation,” is not alien to the thirteenth century, as we will see. The field of play among elites and non-elites, where the quotidian becomes the dominant trope of social, cultural, political, and aesthetic organization, is the field I would call a vernacular public culture.

Part 1 of this book seeks to establish the existence of a public around Marathi in the Yadava century. Parts 2 and 3 of this book explore how public culture was observed and targeted in the works of the early Mahanubhavs and in the *Jñāneśvarī*. In this sense, this book builds a heuristic model that suggests a rudimentary public sphere is possible only when founded upon a preexisting public and an attendant public culture. And in this way I am following in the wake of Habermas, who suggests much the same attends to the changes in the structure of the public sphere in Europe at its nascent stages. That said, I hope it is obvious to my reader that I do not aim to create a one-to-one correspondence with Habermas’s history of the public

sphere in Europe, but rather to note that something similar, though hardly the same, occurred in South Asia.

Habermas argued that the public sphere was not merely one of social critical interaction, but one conditioned by new rules of rational public discourse—a con substantiation of a rationalized economy and a rationalized field of discourse. Hence, in Habermas’s formulation, the public sphere is a rational sphere of public discourse that emerged *specifically* in Europe in the eighteenth century, borrowing the Greek and Roman ideals that were at the heart of the European Renaissance. This public sphere made possible liberal democratic participatory politics, and even though Habermas registers a decline of the public sphere’s ability to affect governmental politics since the dawn of the twentieth century, most scholars in the Habermasian tradition still situate a rational public sphere at the core of liberal democracy as one of its unique features. The Habermasian public sphere is inherently modern, European, and Western in origin. Habermas is quite explicit on this point as he notes that the public sphere was a “child of the eighteenth century” that “cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history of that ‘civil society’ . . . originating in the European High Middle Ages . . . nor can it be transferred, ideal-typically generalized, to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations.”⁷⁸ However, as with many great ideas, Habermas’s innovative identification of the public sphere is an idea that grows beyond the intentions of its author or its author’s prescriptive boundaries. To confine the idea of a public sphere to such a provincial realm would needlessly diminish its interest and power. Features of the concept, as Habermas identifies it, are apparent in other places and in much earlier times. And in those places and times we have the opportunity to fully expand upon Habermas’s concept of a public sphere as a global historical phenomenon, but evincing a highly heterogeneous character grounded in the differences of time, culture, and especially place. In short, we can vernacularize Habermas’s idea of a public sphere and see how it grows in other soils and other times.

In this work I follow scholars who seek to apply Habermas’s ideas, in general, to contexts outside the scope of his original analysis, to abstract Habermas’s idea of the public sphere from its “origins,” restructure it as an ideal-typical generalization, and apply it to a very different historical situation: thirteenth-century Maharashtra and the history of India.⁷⁹ I will emend the conditions under which I use this term, but the general idea of

a publicly accessible cultural field of discursive interaction in which social issues are critically engaged forms a core concept in this work. It is not my contention that the modern Indian public sphere is invented in thirteenth-century Maharashtra, however. This would be an untenable claim. Indeed, the modern Indian public sphere is more indebted to its counterpart in colonial-era Europe and America than to the period I study here. But I do hold that the genealogy of the Indian public sphere is not reducible solely to European historical shifts and models, to the effects of colonialism and Western modernity. Instead, the genealogy of the Indian public sphere is a complex braid of origins. Each vernacular turn in the many regions of India, as well as the grand Sanskrit cosmopolis, all form strands in that braid, and none should be ignored. In this sense, my book is about a *specific nascent public sphere* that relates to and flows into the modern one, joining many other streams of their own unique origin.

I will use terms like *nascent* and *rudimentary*, and so on, to qualify my use of *public sphere* because I am telling here the story of the thirteenth century to represent a social form that is similar to what we will find in modernity, but one that is indeed yet different and inchoate, far more restricted in circulation horizontally in space and vertically in terms of social stratification. While this may seem to imply a particular social evolutionary teleology, my hope is rather to show that the full promise of the social critique presented by the nascent public sphere of the thirteenth century was apparent to the agents and participants within the cultural forms I describe in this book. In other words, the vision of a more egalitarian future, a future where public debate was more socially equitable and accessible, does appear to be present in the thirteenth century, even if within a highly restricted context.

I also do not think that a public sphere—European, modern, or otherwise—is conditioned by rationality. Habermas, drawing on Kant and Rawls, remains true to this central idea, or perhaps aesthetic, of modernity, that rationality is the core epistemology of the modern. Yet it is hard to observe any modern election in any liberal democracy today—leaving aside elections in illiberal “democracies”—and believe that “rationality” is the primary mode of political interaction, beyond all the other affective, personal, collective, or other affinities that motivate voters. Modernity is as whimsical as it is rational, and, to be sure, it is both. The idea that the political sphere anywhere at any time is primarily a rational sphere seems more normative than descriptive.⁸⁰

Rationality may be the chief affect or aesthetic of public sphere discourse in modernity, but rationality itself is not descriptive of the public sphere in any context other than a purely idealistic one. People in the world debating with one another draw as much on emotion, “tradition,” and idiosyncratic morality as they do on rational argumentation. I say this because I wish to avoid the old Orientalist conceit of a rational West and an irrational rest. This is not Habermas’s conceit, and I do not impute it to him. But it is an idea that attends the concept of the public sphere, though not one I draw into this discussion or my use of the term. In this book I argue that the process of vernacularization in thirteenth-century Maharashtra created a social space for critical public debate in Marathi about society. However, this was a debate in which rationality shared space with the logic of the mystical cosmos and where emotional appeals for social inclusion met reasonable requests for cultural accommodation. I think that provincialized rationalism is very much apparent in the world we live in today as well.⁸¹

What we might take from Habermas’s tracing of the “structural transformation” of the public sphere, of its decline and delimitation, is the idea that all public spheres are both socially capacious and restricted. The public sphere is a prescribed space even while it is a public one. If Habermas sees a “decline” in the publicality of the public sphere because of the power of late capital to control media, for example, we may also see restrictions placed around a public sphere as one formation of it emerges in Marathi in the thirteenth century. The expansion of the scope of the public sphere carrying the content of everyday life also brought with it limitations of social order, as we will see.

So let me say now what I have in mind regarding the use of the term *public sphere* in this book. I think of the public sphere as a common social space of discourse—filled by the literary, visual, affective, gestural, etc.—that is mutually intelligible to a given population (i.e., a regional-language population) and that has the potential to engage everyone and anyone. So far this is also what a public is. What distinguishes a public sphere from a mere public is that the population within a public sphere discusses matters of common interest, forming what Charles Taylor calls a “common mind” about such matters, a conversation “potentially engaging everyone,” and this bears in some way on social order and usually on political order.⁸² This is an important way in which I hope to retain the power of Habermas’s original formulation: the public sphere is where discursive power is

mediated between elites and the general “public.” This common mind is not an agreement on those matters of common interest but an agreement on approach, subjects, and principles, the semiotic world that will now be shared between elites and everyone else. This process of agreement and disagreement within the context of decided upon principles and subjects is the scope of the political. However, the political is possible only within such an agreement. When we speak of a “political solution” to a problem, we generally mean one short of physical violence and war. The public sphere, in this sense, retains the character it has in Habermas’s work, as a sphere for the negotiation of power in public.

To enter this sphere is to sublimate one’s individual concerns, to make of oneself and one’s needs a metonym for general wants and needs, to come to represent “society” as Habermas notes. Michael Warner calls this “the principle of negativity,” to negate the particular and personal in favor of the social and collective. And it is this political process, this evolution of the “common mind” and critically engaged public debate that conditions the public sphere and allows the discursive negotiation of power to take place. I will argue that we see this principle of negativity at work when figures like Jnandev and Chakradhar—high-caste males who could have selected a far more routinized and privileged life as scholars of Sanskrit or overseers of temples, monasteries, or other endowed institutions—instead choose to inaugurate arguments that objectified their own caste and gender privilege, even while relying on that privilege. In other words, they “negated” one aspect of their social ontology to engage with another or perhaps the “Other,” those not like them in the field of power.⁸³ A public sphere is created here at the confluence of a new expressive form—Marathi literature—with a particular (but not new) social critique around caste and gender.

This book joins several studies of the public sphere outside Europe, and specifically in India.⁸⁴ One can observe the superior work of Francesca Orsini on modern Hindi vernacular public spheres and on Marathi public spheres, the work of Milind Wakankar and Veena Naregal, who have already explored Habermas’s ideas in comparable historical contexts.⁸⁵ Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph directly engage Habermas in a delightful study of Gandhi and civil society. In this work they adjust Habermas’s original concept of the public sphere to observe Gandhi’s central role in a nationalist and activist public in late colonial India.⁸⁶ Similar work on modern

Indian publics by Arjun Appadurai, Carol Breckenridge, Douglas Haynes, Sandria Freitag, Anne Hardgrove, and Keith Yandell and John Paul have explored ideas aligned to those expressed by Habermas.⁸⁷ Some work has skirted the edge of modernity and explicitly examined the public sphere in India, especially C. A. Bayly's studies of the Indian "ecumene" of the eighteenth century and Purushottam Agarwal's argument for a "bhakti public sphere" in early modern India.⁸⁸ Given Habermas's very specific interest in conditioning the public sphere as a literary field engaged by cultural elites in the discussion of critical questions in society, one could argue that a rather enormous body of scholarship engages "public spheres" in India across all time periods. Indeed, Pollock's epic exploration of cosmopolitan and vernacular literary change over two millennia, in this sense, is a study of a grand public sphere in literary history on a global scale.⁸⁹ It is an investigation of the discursive content of Sanskrit and languages of place that self-reflexively examines the very questions of the cosmopolitan and vernacular in a shared context. The concept of the "public sphere" has moved beyond the confines of its origins. In this work I try to follow others in expanding our use of the "public sphere" as a theoretical concept to new times and places. This is a time before modernity, before the technologies of mass media that extend from the printing press outward to our present that allow for a massive public sphere to emerge. But the core concept given to us by Habermas does endure here, the idea that the public sphere is a discursive field where power is mediated between elites and the quotidian, the "public" at large, where they engage in a critical debate about society, evincing an immanent hope for a better future.

The Quotidian Revolution has a simple thesis: that the primary driver of vernacularization is an engagement with the everyday life of a place, specially its language and other affective and expressive idioms. Vernacularization is *not* primarily about the creation of a new literature—this is a secondary effect. I argue that the emphasis on everyday life compels a cultural politics, and that politics, in turn, engages two of the most salient features of thirteenth-century life in Maharashtra, which are caste and gender. This inaugurates a "public" conversation about caste, gender, and other social inequities, even if it does not lead to resolutions.

The reason I argue that a nascent public sphere emerges as a result of the process of vernacularization is because what circulates around the contentions with this term are some of the very same questions of access,

equality, progress, and humanity that seemed to compel the materials this book discusses. These are also subjects that continue to inspire societies on many levels today. It is my effort to resist the demarcation of a hermetically sealed field of the medieval, quarantined from the colonial or modern or postcolonial. We know well the differences among and between these historical eras, marked by political formations that no one can dismiss. But we know relatively less about what links and binds these eras, what flows through them and past them, into the future.⁹⁰ There is no time in the history of India that is not vital to its present, which is not linked to it inextricably and irrevocably. My goal in using a term like *public sphere* or *public* or even *state* (see chapter 1) will, I hope, press at the boundaries that divide the study of the premodern and the modern (themselves woefully inadequate terms of distinction).

I am also compelled by the important trade in terms that scholarship requires. We speak across time and space of gender, class, religion, and politics, sometimes in vague terms, but always with the hope that our vagaries can be planted in autochthonous soil. My goal is to make an argument about a term used across the humanities and social sciences, yet root this term in the empirical substance of the chapters that follow. Scholarship should always be about the details, certainly, but it should also venture into the general and abstract, for this is where “humanity” exists, if it exists anywhere. This is why any of us ever bother to speak over the differences of language, race, sex, nation, sexual orientation, religion, caste, class, time, and place. The public sphere is one good way of saying we all imagine ourselves to be an “Us” in the first place. And yes, there is the “Them” that presses upon social ethics. This book is about the experience of this tension, and a discussion about it, as well as visions for its resolution, in a place that seems far in the past but is perhaps as close to our present as anything could be.

Notes

Preface: The Shape of the Book

1. Mahanubhavs do not believe Chakradhar died, but rather departed Maharashtra in 1273. I use the dates 1194–1273 to mark the time Chakradhar lived among his followers in Maharashtra.
2. Many of Jnandev's followers do not believe he died but rather is still entombed in Alandi.
3. See the introduction for my rationale for this statement.

Introduction: The Argument of the Book

1. See Povinelli 2006.
2. Pollock 2006.
3. I am inspired here by Gramsci's idea of a passive revolution. Gramsci, however, uses the term in a very modernist, capitalist context, and with less emphasis on everyday life, but more emphasis on ordinary social structures, such as education, organized religion, and media.
4. See Novetzke forthcoming.
5. This is the most common title given to this text, a text that otherwise contains no title. Other titles include the *Bhavārthadīpika* and the *Jñānadevī*. I refer to this figure as Jnandev since this is the name used in the *Jñāneśvarī* to designate its author. Jnaneshwar a later name applied to this *sant*.
6. Pollock 2006:283.
7. *Ibid.*, 4–6. My thanks to Sheldon Pollock, who gave critical advice on aspects of this book, particularly in relation to theorizing vernacularization, gender, and public culture.

8. Ibid., 283.
9. Pollock in Eisenstadt, Schluchter, and Wittrock 2001:41–74. For Pollock’s fullest treatment of this subject, see Pollock 2006.
10. Pollock 2006:6.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 22.
13. Ibid., 7.
14. Pollock engages with caste in his book, but caste does not form a central problematic in his analysis. Gender is not a subject Pollock engages, in part because of the nature of his field of exploration, a field dominated by high-caste men (though not necessarily Brahmins, as he points out). European studies of vernacularization do emphasize gender, however. I thank Pollock for pointing this out to me.
15. Pollock shares this view. See Pollock 2006:12, 204–22, 397–409.
16. Hansen 1999:9. See also Hansen 1996, and Chatterjee 2011. The intimate connection between vernacular culture and everyday life is apparent in studies well outside South Asia. See for example Abrahams 2005 and Lefebvre 1991 [1947].
17. Hansen 2001:69.
18. Ibid., 68.
19. Ibid., 87. See Hansen’s engaging examination of the “ordinary” as a process of “othering,” which he traces from Hegel to Kojève to Lacan and Žižek (ibid., 197–98). I should note here I am making no connection or asserting no relationship between Bal Thackeray or other contemporary political figures and either Jnandev or Chakradhar.
20. Michelutti 2007. See also Michelutti 2008.
21. Flueckiger 2006:xi.
22. Ibid., 14–15. See also the work of DeNapoli 2014. In the context of gender and public performance, we see something like the opposite of “vernacularization” as the investment of everyday life within public culture with the erasure of the devadāsī from the history of Indian classical dance. See the excellent work of Soneji 2012.
23. Mir 2010:120, 182. For Telugu and the situated nature of language in everyday life transformed in political power in the contemporary period, see Mitchell 2009. See also Mantena 2013.
24. See Jalal 2000.
25. Pandian 2009:16, 105 and Daniel 1987. See Prasad 2007.
26. Birla in Pandian and Ali 2010:86.
27. Mahadevan 2015.
28. See, for example, Abrahams 2005. I would note, however, that the *everyday* is a keyword not restricted to the “vernacular” but also employed by scholars to study the “cosmopolitan” as well. See a wonderful example in the work of Bayat 2008.

29. Taylor 2007.
30. De Certeau 1984. See in particular his discussion of “strategy” and “tactic” (ibid., xix). As I am not engaging the “philosophical psychology” of “everyday life,” I have avoided engaging the prominent statements on this idea by Freud or Lacan, which are all taken up by de Certeau.
31. Scott 1985; Chatterjee 2004, 2011. Chatterjee does not invoke de Certeau and does not use his terminology; indeed, Chatterjee emphasizes how certain efforts deemed “illegal” by the state represent “strategies” by the governed to affect political society.
32. Guha in Guha and Spivak 1988:40.
33. De Certeau 1984:xix.
34. See Gadkari 1996:180. Gadkari cites the *Bhāgavata*, the *Devī Purāṇa*, the *Narasīṅha Purāṇa*, and also the *Mahābhārata*.
35. For example, Dandekar 1963:18:1448.
36. This leaves aside the fact that Sanskrit is not uniform over region, but varies region by region, as does English, though it is largely intelligible to anyone who knows Sanskrit in general; this is essential to Pollock’s idea of the cosmopolis, that the diversity of region, though present and registered in Sanskrit, is yet overcome by an overall symmetry of grammar and vocabulary. See his engagement with this idea in Pollock 2006:39ff.
37. Pollock 2003:4.
38. See King 1999.
39. See Pollock 1998:29ff and Pollock 2006:423–36.
40. Pollock 1998:31.
41. Pollock 2006:429–30.
42. Ibid., 5, 432ff, and 434.
43. See ibid., 330–79, and Pollock 1998:30–31.
44. Pollock 2006:479.
45. Ibid., 382.
46. For examples of this complexity, see Wentworth 2011 for Tamil and Busch 2011a for Hindi/Urdu. See also Busch 2011b:7–9 and Behl, Weightman, and Pandey 2000 and Behl and Doniger 2012. For Punjabi, see Harpreet Singh’s recent dissertation, Singh 2013. My thanks to Allison Busch and Whitney Cox for a discussion of this subject.
47. See also Nagaraj 2003.
48. My thanks to Whitney Cox for this challenging observation and for discussing much of this book and giving valuable feedback.
49. See Novetzke 2008b.
50. Hawley 2015. My thanks to Jack Hawley for extensive comments on chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the book.
51. In using this term, I take inspiration from the work of Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984 [1979]), but I am not restricting the use of this term to the

- social frames Bourdieu employs. For more Bourdieun appropriations, see chapter 3.
52. See Thapar 2003 and Doniger 2009.
 53. The key modern scholarship on caste would include the work of Louis Dumont, M. N. Srinivas, Bernard Cohn, Nicholas B. Dirks, and Susan Bayly. A wonderful survey begins Guha's recent book (Guha 2013), and I would recommend Roberts 2008 and Das 2001.
 54. Cohn 1971, 1987, 1996; Dirks 1987, 2001.
 55. Srinivas 1994. For the view that ritual purity ordered the caste system, see Dumont 1980.
 56. Monier-Williams, Leumann, and Cappeller 1899:418 (column 1).
 57. For theories about the historical emergence of jati, see the work of Burton Stein, D. D. Kosambi, and Romila Thapar.
 58. Examples would include the Jat caste, which is found in northern India among Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims; or the Chamar caste, which is found throughout central, western, and northern India, across religious, regional, and linguistic divides. See Rawat 2011.
 59. National Sample Survey Organization 2001.
 60. See Guha 2013.
 61. For example, the first censuses conducted in India under colonial rule in the early nineteenth century began by enumerating varna and only later came to recognize the far more detailed and quotidian designations of jati.
 62. For more on the issue of "Untouchability" in the Laws of Manu, see *The Laws of Manu*, translated by Wendy Doniger (1991) and Olivelle and Olivelle 2004.
 63. See, as representative, B. R. Ambedkar's *The Annihilation of Caste* (2014 [1936]) and "Manu and the Shudras," online resource at <http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/57.%20Manu%20and%20the%20Shudras.htm> (accessed on April 13, 2014). See Rao 2009. Occasionally I use "Untouchable" not to deemphasize the reality of the social stigma forced on such individuals and communities but rather to respect that people described with this term may not themselves accept it.
 64. See Patrick Olivelle's discussion of this issue in Olivelle and Olivelle 2004: xvii–xviii.
 65. For example, see Ghurye 1961 and Gupta 1991 and 2004.
 66. For studies that have observed the intersection of caste and gender, see, for example, Marglin 1985 and Rege 2006. The key origin for this critique is Ambedkar, contained in a graduate student paper he wrote when at Columbia University in 1916.
 67. See Patton 2005 and Laurie Patton's forthcoming "Grandmother Language: Women and Sanskrit in Maharashtra and Beyond." See also the ongoing work of Ute Huesken.

68. Even a cursory look at the most recent censuses of India indicates that the population of women, low-caste men, and men of scheduled castes and tribal castes constitutes a vast majority of India's contemporary population. Taken as a designation of India's population, the phrase "women, low castes, and others" would describe approximately 91 percent of the total population. Seen conversely, those that are not "women, low castes, and others" would constitute a mere 9 percent at best. For a very helpful table on these demographic statistics, see Jaffrelot 2003:323 (table 9.5), which is based on the statistics used by the Mandal Commission Report of 1980. It is likely that the percentage of "women, low castes, and others" will significantly increase when the results of the recently completed socioeconomic and caste census are fully released.
69. Viswanath 2014:190ff.
70. I quote here from one of my anonymous reviewers, an exemplary critic of my work who forced me to adopt and display a far more self-conscious use of such theoretical terminology. I thank the reviewer for this invaluable critique.
71. Personal communication, November 2, 2014.
72. Spivak 1988:314.
73. I will leave aside here the debate around the public sphere and the "private" nature of civil society. This debate does seem uniquely germane to the modern state, rules of property, the twilight of feudalism, and the emergence of liberal democracy in the West. For a brilliant critique of Habermas in relation to the liberal subject, see Povinelli 2006.
74. Habermas 1989:52.
75. Novetzke 2007b and 2008b.
76. My formulation of a public here, and elsewhere, emerges from my reading of the work of Michael Warner (2002).
77. Warner 2002:87ff.
78. Habermas 1989:xviii and xvi, 50.
79. I am not alone in situating the origins of a given public sphere before modernity. See the volume edited by Emden and Midgley (2012). Also see Melve (2007), who situates an emergent public sphere in Europe to the eleventh century around the investiture controversy between the Catholic Church and the monarchies of Europe. Abu-Lughod (1991) speaks of "public debt" and "public trade," but not a public sphere. However, her work suggests the kinds of rationalized economic social systems that Habermas identifies as essential to the emergent public sphere in Europe, what Abu-Lughod calls "the world system" of the mid-thirteenth century onward.
80. Talal Asad's critical interventions in the field of religious studies and definitions of religion might also apply to the field of the study of public spheres. See Asad 1993.

81. Observing Habermas's insistence on "communicative rationality" and a "reasoning public" introduces another feature of a public sphere in general which is active in the thirteenth-century materials of this book (1989:50). This is the way in which a public sphere not only expands the scope of debate within society but also restricts that scope in formalistic ways. Habermas, for example, traces the rise and decline of the public sphere in Europe, noting how it grew more "public" with increased rights of social access and enfranchisement in Europe and America, and how it declined and took on the form of a "spectacle" in the mass media of the 1960s and later. The world of late capitalism and high global consumerism saw the decline of the public sphere, according to Habermas, for in part it came with a decline in rational argument in public, which, we might note, is also when the public sphere became far more capacious and ecumenical (*ibid.*, 141ff).
82. Taylor 2004:83, 86.
83. I have referred to this specific phenomenon as "the Brahmin double" and traced its use. See Novetzke 2011.
84. For more on other studies of the history of the public sphere outside Europe, see Koo 2007. My thanks to Clark Sorenson for this reference.
85. Orsini 2009; Rajagopal 2009; Wakankar 2010; Bhargava and Reifeld 2005; and Naregal 2001.
86. See Rudolph and Rudolph 2006, especially chapter 4, "The Coffee House and the Ashram Revisited," 140–76, and note the discussion of Habermas and critics on pages 144–49.
87. Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988; Breckenridge 1995; Haynes 1991; Freitag 1989; Hardgrove 2004; Yandell and Paul 2000; and my own work, Novetzke 2007b and 2008b. See also a special issue of *South Asia* dedicated to the idea of the public in modern South Asia, Ingram, Scott, and SherAli Tareen 2015.
88. Bayly 1996:180–211 and Agarwal 2009, especially Chapter 2; see also Sen 2005.
89. However, Pollock, perhaps rightly, dismisses Habermas as offering "little in the way of a convincing account of the nature of the 'premodern,' at least in the case of South Asia" (Pollock 2006:8).
90. Here I take particular inspiration from the work of Janet L. Abu-Lughod and her book *Before European Hegemony* (1991), a study of the thirteenth-century world economy.

1. The Yadava Century

1. The first attestation of this term *marathe* as a self-designation by the Yadavas occurs in an inscription, discussed in chapter 2, attributed to the reign of Ramachandra or Singhana III, the last inscription of the Yadavas offering a gift to the Pandharpur temple, dated to 1311 CE. See PMKL 37. The word does not mean "Maharashtra," which occurs