

# UC Irvine

## UC Irvine Previously Published Works

### Title

Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7k1645m6>

### Journal

The American Historical Review, 92(2)

### ISSN

0002-8762

### Authors

Leonard, Karen  
O'Hanlon, Rosalind

### Publication Date

1987-04-01

### DOI

10.2307/1866753

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

concludes that most Japanese in the late Meiji era viewed the emperor less as the focus of absolute loyalty than as a symbol of national unity, military success, and the country's rapid modernization.

In addition to her effective application of social theory, Gluck uses an astonishing variety of sources, from local newspapers to the writings of lesser-known bureaucrats. The use of popular songs and descriptions of New Year's games (for example, the contest to be state officials) makes this one of the first Western studies of modern Japan to bridge the gap between high and low culture.

Gluck is less persuasive in the last pages, in which she briefly explores the significance of late Meiji ideology for the succeeding eras of "Taishō democracy" (1910s and 1920s) and authoritarianism (1931–45). Citing legacies from the Meiji era, she relates the demise of party rule in the early 1930s to the prior "denaturing," or exclusion, of electoral politics from a legitimate place in the transmitted civic values. Yet she also suggests that the oppressive imperial orthodoxy of the 1930s was not the logical outgrowth of late Meiji ideology, which had been relatively unforced and plural. To substantiate these assertions, she would need to place the later ideologies within their historical contexts as carefully as she has done for the Meiji version. One would like to know why the ideological field accepted party governments and labor unions in 1919 but not in 1936 or what led officials and popular ideologues to rigidify the imperial orthodoxy during the 1930s but not before. That would be a separate book, of course. As it stands, post-1915 ideology is treated as an independent quantity, and Japanese scholars may justly charge Gluck with focusing on emperor-system ideology to the neglect of the institutional underpinnings of the emperor system itself—that is, the highly autonomous bureaucracy, police, and military, whose potential for imposing their will was only fully realized amid the crises of the 1930s.

The Japanese of the late Meiji period called theirs "a complicated society," and the author has offered a correspondingly complicated analysis of the diverse sources of prewar ideology. This book is not for those seeking a simple explanation of the forces responsible for war and suppression. Nonetheless, Gluck has set new standards, both methodologically and stylistically, for those working on the interrelation of politics and culture in imperial Japan.

SHELDON M. GARON  
Princeton University

ROSALIND O'HANLON. *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*. (Cambridge South Asian Studies, number 30.) New York: Cambridge University Press. 1985. Pp. xiii, 326. \$44.50.

Rosalind O'Hanlon has produced a very fine study of low-caste protest in nineteenth-century western India. In particular, she has succeeded in bringing alive the content of non-Brahman ideology and the competing versions of it, which caused conflict both within the protest movement and between it and other groups and movements in Indian society.

O'Hanlon starts with the fall of the Peshwas in 1818 and the advent of the East India Company in western India to show important improvements in the opportunities available to lower-caste people. Orthodox religious authority diminished, educational institutions were established, and access to them was widened. But Brahman dominance in the new British administration and in the early nationalist movement posed problems for lower-caste leaders. A careful delineation of the nineteenth-century regional context and a focus on Jotirao Phule and the development of his ideology combine to demonstrate the sophisticated construction of low-caste political ideologies attuned to popular culture and to social realities in Maharashtra. Most of O'Hanlon's sources are in Marathi, although she translates the titles into English in her useful bibliography; the annotated section on Phule's works will be particularly valuable to scholars. Her brief translations of parts of Phule's and others' ballads, plays, and speeches illustrate the conflicting ideologies and enliven the text for the reader. The competing interpretations of the Aryans, of King Bali, and of Shivaji developed by those formulating new identities for the lower castes and others in Maharashtra are effectively presented.

The book has some problems. The three chapters in part 2 seem episodic, less well connected to the rest of the book than they could be. The intellectual history is not always clearly related to social structure or political activities; the topics tend to be discussed separately. And, as a nonspecialist on western India, I found some of the detailed exposition of the positions taken by various newspapers, people, and organizations to be hard going. But many of these details are fascinating—such as Mali marriage reform efforts and other low-caste innovations in religious rituals—and the wealth of material should lead to more informed comparisons with social and political movements in other regions.

O'Hanlon concludes by making a strong and convincing argument that political and religious ideologies are produced in the course of social relations and not invoked later to explain or justify them—that Phule and others anticipated British or Brahman perceptions of the regional society as much as they responded to them. This is an outstanding contribution to Indian intellectual history.

KAREN LEONARD  
University of California,  
Irvine