Colonoialism and Knowledge Construction: Interrogating the Ontological Category 'Caste'

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This article engages and problematises the received meaning of caste present in existing social science discourse and politics- it questions the unproblematic manner through which societal phenomenon is placed in the convenient methodological concept called caste thereby essentialising it. It argues that this routinisation of the concept of caste is embedded in the colonial episteme and proves to be unsatisfactory in explaining social and political formations. It explores how Bourdieu's theorization of social capital when comprehended within the framework of 'the theory of practice' may enable us to overcome the limitations posed by existing methodologies that seek to explain societal mobilizations through the colonial classificatory system of caste. To be precise the article asks can 'caste' (as employed unproblematically in social sciences- a category that follows certain rules and therefore deemed to be structure) be construed as an expression of agency i.e. as social capital. The article attempts to historically unravel by examining the 'Maratha' as a case study.

Problematizing the Discourse on Caste

The most recent intervention in this debate on the essentialisation of caste is presented in the issue of Seminar (May 2012). Jodhaka problemitizes the concept of caste and argues that it has been routinised and predominantly imagined to mean a perennial empiric category that draws its legitimacy from the ideological underpinnings of the caste system. He is of the opinion that caste no longer is congruent to the ideological hierarchy (caste system) and that our research should instead focus more on the material aspects of caste and caste mobilizations for which we need to reimagine the concept of caste. Similarly, Bairy, draws our attention to the ghettoization of caste in social science imagination and claims that this was due to the foisting of an objective castegory called caste on hapless individuals and communities. His urgency therefore is towards incorporating subjective meanings of how caste is experienced- of how they constitute a life world. Manor examines how caste as an identity becomes an important antecedent for political mobilizations in the latter period of the British rule when innumerable caste associations sprang up to consolidate political positions rather than ritual rankings. Teltumbde also draws our attention to how caste as a concept is skewed from reality and that the ritual binaries no longer hold true today. He is also of the opionion that it is the subjectivities that have largely remained untouched while mapping the contours of caste as an empiric concept. Harriss does not downplay the role of the ritual and cultural aspects on which caste as identity draws upon but rather

views these as sources of cultural and social capital that enable and inhibit societal mobility and thus organizes difference and distinctions. From this perspective, not only caste and class is understood as a continuum but the definition of resources is now enlarged to include parameters such as social networks and cultural predispositions and consumption patterns.

Similarly scholars writing on caste within history and anthropology recognise that this concept has been employed unproblematically in social science discourse. It is argued that colonial practices of domination through knowledge/power axis, structured an understanding of caste to suggest that it was timeless, static, rigid, uniform, all-encompassing and ideologically consistent. (Cohn, 1987and Dirks 2001)

Given, that the focus of this article is on one 'caste' (as assumed in social science discourse) called the 'Marathas' and its relationship with power, more particularly in its dominant form-as rule, it is important for me to ask: how do modern forms and processes of power and politics interface with groups (in existing terminology connoted as caste) to organize them into political formations? And how do these formations influence the way power is structured and distributed in society?

Most often than not, the contributions in this domain are made by political scientists who have focused more towards understanding politics rather than theorizing this dialectical relationship. For instance, Kothari et al. (1970) the first to theorize on the relationship between caste and politics) assumed that all jatis were placed in the hierarchical order on the Varna system following Srinivas's (1955) conceptualization of caste as jati. Kothari et.al (1970) contend that disparate jatis (which I argue are social imaginaries) organize to form political alliances to realize their interests and once the objectives are achieved newer permutations and combinations emerge. In doing so, this scholarship recognizes that power is organized through political formations of social units (which they deem to be jati), but not how power/knowledge and historical contingencies shape the formation of these groups in the first place and also how power creates conditions and contexts that enable and organize these groups to mobilize into larger political formations. Thus, I argue that their analysis tends be located in apriori absolutism which then takes for granted that such groups are castes (jatis) and hence their research tends to slip into solipsism. It is therefore not surprising that this scholarship presumes unproblematically that these groups are jatis and that jatis are neatly demarcated endogamous social units that ensure individual loyalty through a set of rules. Following this logic then political formations are deemed to be coalitions of many jatis and communities which exhibit differences that are quantifiable and identifiable interests.

In the late eighties, Frankel and Rao et. al (1989) in their quest to identify, quantify and map the interface between social groups and politics at the politico-administrative level of States used the received understanding and terminology while classifying these groups i.e. caste. To give credit to these scholars, they at least recognized the myriad meanings of caste and so they set out to contextualize the term caste and its disparate meanings in different contexts.

But by assuming social formations to be castes by scholars such as Kothari et al (1970) and Frankel and Rao et al (1989) led to another set of problem- their undue reliance on the 'structuralist' explanation regarding caste behaviour in the context of electoral politics. For instance in their voting behaviour model, they presume that caste based voting is predictable as caste is collapsible into a community and therefore following this logic members of a community are bound together by a set of rules. They premise their argument on the axiom that caste rules and regulations facilitate the organization of caste solidarity- caste as an identity enables politicization of caste which in turn enables political mobilizations, which finally manifests in caste based voting behaviour. Following this trajectory of explaining political behaviour this scholarship has further engaged in research that anchors itself in apriori axioms of rules to predict how rule is organized in context of larger political formations such as the Kshtriya, Harijan, Adivasi and the Muslims (KHAM) or the Ahir, Jat, Gujjar and the Rajput (AJGAR). However there is another lens through which the question of how and why individuals organize into groups (caste loyalty) can be addressed- as strategies of actors who actively engage in the struggle for resources.

Can we instead examine such political formations through the lens of strategies and practices of actors without loosing out on the rigour of how structure impinges on the actions of these actors? Can one instead of employing the term caste (in its objectivist stereotyped understanding) envisage such groups as a manifestation of subjective interactions that are nevertheless shaped by existing structural constraints alone?

Could it be possible that the major difficulty of the earlier scholarship on caste and its interface with politics relates to its restraining theoretical lens? Afterall it required a theoretical lens and a vocabulary to grasp the dynamics and relational character of caste as an imagiary. I would like to suggest that this scholarship has assumed caste to be a web of objective relations that organizes practices and the representations of practice. The problem with this logic is that it attempts to delineate structures existing prior to actors, structures that make possible the knowledge and primary experience of those persons. This logic incorporates approaches such as Marxism (such as its concepts, mode of production which encompasses forces and relations of production, that in the final analysis determines a certain social formation), structuralism (uncovers the underlying oppositions that render a text, myth, or a social system intelligible), and hermeneutics (comprehends a ritual or literary work by constructing an interpretation). Bourdieu argues that all these approaches share the same characterization of what they deal with as an object (in this case caste), a datum, an opus operatum rather than a modus operandi. (Bourdieu, 1977; 32)

This problem arises as Bourdieu (1990) points out, when the researcher attempts to elicit a representation of practices, whether from an informant or a set of aggregate statistics that results in misrecognition, as regards the object being structured by an immanent underlying code. In conventional analysis all social relations are assumed to be 'objectified' communicative relations that have a pre-determined path and hence predictable. The result is that the researcher misrecognises the 'real' and instead proceeds to construct some kind of repertoire of rules to account for the system- the 'regularities' are misunderstood as rules. (Bourdieu,

1977; 25) What is presented as the elements of an analysis is then a predetermined set of discourses and actions appropriate to a particular stage or frame. Thus producing objective representations such as maps, grammars, role sets, lists of ordered rules among others whose specific forms may differ, but all of which attribute a stable underlying order to social phenomena. Is the social order so neat and predictable?

This argument then leads us to a pertinent question- how does one examine the processes of group formation and political mobilizations in a colonial and post colonial setting? In order to tackle this complexity, which perspective can help us best to comprehend these processes of group formation without losing out the uneven, unpredictable and complex permutations and combinations at play? Bourdieu's (1992) theory offers us a dynamic and relational lens through which emerging continuous flexible networks can be examined. But how does Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) theorization help us?

Caste as Subjective Expressions of Survival Strategies

Bourdieu (1990) argues that the earlier approaches in social sciences misrecognise the way social life is organized and thus end up either positing social reality through a structuralist or a phenomenonological perspective i.e. either the structure or agency becomes immanent. He posits an alternate perspective that situates analysis in the practical universe of everyday practices and not in a given and bounded objective space but in relational matrix. For Bourdieu (1977, 1990) social behaviour is not to be examined in terms of a code given as a static representation, but as continual and dynamic operationalisation of actions by social actors who strategise in accordance with their practical mastery of social situations and in the given historical contexts. How does he do this? Bourdieu (1977, 1990) proposes a "theory of practice".

> "… To restore to practice its practical truth, we must therefore reintroduce time into the theoretical representation of a practice which, being temporally structured, is intrinsically defined by its tempo…to substitute strategy for rule is to reintroduce time, with its rhythm, its orientation, its irreversibility. Science has a time which is not that of practice. For the analyst, time no longer counts: not only because…arriving post festum, he cannot be in any uncertainty as to what may happen, but also because he has the time to totalize, i.e. to overcome the effects of time. Scientific practice is so 'detemporalized' that it tends to exclude even the idea of that it excludes: because science is possible only in a relation to time which is opposed to that of practice, it tends to ignore time and, in doing so, to reify practices…practices defined by the fact that their temporal structure, direction and rhythm are constitutive of their meaning." (Bourdieu, 1977; 8-9)

In this schema, actors are both a product of social structures and also producers of these structures (the "generative principle" of practice) and thereby situating the analysis within the very movement of accomplishment of any social phenomenon. Such an account makes possible a science of the dialectical relations between objective structures (to which the objectivist mode of knowledge gives access) and the structured

dispositions within which those structures are actualized and which in their actualization reproduce them, which he terms as the habitus.

In this context Bourdieu's (1990) conception of strategies, dispositions, generative principles and schemes i.e. habitus, field, practice and species of capital become pertinent to comprehend how social groups are organized and how rule is organized. His analysis also seeks to explain how various strategies are drawn up and practices organized by individuals to become part of the ruling group. Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) theory of power is rooted in the logic of cultural reproduction which operationalises through the logic of practice i.e. through the dialectic interaction between the habitus and the fields. The habitus is the mental structure through which people deal with the social world. It can be thought of as a set of internalized schemes through which the world is perceived, understood, appreciated, and evaluated.

Bourdieu contends that mechanisms of social domination and reproduction were primarily focused on bodily know-how and competent practices in the social world. Bourdieu fiercely opposed Rational Action Theory as grounded in a misunderstanding of how social agents operate. Social agents do not, according to Bourdieu, continuously calculate according to explicit rational and economic criteria. Rather, social agents operate according to bodily know-how and practical dispositions. Social agents operate according to their "feel for the game" (the "feel" being, roughly, habitus, and the "game" being the field) with agents enculturated to certain dispositions, with certain schemes of thinking and acting that are regarded as the only right way to do things, not in the sense of having been chosen as better than other ways, but as the only way, the "natural" (doxic) way to act. Taken as an entire system of schemes of perception, appreciation, and action, these dispositions constitute what Bourdieu terms the habitus. It is the habitus that lends order to customary social behaviour by functioning as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices. (Bourdieu 1977: vii)

Instead of analyzing societies in terms of classes (in this case caste), Bourdieu (1977) uses the concept of field: A social arena in which people maneouver and struggle in pursuit of accumulating desirable resources. According to Bourdieu (1990) a field is a network of social relations among the objective positions within it. It is not a set of interactions or intersubjective ties among individuals. Social agents act strategically depending on their habitus in order to enhance their capital. It is a type of competitive marketplace in which economic, cultural, social, and symbolic powers are used. The pre-eminent field is the field of politics, from which a hierarchy of power relationships serves to structure all other fields. The field of power (politics) is peculiar in that it exists "horizontally" through all of the fields and the struggles within it control the "exchange rate" of the forms of cultural, symbolic, or physical capital between the fields themselves. A field is constituted by the relational differences in position of social agents, and the boundaries of a field are demarcated by where its effects end. According to Bourdieu (1986) to analyze a field, one must first understand its relationship to the political field and also has to map the objective positions within a field. Finally, the nature of the

habitus of the agents who occupy particular positions within the field with varying amounts of species (cultural, social, symbolic and economic) capital can be mapped. It thus follows that fields are historical constellations that arise, grow, change shape, and sometimes wane or perish, over time. (Wacquant, 1998, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2002)

Thus in this schema, agents act strategically depending on their habitus in order to enhance their capital. Bourdieu (1984) examines the social construction of objective structures with an emphasis on how people perceive and construct their own social world, but without neglecting how perception and construction is constrained by structures. An important dynamic in this relationship is the ability of individual actors to invent and improvise within the structure of their routines.

According to Bourdieu (1990) the system of dispositions people acquire depends on the (successive) position(s) they occupy in society, that is, on their particular endowment in capital. Thus for Bourdieu (1986), a capital is any resource effective in a given social arena that enables a social actor to appropriate the specific profits arising out of participation and contest in it. Capital comes in three principal forms: economic (material and financial assets), cultural (scarce symbolic goods, skills, and titles), and social (resources accrued by virtue of membership in a group). A fourth species, symbolic capital, designates the effects of any form of capital when actors do not perceive them as such (as when we attribute moral qualities).

Having briefly outlined Bourdieu's ideas, I argue that his insights are useful in comprehending and capturing the vibrant nature of social and political group formations and how caste can be construed as social capital and how this social capital enables organisation of rule. I endeavour to examine how individuals and social groups organize through social networking (using cultural, social and symbolic capital) for political ends.

In order to substantiate my argument that caste is a social imagiary I choose one social group/political formation termed as 'Maratha'. I reasoned that by examining the 'Marathas' as a case, I may be able to overcome the limitations faced by scholars such as Lele (1982, 1990), Palshikar (1994, 2002), Vora (1996), and Deshpande and Palshikar (2008) i.e. that the 'Maratha' (or also popularly recognized as Maratha-Kunbi caste cluster) by proving that it is a changing social imagiary and not a static objective structure. Lele (1982, 1990) has argued that this caste cluster is unique as it constitutes 31% of the total population of the State and thus does not require the support of any other caste group to rule. Further he has argued that the organisation of the Maratha caste cluster could take place despite its internal stratification (in terms of classes and jatis) through hegemony. But in his analysis he does not examine the processes and everyday practices through which ideology operates to actualize hegemony. Moreover, if one accepts this logic it becomes difficult to imagine how hegemony alone can bind this 30 million (2001 census) individuals together over long periods of time. This reasoning also assumes that this caste cluster as relatively immutable and permanent reproducing itself generation after generation. It cannot explain the journey of how the 'Marathas' got organized in the

period from the colonial to the post-colonial. Another problem with such kind of analysis that uses a received meaning of post facto categories such as caste is that it tends to view strategies such as kinship, the operationalisation of the ideology of martial race, signs, symbols through the structuralist prism as rules rather than as strategies. It is no wonder that their argument slips into the positivist framework i.e. of examining the opus operatum (post fact) rather than the modus operandi. The term 'Maratha' has meant different social formations at various historical junctures (colonial and post colonial contexts) - from akin to a region to meaning a particular social and political formation to meaning a peasant group. (Deshpande, 2004, 2006)

In my doctoral work I have assessed the role of various strategies such as kingship (Kshtriyaness), kinship, education, sports albeit in a transformed manner continued to play an important role in the post independence period to access power. I have attempted to reconstruct social imaginings, memories, interpretations and reinterpretations of the past (since late 19th century till 1970s) and argue that the 'Maratha' is a social imaginary and has had several connotations depending on the historical contingencies particular points in time. There is a misrecognition in social science wherein scholars attempt to collapse such a relational, subjective and contested identity movement into a routinised and immanent category i.e. caste. Therefore the methodology I employ was based on historical reconstruction and interpretative sociology. Primary sources include documents within the archives and the public domain (newspapers, pamphlets, diaries, official papers and communications) together with case studies, interviews, narratives and life histories. Secondary sources are review of literature in social sciences, articles published in journals and books.

I have examined how changes in the political economy (inauguration of capitalism and 'modern' governance structures) lead to organisation of various fields during the colonial rule. These fields such as the military, bureaucracy, judiciary, legislature, education among others demanded specific kinds of capital. It is in this context that I locate the term 'Marathas' and ask if it can be construed narrowly only as a caste or can be deemed to be a political formation. I examine how the term 'Maratha' is loaded with manifold meanings and is multi layered and has connoted various imaginings at disparate junctures of time and contexts. I have mapped the journey of this imagining from the early 19th century into the post colonial period- how it transformed from a kshtriya imagiary to that of the peasant. How did strategies such as education and sports enabled the construction of this imagining called 'Maratha' and how these became conduits to qualify for becoming part of this through institutions such as talims (gymnasiums) became sites of discipline the body through certain 'masculine' sports (such as wrestling) to organize embodied form of cultural capital to claim a 'martial' connection. I also assessed how these sites became important recruitment grounds for enrolling in the military and police services in the colonial and post colonial contexts.

The native groups employed another strategy in order to construct a social imaginary of a peasant group. This peasant group was mobilized under the category 'Marathas'. I explored how various sections of peasantry with differential cultural backgrounds could coalesce as one imagined community. I have also assessed the

impact of this mobilisation in accruing resources by way of maneuvering in the delimited colonial fields. It was this peasant imaginary enables the 'Marathas' to acquire the moral leadership of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement (SMM, a movement to demand a separate State of Maharashtra) and in the post 1960 become the legitimate heirs to claim political power. The field of power later structured the entry of 'Marathas' into the cooperatives, the panchyati raj system, the State level Congress party, lower levels of bureaucracy and also the State legislature. Maratha rule, I have argued is not by its mythical numerical strength but the misrecognition that the 'Marathas' are a unified largest political bloc through naturalization of the idea that 'Marathas' had a legacy of kingship (as kshtriyas they were always meant to rule) - a doxic condition in the minds of the masses.

In this article however I only highlight strategies of kingship and kinship. 'Maratha' has been defined variously by those in power and by individuals who profess to be 'Marathas'. I am arguing that 'Marathas' is a political formation displaying particular imagiaries as a response to the governmentalized practices of the colonial and post colonial policies and therefore suggesting that the 'Maratha' is a layered term and therefore needs to be examined as caste. It constantly evolved and in time came to be recognized as a political formation (social capital) which was effected through various models and strategies (cultural, symbolic capital). These capitals could be operationalised due to the organizations of certain social imaginaries which were context contingent. This I argue is a way out of absolutism and offers us a plausible perspective through which to assess the dynamism of the societal phenomenon which ingrains within it a sense of time and space.

Native Discourses on 'Maratha' (19th to the 20th century): Kingship and Kinship Strategies

In this section I explore how various discourses emerged in the late 19th century that defined and reimagined the term 'Maratha' and in doing so questioned the Brahmanical episteme. These definitional discourses continued till the 1931 census 'froze' in time the category called 'Maratha'. In this period many sections of indigenous actors ascribed to this category 'Maratha' as a strategy that facilitated their social, economic and political mobility. These discourses are anchored in the Satyashodhak movement of Phule and Shahu's interventions.

With the end of the Peshwa rule in the 18th century and the British policy of permitting kingship (nomial) in certain territories, a new notion of 'Maratha' emerged that challenged the earlier Brahminical episteme. With the installation of Pratapsinh the descendant of Shivaji in 1818 as the nominal ruler at Satara the authority and the hegemonic rule of the Peshwas and the scribal group (Brahmins) in western India was to an extent circumscribed at least in this region. This development was to have profound consequences on the composition and understanding of the category 'Maratha'. This did not mean that the Brahmin intellectuals lost all the ground as these ideas of purity and pollution were very much ingrained in the minds of the masses and the Brahmins were still regarded as the interpreters of religion. However the change in guard allowed the new entrant to question the entrenched social order. (O'Hanlon, 1983)

In this contestation in 1830 Pratapsinh was supported by 'Maratha' chiefs (watandars and erstwhile feudatories) who too wanted to claim the same status. This was the first effort of this kind and it led to polarization of two groups, one representing the Brahmins and the other the kin group of Pratapsinh and his allies' i.e. elite 'Maratha' sardars. This face off resulted in a public debate taking place to determine if the 'Marathas' could claim a kshtriya status. This debate was informed by religious ideologies and therefore was seen as an important attack on the Brahmin forte. The public debate finally secured Kshatriya status for Pratapsinh and his kindred and also the erstwhile feudatories or sardars who were self proclaimed 'Marathas'. However the criteria on which this debate was won enabled not just influential landed chiefs but also many modest Kunbi families to put forward Kshatriya claims, despite Pratapsinh's attempts to limit them to a small, elite circle. The term 'Maratha' necessarily came to mean 'of kshtriya origin' and now a large section of the peasantry i.e. Kunbis began to appropriate it as it had inherent cultural and symbolic value. By claiming to belong to a noble family background an individual stood better chance of getting employed in the colonial 'fields' than without. This of course led to a contestation between the aristocratic and erstwhile military sardar families and the common Kunbi peasant families over the use of this term. (O'Hanlon, 1983)

Interestingly it was not only the peasant Kunbis who were ascribing to claim the kshtriya status but also other social groups and communities such as the Sonars (goldsmith) and Prabhus (scribes) who were attempting to do the same. The outcome of this debate in Satara was that a wider range of peasant castes began to claim a 'Maratha' kshtriya status that invoked the attributes of rulership and martial heroism which could be shared by very large groups especially amongst the Kunbi peasantry. In time large number of Kunbi families began to adopt practices such that they could be recognised as 'Marathas'. Especially those Kunbis who were rich and landed attempted to raise their social status in this manner. (O'Hanlon 1983; 40)

This was also at a time when the pressure on land was ever increasing due to the dismantling of the 'Maratha' armies (the term 'Maratha' here denotes a territorial linguistic identity) leading to unemployment resulting in ex-soldiers, civil servants and other miscellaneous military and related state functionaries to revert to agriculture and related land based activities. Moreover with the growth of urbanisation and inauguration of modern industrial technology the artisans faced a major problem. As the new technology based on mass production began to take roots in the Deccan most of the artisans were faced with the prospect of reverting to agriculture, mainly as casual landless labourers. (Rodrigues, 1998)

From the mid-nineteenth century, colonial observers highlighted the fact that membership of the 'Maratha' kshtriya category was emerging and this was related to the improved economic status due to urbanization and also those benefiting from the recent commercialisation of agriculture. This was also a period when the political economy was in transition. Famines and droughts were forcing villagers to migrate. The Deccan riots of 1875 in Ahmednagar and Poona were perhaps one of most violent protests against this rising

trend that also critiqued the colonial government policies. It was in the midst of this transition that the non-Brahmin or the Phule movement emerged. (Omvedt, 1976, O'Hanlon, 1983)

However Phule's Non-Brahmin movement did not appeal to the 'Maratha' nobility (those who assumed the nomenclature of kshtriya origin). Other than the aristocratic 'Marathas' the Lingayats, Jains and Kayasthas also did not participate in Phule's Satyashodhak movement. It is therefore not surprising that the Non Brahmin movement lost its initial objective and in the process got manipulated to serve the ambitions of a section of ascendant entrepreneur non-Brahmins who now began to imitate and imagine themselves as 'Maratha' (read kshtriya). The Indian National Congress was inaugurated in 1885 and one of their major demands was the incorporation of indigenous actors in the functioning of the government and a long term agenda was self-rule. This is also the time when the Viceroy Rippon and his council were deliberating of introducing local self rule and the understanding was that sooner or later this political space was going to expand- which was materialised as the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909. The idea of kingship was intricately associated with that of rulership. By claiming to possess certain inherent characteristics i.e. of kshtriyaness sections of the 'Maratha' leadership were implying that they have the right to rule. What is interesting in this discourse is that it relied on religion while doing so and also evoked a sense of a social imaginary i.e. a restricted form of imagined nationalism (invoking a cultural past of heroism and martial qualities). (Omvedt, 1976)

O'Hanlon (1986) points out how this project enabled new social imaginings. In a speech entitled 'kshtradharma' in one of the Satyashodhak meetings in the late 19th century, one member of the Satyashodhak movement argued,

> "It was not true that only rajas could call themselves kshatriya: the term should be given to all those whose families had striven in the past to protect the country and this included the humblest of soldiers. Moreover the fact that many kshtriyas had now ceased from practicing their professions as warriors did not meant that they were no longer kshtriyas" (O'Hanlon 1986, 298)

This was a very tacit way of ensuring that the notion of kshtriya could be expanded to include the peasantry. Thereby suggesting that the Kunbis, Malis, Dhangars and other allied peasant social groups could be termed as 'Marathas' and these nomenclatures are interchangeable and permeable. The claim towards being a kshtriya meant that the 'Maratha's were now imagining themselves through the prism of kingship with the tacit anticipation of 'Maratha' rulership.

This aspiration of the 'Marathas' received due attention in the colonial discourse and was accepted with the inclusion of the 'Marathas' as the martial race in 1882. There were other communities which were labelled as martial races by the colonial state and employed in their British Indian army- such as Rajputs, Sikhs Muhammadans, Pathans, Gurkahas and Dogras. To this list were added the 'Marathas' and the Deccani Musalmans.

By the late 19th century from within the Satyashodhak movement arose the Non-Brahmin movement that in particular stimulated economic and social change in the rural areas through promotion of institutional

building, especially in the realm of education. Though Phule initiated the Non -Brahmin movement, after his death the self proclaiming elite 'Marathas' took over its leadership and redefined and reinterpreted the non-Brahmin movement as 'Sarvajanik Satya Dharma' (universal fraternity) and thus incorporated ideologies that suited its interests. In time it came to represent the political ambitions of the new emergent self styled 'Maratha' elite. Henceforth a section of the 'Maratha' elite took over the mantle as the leaders of the 'Bahujan Samaj'. To this end Phule's ideology was appropriated and reinterpreted by his 'Maratha' successors. However by 1880s Phule's interpretation of 'Kshatriya' was reinvented and appropriated by the 'Marathas' to mean exclusively kshtriya. (Omvedt, 1976)

However the contestation of imagiaries of the 'Maratha' was far from over and some of the interpretations served the interests of certain sections. There was a tacit acknowledgement of the elite nature of the 'Maratha' category with its ninety-six families, but allowed for its extension to include families of other castes who have the same surnames and who could, thereby, 'become' 'Marathas'. This discourse coming at a juncture when the colonial state was preparing to devolve some authority and power to the indigenous actors at a lower level signified political ambitions. The fact that many surnames (family names) were common across rural 'caste' groups made this a significant extension. (O'Hanlon, 1983)

By late 19th and early 20th century the reigns of the non-Brahmin movement leadership passed onto Shahu, the Maharaja of Karveer (princely State of Kolhapur). Shahu and his associates gave a new direction to the Satyashodhak movement and its mandate changed- it now became a vehicle for organising a 'Maratha' based political formation. He and his colleagues urged the peasantry to join the various fields inaugurated by the colonial state. He opined that it was the only way through which the Bahujan Samaj could challenge Brahmin domination. Though he is popularly known for his benevolence in supporting the Bahujan Samaj, it is pertinent to note that he was also furthering the interests of the 'Maratha' community. For instance he readily patronised and supported many of the 'Maratha' newspapers such as Rashtraveer, Shivachhatrapati, Chhatrapati, Tarun Maratha, Garibancha Kaivari, Bhagava Zenda, Shrishivasmarak, Vijayi Maratha, Deen Mitra, Jagruti, Hunter, Kaivari, Pragati, Jinvijaya and Navyug. He also overtly supported efforts by 'Marathas' in the field of education, sports and specifically urged 'Maratha' youth to enrol in the military and police services, subscribing to the view that the 'Marathas' had a martial (kshtriya) cultural past. (Copland, 1973)

Some of these 'Maratha' sponsored and operated newsprint became a means through which these ideas were consumed and became imbricated in the 'popular' domain and also contested other parallel meanings of the term 'Maratha'. For instance in Vijayi Maratha the issue that became well known was regarding the ritual status of the Maharaja of Baroda, the Gaekwads. The Gaekwads were deemed to be Kunbi and therefore of shudra Varna.

"The Gaekwads of Baroda and even the Holkars of Indore are Marathas. As the occupation of their forefathers was that of kshtriya how can they be called shudra and Dhangar. By their deeds they are both Marathas." (Vijayi Maratha, 1922, July 24th ; 4)

Thus by the early 1890s, a clear social trend had emerged delimiting kshatriya identity to 'Marathas' and the 'Maratha' "shahannava kuli" (ninety-six lineages) who were also now deemed to be assal (pure) 'Marathas'. A section amongst the assal 'Marathas' sought to uphold their elitist perception of kshatriya heritage by distancing themselves from the peasant Kunbis. But there was also a counter current in which other sections of assal 'Marathas' and other 'Marathas' permitted hypergamy resulting in Kunbi peasants to become part of the 'Maratha' community.

After Shahu's death in 1922, the non-Brahmin movement was led by Keshavrao Jedhe and Dinkarrao Jawalkar together with other 'Maratha' associates who were part of the organic intellectual of the 'Marathas'. Bhaskarrao Jadhav who was a close associate of Shahu was nominated as a member of the Bombay Legislative Council in 1922. In 1923 he formed the non-Brahmin party with the help of thirteen 'Maratha' legislators. Soon by mid 1920s, the self proclaimed 'Marathas' gained control of the local boards in Satara, Solapur and Nasik districts. After gaining control over the local boards the non-Brahmin leadership started education institutions and student hostels (Omvedt 1976:199).

One can discern two distinct yet enmeshed discourses of the 'Maratha' organic intellectuals. The two ideologies were interchangeably employed in disparate contexts so as to mobilise a large section of the peasantry for political ends and also to ensure that only very few communities became part of the 'Maratha' group. Thus on the one hand these intellectuals urged all peasant communities to join the fight against Brahmins and on the other hand coaxed only Kunbis to enumerate themselves as 'Marathas' in the 1931 census operations. Of course as mentioned earlier members of some communities (those communities that were culturally inimical to the Kunbi peasant culture) could own and till land and be accepted as Kunbi. For instance the discourse in a non-Brahmin periodical called Rashtraveer from Kolhapur urged 'Marathas' to accept the claim of Kunbis as 'Marathas'.

"…Kunbis are Marathas. In earlier times also during the era of Chattrapati Shivajiraje the Maratha's were cultivators during periods of peace and warriors during war. It is the Brahmins who have created this false category…rise o' sons of great Maratha's and defeat the designs of the Brahmins" (Rashtraveer, 1919, April 4th ;2)

What this meant was that there was a caliberated channel through which individuals could 'belong' to the 'Maratha' community. Thus the 'Maratha' intellectuals organised new strategies such as kinship and kshtriyazation (kingship) through which sections of the peasantry could form a political front. To support these strategies and in recognition of the fact that colonial fields required other forms of cultural capital the intellectuals began to organise education and sports (talims or gymnasiums) - a form of civil society.

Marriage and Kinship as Strategy

In this context Bourdieu (1977) proves helpful- according to him marriage alliance is not a matter of coercively obeying a rule but rather reflects a much more subtle objective i.e. of accruing capital. Bourdieu (1977, 1990) argues that kinship is a strategy through which actors accumulate certain forms of capital that enables them to partake in fields. Since the practices display a certain degree of regularity they tend to display patterns and sequences across time. Bourdieu (1977) argues that it is these regularities that are misrecognised in social science scholarship as rules and in turn these rules are codified as objective realties which are then classified as measurable categories- such as class, race, gender, kinship, marriage among others. (Bourdieu 1977, 1990, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992)

Following Boudieu I suggest that one can assume kinship as a form of capital cultural and social that is transmitted as in embodied cultural capital (that is through inheritance of a lineage and surname) and acquired or institutional cultural capital (through marriage and filiations). Much work has been done on the Maratha kinship patterns by scholars such as Carter, 1973 and Karve 1975. However they have construed these as objective rules and regulations rather than strategies. I argue that Kinship in terms of bhauki (blood realtions) and soyre (affinal relations) can be construed as networks of social capital. From this perspective members of the social imagiary i.e. the 'Marathas' are incorporated into the larger community not only as individuals but also through the group, and their rights and obligations would thus depend in part on their group membership- understood as a form of 'collective moral consensus' emanating from within a community. Meaning that, an individual by virtue of possessing a membership of a community, can participate in the determination, practice and promotion of the common good of the community but is also bound by its rules and its logic of practice.

What is pertinent here is that a universal feature of lineage organisation in western India is the unilineal transmission of ritual status within 'castes' according to a rule of cumulative patrifiliation. But, although ritual status is transmitted unilineally, it cannot be maintained without the assistance of affines (soyre). This is so in several ways. As the segmentary system of non-Brahmin Maharashtrian concepts of kinship and marriage implies, soyre are regarded externally as a class of blood relatives (raktache natevaik). Furthermore, from an internal point of view a woman becomes a bhauki relative to her husband, a blood relative in the restricted sense. A consequence of both these notions is that actors come to naturalize the idea that only by marrying a woman of suitable status may one transmit unaltered to one's children the status one received from one's father. Indeed, if one succeeds in marrying very well one may even enhance one's ritual status. (Carter, 1973)

The question of the relative status of spouses is of more important to understand the relative ranking of the lineage system- the officialised version. It is no wonder that the 'Marathas' deem it to be important to marry someone from a family whose rank (darja or symbolic capital), a compound of ritual status, social position, and wealth, is equal to one's own if not more. One's spouse also ought to have a good character and adequate education. As a general rule it is felt to be easier to find a suitable spouse among one's marriageable

natevaik, i.e. soyre, for ties of kinship and affinity may be used as discreet channels of communication. But in all cases the spouse should be related to the individual (padar lagne, literal meaning would be meeting of the ends of the women's sari) either through cumulative filiation or in some rare cases through notional filiations.

In this context it is important to note the role played by colonial governmentality in the emergence of this imagiary. I map the contours that shaped the discourse/s of the 'Maratha' imagiary in the early 20th century. The inclusion of 'Marathas' in the category of a Martial race further strengthened the claim of the now self proclaimed sections of 'Marathas' as belonging to the Kshatriya Varna. As Major Bentham, the recruiting officer in 1908 for the Deccan Marathas and Musalman reiterates this belief,

> "As a class the Maratha's possess great military qualities. They are quiet, orderly, amenable, clean, intelligent, determined and well-behaved. They are both good infantry soldiers and the Dekhani unsurpassable as Cavalry soldiers ... What other class in India have as the Maratha's have, except perhaps the Sikhs...?" (Bentham, 1908; 76, Handbook for the Indian Army; Maratha's and Dekhani Musalmans, Superintendent of Government Printing, India, Calcutta)

Also commenting on the best places to find such 'Marathas', he points out that Satara and Kolhapur are the best recruiting areas for the assal 'Marathas'. In his words

> "The very best class of Maratha's are obtained here...supplies a large number of men. The people are thoroughly conversant with military matters and know all about conditions of service..." (ibid; 156 and 161)

This is suggesting that the 'Marathas' have an inherent cultural knowledge of the military and therefore the capability of good administration, behaviour, manners and therefore are professionals. This in Bourdieun (1984) terms would mean embodied cultural and symbolic capital. This process of embededdness of the term 'Maratha' was reflected in the colonial ethnographic work and by the 1920s it came to refer to a section akin to that of the peasantry i.e. the Kunbis were supposedly 'Marathas'. For instance as Enthoven (1921) a British ethnographer observes

> "Kunbi is commonly derived from Kulambi or Kutumbika and is a Marathi term meaning a husbandman, Kanbi being its Gujarati equivalent...There seems little doubt that, strictly speaking, the term Kunbi, like Rajput, denotes a status and not a caste, and may be compared in this respect with the latter term, which has no necessary ethnic significance. The fact that Maratha Kunbi's are to a great extent homogeneous is clearly due primarily to their being 'Maratha's and not to their being Kunbi's." (Enthoven, 1921, Vol II; 284)

The discourses of the indigenous actors were thus gradually being reflected by the colonial state and simultaneously the indigenous actors interpreted these colonial registers as forms of legitimation to their claims. Thus through this dialectic process the boundaries of the category 'Marathas' had been drawn- though these boundaries were never strictly bounded. As Enthoven observes,

"Kunbi's, as a class, are landholders and husbandmen. Some of the higher families are land propri-etors, Deshmukhs and Patils in the Deccan. Some of the Maratha Kunbi's are employed in Native States, and a few in Government service. Many enter the army. The Deshmukhs and those in service are well off, but the husbandmen as a class are poor." (Enthoven, 1921, Vol II: 285)

This discourse was now reflected now officially through the ethnographic details of the census and also in the writings of historians. Sardesai (1926; 78-79) argues that some of the Kunbis employed in military services and the Deshastha Brahmins in the administrative services were granted in lieu of their services a cluster of villages called watans. These beneficiaries thus took up titles such as Watandars, Zamindars, Jagirdars and Inamdars. Also those Kunbis who rose up the military hierarchy but were not allotted watans also claimed to have a higher status than the peasant Kunbi.

This process of economic and political differentiation was in essence the precursor to the emergence of the 'Marathas'. As Enthoven (, 1921: 8) suggests that there emerged two classes from the Kunbi peasnt group- 'Maratha' proper and the 'Maratha'- Kunbi or cultivator caste also called Kulvadi.

However with selective inter-group marriages and endogamy these classes emerged as separate yet interconnected social groups. Eventually the exhaustive stratification established by the feudal system became a source of economic and political supremacy of a few families and their kin within the 'Marathas' itself. The 'Marathas' developed a stratification in terms of three stratas - Assal or Kulin (Pure 'Maratha' or 96 kulis or lineages), Lenkavale, Shinde or Kharchi (illegitimates) and mixed 'Marathas'.

Henceforth few lineages emerged as the upper or assal 'Maratha's, during this period such as the Bhonsales, Jadhavs, Nimbalkars, Mores, Manes, Ghatges, Dafleys, Sawants, Shirkes, Mahadiks, Mohites including others of the 96 pure kuls or lineages. These lineages became more prominent with the rise of Shivaji (1627-1680) the founder the 'Maratha' Empire. (Enthoven, 1921, Vol.3: 19)

In this kingship system the village land was allotted to the Brahmin and 'Maratha' landlords. At the village level the Patil usually a 'Maratha' performed the function of a village head and the Kulkarni a Brahmin kept land records. Similarly at the regional level their counterparts i.e. Deshmukh a 'Maratha' claiming an assal or pure 'Maratha' lineage functioned as the regional head and the Deshpande a Brahmin kept revenue records. (Omvedt, 1976)

Historians such as Sardesai (1926) and Altekar (1927) argue that such was the symbolic domination of the assal 'Marathas' that they became the reference group. Their surnames (last names which are in them-selves social and cultural markers) were taken up by other (than Kunbi) allied artisan and peasant communi-ties also. As Enthoven (1921) affirms,

"In this connection it may be observed that the protégés often take the surnames of the patrons. Thus there are Chavans, Cholkes, Mores, Pavars, Shelars and Yadavs among Kolis, Dhangars, Mahars, Malis, Ramoshis, Mangs and several wandering tribes which seem to be

but slightly connected…. There are two or three historical instances where even Brahmins have assumed the surnames of their Maratha patrons, e.g., the Ghorpades of Ichalkaranji, the Dhamdheres of Poona…the Bivalkars are known as Angres in Bombay."(Enthoven, 1921; Vol.3; 27)

However he also adds that the line of demarcation is rather flexible when it comes to marital alliances. Highlighting the role of kinship practices that enable well to do Kunbi-families to become part of the 'Maratha' community he opines,

"The line of demarcation between the two communities is not a hard and fast one as inter-marriages between well-to-do Kunbi families and the lower sections of Maratha's are not infrequent. Such intermarriages usually take the form of a Maratha boy being married to a Kunbi or Kulvadi girl. Such marriages are common in remote parts of the Presidency. On the other hand, Maratha girls would not be given in marriage to Kunbi boys. Thus the Maratha's proper assert their social supremacy, and though akin to Kunbis, they must be considered distinct. (Enthoven, 1921, Vol.3: 9)

But why did the Kunbi peasantry yearn to be known as 'Marathas'? In attempting to answer this question, Enthoven (1921) suggests,

"Kunbis prefer the designation Maratha to that of Kunbi, as more honourable. The Kunbis however do not lay any pretensions to Kshatriya origin. They are as a rule connected with field work, while the Maratha's, though they may be mere cultivators, more often follow other avocations and regard cultivation as a secondary profession on which they may fall back if they are unsuccessful in other lines." (Enthoven, 1921, Vol.3: 9)

In the following section I assess the impact of the colonial fields and the nature of mobilizations that ensued to become part of the state sponsored areans and its manifestation in the form of various imgiaries of 'Maratha'.

Forging a Civil Society: Education as a strategy to procure cultural and symbolic capital

In this section I explore how education became a strategy through which the social imaginary 'Marathas' organized capital- symbolic, cultural and social. Bourdieu (1985) examines how class reproduction takes place in modern societies generation after generation through the institution of education. He argues that the mode of acquiring what constitutes valued knowledge in schools matches the lifestyle and habitus of the dominant classes. (Bourdieu, 1985)

It is in this context of Bourdieu's (1990) understanding of cultural capital that I ask how the 'Marathas' organized formal education as a strategy to mobilize politically and to take advantage of the limited opportunities of mobility offered by the colonial state. To understand how the 'Marathas' organized this strategy we need to first ask how did the institutionalized form of cultural capital attained through education enable an

individual to enter the colonial fields of public service? What were the colonial policies that enabled/disabled entry into these fields? How did some members of the 'Maratha' social group envision and adapt to the colonial policies? But most importantly we need to ask how educational associations became a strategy to reinforce other strategies such as the notion of 'martial' and kinship ideology in order to translate as social capital.

The scribal community or the Brahmins were the first to take advantage of the changing political economy. The 'Maratha' leadership although laggards in this respect were wise to see education as cultural capital. It is no wonder that in 1906 the Akhil Bharatiya Maratha Shikshan Parishad or the All India Maratha Education Conference (AIMEC) was instituted as one of the most important organizations for not only the promotion of the educational needs of the 'Marathas' but it also came to represent an important expression of 'Maratha' unity.

The Shri Shivaji Maratha Society (SSMS) an offshoot of AIMEC was established in Pune in the year 1918. The founder members of this society were- Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, Uddoji Pawar Maharaj of Dhar, Rajaram Maharaj of Kolhapur, Sayajirao Gaikwad Maharaj of Baroda, Raobahaddur P.C. Patil, Baburao Jagtap, Bhaskarrao Jadhav, Appasahab Jedhe, P.C.Patil, Shankarrao More and other notable 'Marathas'. In 1921, the Shri Shivaji Maratha High school was inaugurated with the objective of educating the masses of 'Marathas'. The archives of the SSMS states these objectives- to end Brahmin monopoly in the sphere of education, to encourage mass education for the Bahujan Samaj and especially amongst the Maratha community, to train the Marathas to join the military and police services, to enable the Maratha community to regain its lost pride, to ensure that in the times ahead Marathas would lead the Bahujan Samaj and therefore fulfill the cherished desire of the Shivaji Maharaj. (Manifesto of the society, SSMS, 13th October 1918)

All the founder members were either members of the Non-Brahmin movement or supporters of it. The SSMS was to be the torch bearer for many more activities than just education as we will note. The Shri Shivaji Maratha High school (henceforth SSMHS) became the site for social networking and also the epicenter of non-Brahmin movement in Pune. Since the society's inception the secretary was Keshavrao Jedhe and the under secretary was Shankarrao More (both became important Congressmen in 1930s and in 1948 established the Pesants and Workers Party)

The society in coordination with Shahu of Kolhapur inaugurated the establishment of several 'Maratha' boarding houses across the Bombay Province to facilitate movement of 'Maratha' students from rural areas to come to the urban centers for education. The first boarding house to be inaugurated by the society was at Ahmednagar through a donation of Rs. 2000 from Shahu in 1921. (Rajashree Shahu Chattrapati's Nivdak Adesh , Shahu Maharaj's special mentions, Part I, entry 399, 9th May, 1921)

Similarly sports also became a channel through which social and cultural capital could be accrued. Bourdieu's (1978, 1988, 1990) work on sport sought to demonstrate how different classes and class frac-

tions embody (often unconsciously) their points of honour and schemes of evaluation in their sporting prac-tices and how the dominant classes use sports, done in rarified ways and at exclusive venues, in order to distance themselves from others (Bourdieu 1978, 1988). Bourdieu's theories have focused on demonstrating that sport operates as a type of cultural capital. Bourdieu conceives of the body as the point where culture and social structures are manifested and produced. Sporting practice is, at once, enabling yet constraining and constitutes a social practice through which particular culture and class is embodied.

But how do we examine sports as cultural capital in the Indian context? How and why were certain sports deemed more relevant by the colonial state? How did this kind of classification enable/disable an individual's cultural capital? Do sports relate to caste? How?

It is in this context that I ask how sports as a strategy in the colonial period may help us unravel various facets of caste. Cultivating the body in a certain way may have had certain symbolic advantages in specific contexts. The talims (sports training centers or gymnasiums) have been instrumental in cultivating certain forms of cultural and symbolic capital. The 'traditional' sports at the talims are an elaborate way of life involving general prescriptions of physical culture, diet, health, ethics, and morality. These sports may not be caste-specific always nor directly implicated in caste hierarchy, but they provide certain amount of cultural capital in certain contexts and do throw light on caste related dynamics. (Alter, 1992)

Conclusion

To conclude this article, I argue that earlier social science scholarship misrecognised multiple strate-gies of survival and processes as a static category called caste. For instance can one comprehend a political coalition such as KHAM (Khatriya, Harijan, Adivasi and Muslim) or AJGAR (Ahir, Jats, Gujjar and Rajputs) through the narrow lens of caste based formations? Can this perspective allow us to understand how and why do such culturally disparate groups coalesce in particular contexts and disperse overtime? Are these groups homogenous in constitution or are they fluid entities with flexible boundaries? In assessing societal phenom-enon, this perspective relies much on structuralism or on rules rather than on agency and on practice. This approach is anchored in examining the opus operatum rather than the modus operandi. One could also examine this phenomenon differently- why do individuals form a group? What are the strategies employed? How and under what circumstances do groups coalesce into political blocs? What are the social imaginaries that facilitate such a formation? What are the interests served? I contend that by essentialising caste and positing it as the focal axis through which such political and societal formations occur, it detemporalises the phenomenon and straight jackets complexities into monolith positivistic categories. It is in this context that I opine that 'caste' (in its misrecognised form) can be examined as a set of strategies that allow social and political formations i.e. social capital.

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