

TELEVISION INSIGHT

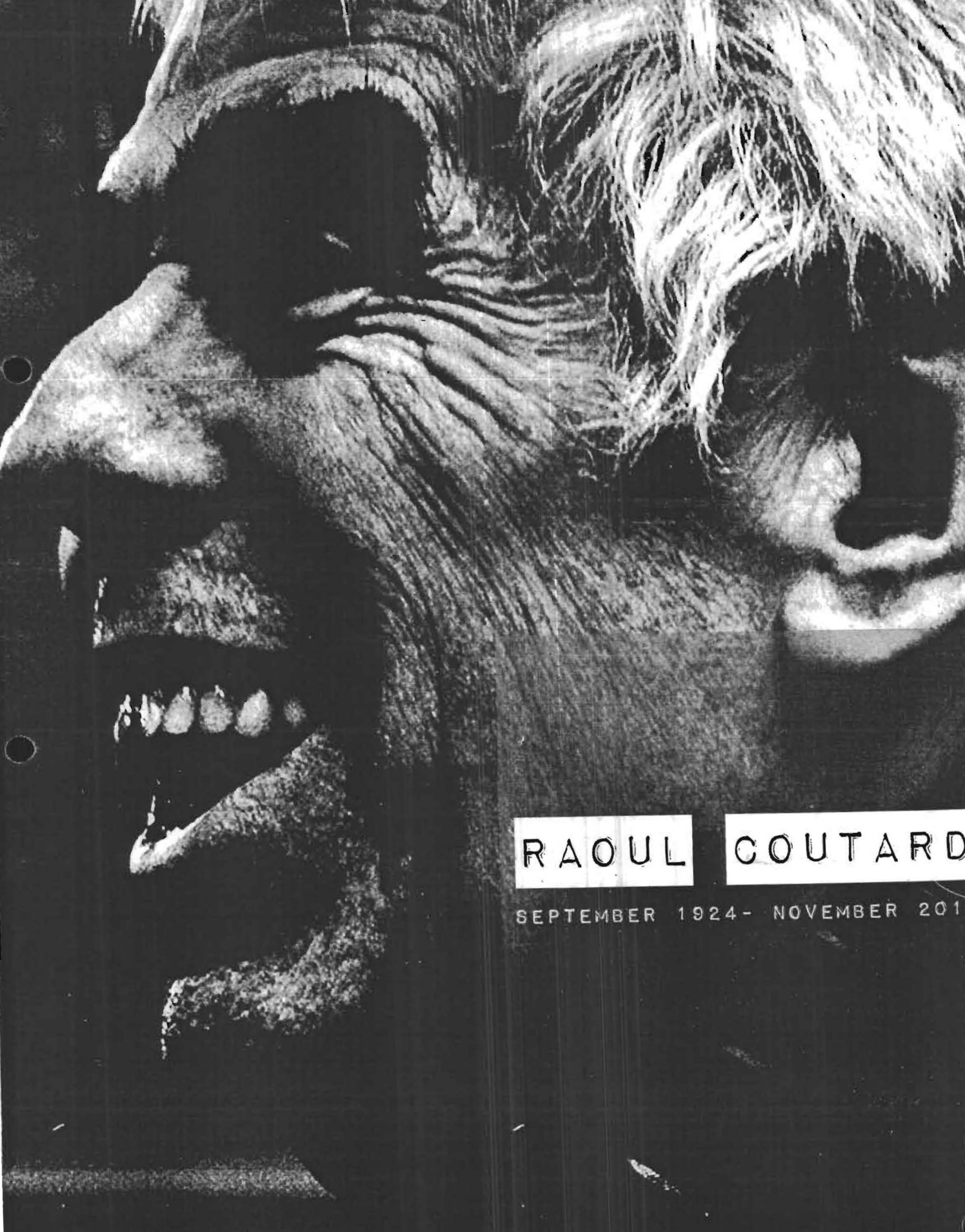
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When Marathi Cinema Became 'Maratha'

*A historical perspective on macho-ism in
Marathi Cinema*

Dr. Vishal G. Jadhav



Ek Gaav Bara Bhanagadi (Anant Mane, 1968),

Masculinity has only recently emerged as an important research category in social sciences and gender studies. Foucault (1969, 1975, 1985, 1998) was probably the first to demonstrate how sexuality and power/knowledge intersected, how knowledge construction embodied power and how power influenced the way episteme and discourses were organised to control human bodies and mind.

Radical feminists such as Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) have been able to theorise about sexuality and have demonstrated how it is underpinned by the patriarchal discourses and power relations existing in society. There is ample scholarship available on the narratives of femininity (Eurocentric) and the kind of symbolic, cultural and physical violence it can generate. There is also a critical deliberation on the crisscrossing patterns of race, class and femininity. However, even feminists have not paid much attention to the social category called Masculinity even as they have examined bio-

"Even feminists have not paid much attention to the social category called Masculinity even as they have examined bio-politics and violence that is inscribed on a woman's body."

politics and violence that is inscribed on woman's body.

Feminist scholarship has largely focused on patriarchy, examining various social categories such as gender, race, class and caste that intersect to maintain 'male-centeredness' knowledge-production. It is in this respect that the binaries of masculinity and femininity have been examined, to comprehend ways in which gender is constructed and how it transcends and intersects with other social identities organising new 'sociabilities'.

Anthropologists have investigated masculinity in order to map the ontological relationship between sports and masculinity. The anthropology and sociology of sports also opened up the field of enquiry into the relationship among race, sport and human body. This trajectory of thought led some scholars to capture life at the gymnasium or Akharas in north India. (Alter, 1992) They provided ethnographic details of how bodies were sculpted according to their idea of masculinity and interrogated the connection among religion, caste, class and politics.

Historians have dealt with the issue of masculinity and have described how the notions about it have changed over time. There are also certain studies that talk about the multiple and accepted concepts of masculinity in pre-colonial India. In post-British India, it was the Victorian sensibilities that influenced the country and a singular form of masculinity emerged, the one desired by the rulers. This also rewrote the concept of femininity.

This coincided with the time when the British invented the myth of the 'Martial' race. The continuing expansion of the empire required higher recruitment of soldiers from amongst natives for the wars fought by the colonial masters

"The British invented the myth of the 'Martial' race. The continuing expansion of the empire required higher recruitment of soldiers from amongst the natives for the wars fought by the colonial masters across the world--from Afghanistan and Burma to Mesopotamia and Egypt."

across the world--from Afghanistan and Burma to Mesopotamia and Egypt. In order to ensure a constant supply of Indian soldiers, the British

Bourdieu's (1978, 1988, 1990) work on sport sought to demonstrate the interstices and intersections between social classes, gender and



Majhi Zameen (Bhalji Pendharkar, 1953)

invented this myth of martial races. Detailed ethnographies and documentation were done on the martial category of people. Military handbooks were prepared to ensure that there was no tampering and only the so-called 'pure' blood lines served the Empire. These individuals were supposed to have features that were hyper masculine in nature, their bodies, hardy and muscular; their minds accordingly disciplined. In short, they were projected as extraordinary men. This narrative also led to the classification of men into a sub-category of non-masculine or effeminate men.

the notion of masculine and feminine. He interrogated how different social classes and class fractions embody--often unconsciously--their ideas of honour and schemes of evaluation in their sporting practices. He demonstrated how the ruling or the elite classes adopted exclusive sports in order to distance themselves from the labouring classes (Bourdieu 1978, 1988).

Mrinalini Sinha (1995), for instance, has interrogated the British design that created these false divisions of masculine and feminine, and examined their impact on the minds of the natives. She also uncovers the politics of why the Bengali 'Bhadralok' intelligentsia was termed as effeminate. Ashish Nandy (1983), following the logic of Frantz Fanon, in *Intimate Enemy*, refers to the kind of violence that the Indian men inflicted on their own bodies and minds to cater to the social constructs foisted on them by the colonisers.

Bourdieu's theories have focused on demonstrating that sport operates as a type of cultural capital. Bourdieu conceives of the body as the site where structure is embodied and also reproduced over time, calling this bodily process, 'habitus'. The rules, nature, skills and bodily requirements are factors that display class and cultural characteristics. Bourdieu argues that the rigorous training imparted in sports that enables the participant to perform complex movements overtime, becomes part of the habitus-- the bodily training is internalised in such a way that it becomes part of the unconscious. Bourdieu sees sport as a class-specific practice, as with the practices of eating or the consumption of goods, in which choice is socially structured. This 'taste' is seen as both reflecting and reproducing dominant culture and it is through his key conceptual tools of habitus, field, practice and capital that he seeks to capture the dynamic processes through which culture is embodied and reproduced.

Historians such as Chandavarkar also touch upon masculinity and *talim* or training given in gymnasiums of Bombay in the 19th century and how important it became to the working class in the city, especially in the railways, where men could be hired as coolies or for other, similarly hardy jobs. It talks about the kind of cultural and social capital that could accrue from this concept of masculinity.

An emergent discourse during the colonial period centered on the organisation of the notion of martial race, which based itself on the reconstruction of the dominant historical discourses of kingship and kinship within the

larger framework of colonial masculinity. As Nandy (1983) suggests, the development of a post-enlightenment notion of modern/'Western' masculinity became naturalised and led to colonial domination. In this context, certain notions of masculinity came to be associated with and engendered in particular sports. The British had begun mapping the cultural activities of the indigenous actors and a process of 'hierarchisation' in terms of the preferred value system emerged. There were two communities in the Deccan that were enumerated as martial races, based on the hegemonic colonial masculine discourse--the Mahars and the Marathas. I discuss the case of Marathas.

As Nicholas Dirks (1989) argues, marking land and marking bodies were related activities and it was through these techniques of governmentality that the British ruled over the minds and bodies of the natives. Imperial masculinity was a normative model originating in the 19th century Britain, which was then superimposed on the colonised through various technologies of the colonial ethnographic state. But what were the characteristic features of this hegemonic colonial construct and how did it aid the colonial project of controlling the bodies of the natives?

Roland Hyam (2010) describes the 19th century idealisation of the British male. He argues that during this period, the discourse shifted from the construction of an ethical, religious Christian order based on peace and passivity to a schema that admired and suggested the construction of a society of robust, virile, aggressive, assertive, healthy, hygienic and disciplined (in mind and body) men, who would aid in creating a modern nation. This notion that the male body reflected moral character and that physically able and strong men made up a strong nation was carried through in the twentieth century Britain.

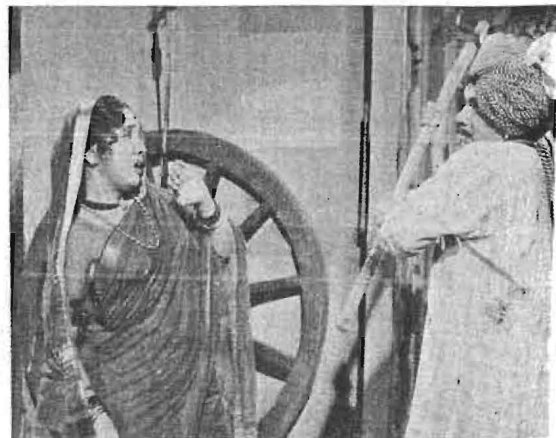
What was the impact of this hegemonic ideology on the minds and bodies of the colonised? This was a period in which Bengal (which was the first territory to be colonised) was churning out 'modern' intellectuals who were influenced by western ideas and were attempting to reorganise their society through reform. Some of them were even questioning the imperial state. In this process, a new nation was being organised that threatened the sovereignty of the colonisers. The only way to rule over the natives was by foisting on them the meta-narrative of the 'I' and the 'Other'. The so-called civilising mission not only

denied agency to the natives but also instilled within them a sense of inferiority that they internalised and naturalised over time.

As Sinha (1995, vii) aptly observes in the context of Bengal, in that period, the British and the Bengali were delineated by sharp stereotypical distinctions: there was a supposed masculine ideal, identified by a love of sports, particularly hunting and a disdain for the 'bookworm', celebration of general competence ('trained for nothing, ready for anything'), a vigorous pursuit of play as well as work in its proper place and chivalric, therefore, distancing approach to women, all contributing to the 'manly character' which was seen as the well-nigh unique mark of the Briton.

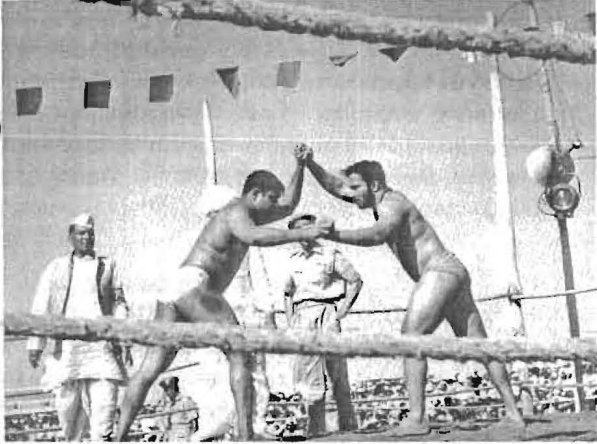
In *The Intimate Enemy*, Nandy argues that the recovery of "self-esteem" entailed asserting the validity and power of native masculinities. In India, multiple models of masculinity were available for emulation, including imperial masculinity. According to Nandy, the most prominent were two Aryan models of native masculinity: virile aggressive "Kshatriya-hood" and that anchored in "self-denying asceticism", restrained, rational "Brahman-hood". He argues that a section of the 19th century Indian elite saw the British as agents of change and progress, and accepted the masculinised ethos of aggressive imperialism. They even held themselves responsible for their subject status and chose the Kshatriya or warrior model of manliness as equivalent of the imperial model of masculinity.

As O'Hanlon (2007) suggests, the Kshatriya model was a very old and popular normative one that was accepted by the Moghuls and their contemporaries. This discourse of medieval In



Satiche Vaan (Datta Dharmadhikari, 1969)

was anchored in the need for organising an army of trained and disciplined mercenaries. These men needed to have tough, martial bodies, had to practice combat/contact sports and were supposed to be brave and daring. This idealised notion was not very different from that of the colonisers. The field of military service was restricted to certain castes and social groups who were considered to be the martial class. As she points out *Tambadi Mati* (1969)t:



Tambadi Mati (Bhalji Pendharkar, 1969)

Didactic literatures prescribed the qualities of strength, dexterity, daring and resolution to be cultivated as part of training in arms, and men's reputations and prospects of advancement depended on their public performance in the battlefield... The Mughal courts elaborated norms for cultured comportment that diffused through the urban centers of North India with the expansion of its political authority. Martial skills and literary accomplishments went hand-in-hand in this setting. Archery and wrestling formed part of the education of sons of *ashraf* or the urban elite, and well-known literary figures were often also skilled archers and swordsmen. These gendered bodily and literary accomplishments were, in turn, vital parts of the repertoire of a gentleman of culture, for whom appropriate bodily deportment and the cultivation of bodily health were important signs of gentility. (O'Hanlon, 2007; 495-96)

It was not surprising to find the monks of various religious orders employed as mercenaries by the pre-colonial military states. In view of this military legacy of the natives, the British had to now carefully utilise the available resources for their own expansionist policies so as to externalise the cost of war and also to ensure that these martial

communities would not mobilise against them as had occurred in the uprising of 1857. As O'Hanlon elaborates: the Company's struggle to demilitarize Indian rural societies proved an extremely complex challenge, and has been explored in the work of a wide range of historians... India's political fluidity from the later seventeenth century provided ideal conditions for their expansion, as demand increased for their fighting skills, their military discipline, and their pragmatic willingness to serve different paymasters as occasion and opportunity presented themselves. However, the long and gradual collapse of the military labor market and the colonial criminalization of itinerant and mobile peoples closed down these possibilities, as India's British rulers insisted that peaceful and prayerful pursuits were the only legitimate business of holy men. (O'Hanlon, 2007: 492)

The colonial idea of classifying a section of Indian society as martial was a political decision as it meant that the state could henceforth--with the least training and investment--access the existing military market for the expansion of the empire and at the same time suppress any kind of mutiny within the conquered territory, using one martial race against another. The British not only employed this policy in India but also in Africa where the Kamba of Kenya and Yao of Nyasaland were inducted in the East African colonial Army (Parsons, 1999 and Marjomaa, 2003). The Gurkhas were specially employed in the native Indian Army to ensure that no further repeats of the 'mutiny' of 1857 occurred. (Caplan, 1991)

This was also a time when due to the proliferation of western ideas of equality, democracy and fraternity, various subaltern caste groups were re-organising politically to be able to challenge the age-old dominance of the Brahmins. After the annexation of the Deccan, political power moved into the hands of the British from the erstwhile Peshwas. Thus, the Maratha caste found a new opportunity to mobilise into a political block by collaborating with the imperial state. The selective inclusion and exclusion by the British enabled the Marathas to access the new colonial field of military, para-military and police services.

Marathi films were initially produced in the princely state of Karveer (Kolhapur). For almost three decades from 1920, we witnessed the production of films based on the Hindu deities and saints like Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva, Tukaram and Dyaneshwar. Vedic characters such Bheema,



Pinjara (V. Shantaram, 1972)

Arjun, Yudhishra and Karna were reproduced. This period also saw the production of movies based on historical characters, including Shivaji, Sambhaji, Tanaji, Angre, Umaji Naik, Rana Mahapatrap, Rani Lakshmi Bai and Shahu Maharaj. The latter films reproduced the received notions of the 'Maratha' masculine body so much so that even Lakshmi Bai was conceived within this discourse of masculinity.

The 1950s witnessed the production of films that demonstrated village life, and the power relations in the caste-based political economy. For instance, *'Patlacha Por'* (1951), *Mahajan* (1953), *Majhi Zameen* (1953), *Mai Saheb* (1953), *Kuladaivat* (1955), *Kalagi Tura* (1955) and *Muthbhar Chane* (1955) captured the caste-class dynamics of rural Bombay Presidency. The characters in these films endorsed the peasant form of masculinity: hardy bodies, peasant moorings, bread winner of the family and patriarchal relationships within the family.

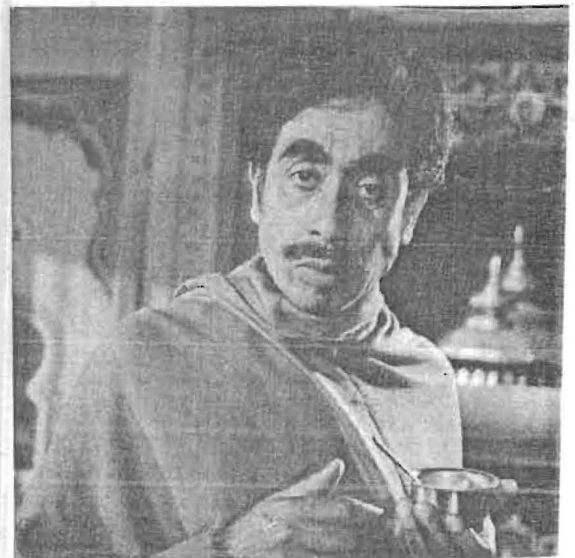
"The 'Mard Maratha' image became omnipresent and began to be connected with state/political power. It coincided with power being wrested from the 'Shetjis and Bhattjis (business caste/class and brahmins) into the hands of the Maratha leadership."

During the following three decades until the mid-1980s, there was a gradual transformation in the narrative of Marathi films. The 'Mard Maratha' image became omnipresent and began to be connected with state/political power. It coincided with power being wrested from the 'Shetjis and Bhattjis (business caste/class and brahmins) into the hands of the Maratha leadership. These films also captured rural life and the power relations at

the grassroots level. This phase was politically important as the newly-formed state of Maharashtra also introduced new legislations to popularise the cooperative movement to banking/credit, processing and marketing. Legislation on Panchayati Raj saw the decentralisation of power to the village level. These changes were captured in these films that examined how the Maratha politics together with the Congress system created a Maratha rule in the State.

"Bourdieu argues that the rigorous training imparted in sports that enables the participant to perform complex movements overtime, becomes part of the habitus--the bodily training is internalised in such a way that it becomes part of the unconscious."

Movies such as *Kuladaivat*, *Kalagi Tura*, *Muthbhar Chane*, *Gariba Gharchi Lek*, *Chimnyachi Shale*, *Sukh Aale Mazhya Daari* (all 1962), *Mohityanchi Manjula*, *Sukhachi Sawali*, *Te Mazhe Gha* (all 1963), *Pathlaag Phakir*, *Sawaal Majha Aika Maratha Tituka Melvava* (all 1964), *Pahila Bha*, *Swapna Tech Lochanii*, *Juna Te Sona*, *Thaan Lakshmi Kunku Lavatey* (all 1967), *Ek Mati Ane Nati*, *Aamhi Jato Amuchya Gava*, *Ek Gaav Ba Bhanagadi* (1968), *Dongarchi Maini*, *Ganagawlan*, *Satiche Vaan*, *Manaacha Muje Nandaila Jaate*, *Aparadh*, *Tambadi Mati* (1969) continue with this narrative of Maratha rule at the village level and its internalisation as a natural phenomenon. In most of these films, the



Samna (Dr. Jabbar Patel, 1975)

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Simhasan (Dr. Jabbar Patel, 1979)

(All film stills courtesy: NFAI, Pur

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The author has been teaching sociology for the last fifteen years. Presently he is an Associate Professor and teaches at Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth. He has also published research articles for National and international journals. He also has to his credit several published books. He is also the recipient of the Dudley Seers Memorial Award for the best article in the Journal of Development Studies, Routledge. He has also been invited several times to Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, University of Johannesburg, Moscow University among the many more international universities in the capacity of a visiting fellow.

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He has been involved with television as a Writer, Director and Producer in India and East Africa. He has been involved with the production of over five hundred hours of television programming in various genres, both fiction and non-fiction. He has produced short fiction pieces for Children's Film Society of India, UNESCO and the Government of France. He has written and directed a feature film on People of Indian Origin living in Kenya, East Africa. Amit Tyagi is currently working as Dean Films at FTII and is involved with the preproduction of two documentaries.

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Payal Kapadia is a filmmaker from Mumbai, India. Her film The Last Mango Before the Monsoon was shown at The International Short Film festival of Oberhausen (2015) where it won the FIPRESCI Award and Special Jury Mention and the Best Film at the Mumbai International Film Festival (2016). She is currently studying film direction at the Film and Television Institute of India.

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Dr. Aman Vats is doctorate in Communication Studies from University of Pune. His expertise lies in fields of Communication Research, Broadcasting, Video Production & Editing, Media Theories, Development Communication, Public Relations, Human Rights, and Cultural & Film Studies.