Forging a Civil Society: Education and Sports as Strategies

In this chapter I explore how education and sports became strategies through which the social imaginary 'Marathas' organized capital- symbolic, cultural and social. This chapter is divided into six sections. Section one examines how civic organizations came to be organized during the early colonial period and how it came to be dominated by the Brahmin community. In section two I assess the discourses of the non- Brahmin movement regarding the Brahmin domination in the colonial fields and the strategies invoked by them. Section three and four are case studies of a 'Maratha' educational forum. Section five explores how sports becomes a strategy through which the 'martial' imaginary of the 'Marathas' is reinforced. Section six examines the role of 'talims' (gymnasiums) as a site for accumulation of specific forms of cultural capital. I begin with how education is an embodied form and an institutional form of cultural capital.

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. The concept cultural capital was posited to challenge 'human capital,' a concept designed to think consciously or unconsciously, society in terms of a meritocratic system of autonomous individuals who vary in their economically marketable skills and dispositions. Cultural capital aims at making explicit the cultural processes of reproducing class privileges and exclusions in societies. Individualized exclusion is carried out almost universally in modern systems of formal education which grade, label, track and credential each of us with the force of a universally recognized authority whose publicly stated purpose is to recognize personally achieved knowledge and abilities and valued personal qualities such as “intelligence,” “creativity,” and “character.” (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990, Waquant, 1998)
Cultural capital bares the socially masked and misrecognized phenomenon that these knowledges, abilities, tastes and dispositions are anchored in skills of the individual. The concept of cultural capital demonstrates that these differences are grounded in leisure and freedom from the pressures of necessity that the dominant classes possess and their symbolic power to define their cultural repertoires as universal or most legitimate. From this view, cultural capital is economic capital put to use by the dominant classes to distance themselves culturally from the dominated classes to maintain their exclusive access to the most valued and valuable resources, activities and institutions. Thus the educational system evaluates people as autonomous individuals, but for dominant class cultural knowledge, beliefs and dispositions that are transmitted, often unconsciously, within the home, the family, and exclusive social networks. (Bourdieu, 1990)

The system of formal education thus works to sanctify the culture of the dominant classes and distribute credentials, universally recognized capital, on the basis of the possession of this culture. Fixed as this game is, it does allow for those who are less endowed some chance to move up and it does require that those in the dominant classes “apply” themselves to the game. From this brief summary of formal education as cultural capital, it should be clear that educational credentials are a central form of cultural capital- the universally recognized symbol/exchange value of one’s cultural and moral excellence. Thus, acquired credentials have rightly become the primary measure of accumulated cultural capital. (Bourdieu, 1977, 1985, 1990)

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 what were the fields that the colonial state had inaugurated. What were the species of capital required to enter this field? 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.

Before we examine how the 'Marathas' entered these fields, it is pertinent we
discuss the colonial policies on education as these policies dictated and
demarcated the boundaries and rules of the field of education.

After military conquest over the Deccan in 1818, the colonial state machinery
now maneuvered to consolidate its position through proliferation of its civil
institutions amongst the indigenous actors. The administration had to be staffed
by indigenous actors which was the primary motivating factor that informed the
British educational policy. The bureaucracy required an operational class of clerks
to help govern the Empire. The idea was to organize a civil society of the
indigenous actors that could mediate between the colonial authorities on the one
hand and on the other hand with the masses. In pursuance of this policy, the
colonial state structured an education system as a means of creating this class of
citizens. Macaulay, then a member of the Governor-General’s council, made this
clear in the famous Minute he prepared for Bentinck in 1835,

“...I feel with them (natives) that it is impossible for us, with our limited
means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present
do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the
millions whom we govern, – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour,
but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class
we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich
those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western
nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying
knowledge to the great mass of the population” (Edwardes, 1967; 45)

This was also famously called as the downward filtration strategy by later
nationalists. (Stokes, 1978) Keeping to this strategy, the colonial state inaugurated
Maculay’s Minute (1835) on education that favoured the limited government
resources to be devoted to teaching of classical and arts curriculum that stressed on western philosophy and literature- designed not to teach science or technology but to pass on English morals through the medium of English language alone. Another covert objective of the colonial authorities was to inaugurate only a few secondary level schools and colleges instead of a large number of elementary schools, thus neglecting mass education. These objectives were continued through the inauguration of the famous Woods despatch of 1854 (also deemed the Magna Carta of English education in India). With this in mind, the colonial state gradually began systematizing a hierarchy- from vernacular primary schools in villages to the Anglo-vernacular high schools affiliated to district level college and finally to the university at Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras (Punjab university was set up in 1882 and Allahabad university in 1887). Thus by 1857 universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were inaugurated. By mid 1870s departments of education were also set up in all provinces to monitor this system. Two other important recommendations in the Woods despatch were - stress on women’s vocational education and on teachers training, for which it suggested a grant in aid to encourage private enterprise by the indigenous actors. (Stokes, 1978, Kumar, 1968)

Following the transfer of power to the Crown in 1858, the colonial policies vacillated between two contradictory poles – educating a small section of the indigenous actors thus ensuring a steady supply of workforce and in contrast, controlling the sites of higher education to check the mobilization and articulation of the nascent nationalist movement. In, 1882 a task force called the Hunter commission was constituted to elucidate the future educational policy of the colonial state. This commission recommended transfer of control of primary education to newly set up district and municipal boards and also suggested that the secondary (high school) education should have two divisions- Literary (leading up to university) and Vocational ( for commercial careers). In short this meant fewer openings for the indigenous actors to pursue university education. By 1904, with the heightening of the demand for unification of Bengal, Curzon the
then Governor General promulgated the Universities Act that justified greater control of the colonial state over universities as he deemed them to be sites of Nationalist activism.

Keeping in mind its objective of nurturing a miniscule class, the colonial state marginalized primary education which was financed largely by the weak local authorities. As a result, the indigenous actors had little access to education (at the eve of independence in 1947, 88 per cent were illiterate).

This was also a period when the Indian National Congress (INC) was inaugurated- in 1885. This was as per the designs of the colonial state- to set up a political forum of the indigenous actors that would act as a ‘safety valve’ and facilitate British rule in India. The educational policies of the state ensured that only a miniscule urban based middle class constituted the INC. A class that was Indian in blood and colour and British in taste and Morals. This miniscule leadership was to represent the masses and in turn convey and convince the indigenous actors of the benign rule of the colonial state.

Thus the colonial policy of limiting educational opportunities for the indigenous actors meant that the educational field was highly competitive. Usually only those indigenous actors with embodied cultural capital (i.e. those individuals who had a ‘tradition’ of learning had an edge over the others) could get entry in the field. But who were those indigenous actors having this embodied cultural capital? As W. Hunter observed as early as 1890s,

"The Maratha Brahmans, instead of adopting a policy of resistance, have adopted a policy of acceptance and...they are at this moment the chief native administrators of the system which superseded their own." (Hunter, 1892; 12)

Scholars such as (Omvedt, 1973, 1976, O’Hanlon, 1986) argue that the scribal social group (Brahmins and the Kayasthas or CKP) had a ‘tradition’ of learning and writing. They contend that it is these sections amongst the indigenous actors who were the first to westernize and adapt to the changing cultural and political
scenario. These sections were therefore best suited to take advantage of the employment opportunities organized by the colonial state— as clerks, lower level bureaucrats, revenue officials and interpreters for the colonial authorities. Thus the educational system brought forth a class of professionals and upper white-collar staff which served the needs of colonial state.

There was of course a covert colonial agenda—they needed allies who would support their project of cultural domination over the indigenous actors. After the revolt of 1857, it was a matter of conscious British policy to ensure communal division: in the words of the 1879 Army Commission,

“Next to the grand counterpoise of a sufficient European force comes the counterpoise of indigenous actors against natives.” (Sarkar, 2000; 16)

Unlike in the Europe, the system of electoral politics was not introduced through a long process of democratic and working-class struggle; on the contrary it was introduced by the British rulers as part of their effort to associate existing elite sections with their rule—this meant that the erstwhile elite were drawn from the Brahmins (in the Deccan from the Chittpavan and Deshastha Brahmin community together with the CKP). It is no wonder then, that the British took the help of the Savarna (members of the scribal community) who interpreted Indian society in a way that was mutually acceptable—to the colonial plan and also useful for the Brahmin community to reinforce their privileges. Thus these ‘indigenous intellectuals’ became the elite during the early colonial rule and continued to remain in power for a while after independence. They were employed by the colonial state on one hand and on the other this group constituted the early nationalist organizations such as the INC. (Chatterjee, 1997)

The colonial state inaugurated and organized fields such as the bureaucracy, military and police, industries, law and the economy. These fields valued individuals possessing specialized forms of cultural and symbolic capital such as education (literate), marital legacies, skilled labour (artisans and industrial workers) and the professionals (English literate urban middle class). The limited
nature of entry into these fields resulted in a scramble amongst various communities and led to mobilization of individuals - in the form of organized caste associations to demand greater representation.

Recognizing Brahmin domination in these fields, sections of the non-Brahmin communities began to politically organize to counter this trend. To achieve this objective, they inaugurated educational institutions specifically for community members, organized employment awareness campaigns and devised strategies through which the requisite cultural and symbolic capital could be harnessed.

Having given this brief introduction to the colonial policies, I briefly discuss how these policies enabled certain informed sections of the indigenous actors in the Deccan to take advantage of the situation. In order to capitalize on existing resources, the early colonial administrators relied on employing the Brahmins to serve the bureaucracy, as Brahmins were the literate group of actors (community). Not only did the colonial administrators require indigenous actors in the capacity of clerks but more importantly a class of indigenous actors who could interpret Indian society for them. (Table I and II)

Civic associations and educational forums of the indigenous actors in the Deccan

The colonial policies and its governmentality entailed that the indigenous actors be recognized through the prism of community membership rather than as individuals. Its classificatory policy firstly delineated and rigidified categories such as caste, religion and race and legitimated them through practices such as the census. Now castes were to be imagined as communities and hence indigenous actors were recognized through the lens of community membership. It is in this context that one can comprehend why the civil society of indigenous actors sponsored by the colonial state (self interest) began to organize itself on the basis of caste which became apparent especially in the early 20th century. These civic
organizations sometimes implicitly and at other times explicitly reflected through their practices the embedded primordial identifications.

For instance Justice Ranade and his associates, realizing the importance of state patronage inaugurated the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, a civil society organization in 1870. Though the Sabha claimed to represent the masses by voicing concerns and grievances of the indigenous actors, it was an exclusive organization of literate and informed urban middle class, predominantly belonging to the Brahmin community. This organization pleaded that the state should intervene in matters related to political representation, education, employment and other urban related issues- in many ways this organization was a precursor to the Indian National Congress. xi (Sarkar, 2000)

The recognition that education was a valued resource led to intense mobilization within the Brahmin community. Individuals within this community such as V. K. Chiplunkar, G. G. Agarkar, V. S. Apte, V. B. Kelkar, M. S. Gole, N. K. Dharap together with Lokmanya Tilak and M. B. Namjoshi inaugurated the first private (native) secondary school in Poona - New English School in 1880. This was also the first such endeavour in the Bombay Province and is considered to be a milestone because the colonial state and Christian missionaries were the only agencies involved in educating the masses until then. In 1884 they instituted the Deccan Education Society and in 1885, Ferguson College in Poona- thus organizing the linkage from secondary to higher school education to the college level (the medium of instruction was in English, thus giving a great advantage in terms of potential employment). xII In 1899 with the objective of spatial expansion the Society inaugurated a branch of the New English School in Satara. In the same year, the Nutan Marathi Vidyalaya (New Marathi School) was launched in Pune to cater to students who could cope with the medium of instruction as Marathi. In 1919, the Willingdon College was inaugurated in Sangli town (now a district) of the Bombay Province, thus ensuring a head start for the members of the Brahmin community. Though the Deccan Education Society claimed to represent the interests of all communities of the Deccan, in reality it catered to the
interests of the Brahmin community and especially the Chitpavan Brahmins amongst them. (Gordon, 1970)

In order to ensure a regular supply from this community the colonial administrators appeased them through by their non-inference policy and sometimes by providing educational patronage. For instance, Elphinstone maintained the dakshina system whereby the state disbursed grants to Brahmins who had distinguished themselves in sacred studies. Elphinstone also established the Hindu college in Poona (the first college outside of Bombay) to train Brahmins in classical Sanskrit studies. However by 1859 these institutions were gradually modified- the dakshina fund was converted into a general scholarship fund and in principle admission was now opened to students of all communities and in 1864 the Hindu college was renamed as the Deccan College. (Report of education, 1871)

In spite of its claim of admission to students of all communities in practice students of the Brahmin community continued to dominate entry into this institution - as there were hardly any qualified students from other communities. "Members of the Brahmin community were able to take advantage of the university (Bombay) level education too. This translated into an overwhelming dominance of the Brahmin community in education, the skilled professions requiring higher learning such as the judiciary and the lower and middle public services. (Kumar 1968)

The census statistics of 1921 and 1931 of the Bombay Province (Table I and II) illustrates this trend. The literacy (literacy in Marathi) of the Kayastha (CKP) is 64.4%, the Chitpavan Brahmins is 55.2% and the Deshastha Brahmins is 55.8%. The percentage of the literate amongst the ‘Maratha-Kunbi’ community is only .06% and is the lowest as compared to other castes.

The public service commission of 1921 found that 41.25 per cent of deputy collectors, 75.5 per cent of Mamlatdars (assistant deputy collectors) and 71 per cent of subordinate Judges in the province were from the Brahmin community.
Further, members of the Brahmin, Kayastha and merchant communities represented 268 of 411 clerks in the Secretariat, 64 of 91 in the Public Works Department, 125 of 198 in the High Court, 32 of 47 in the Police Courts, and 59 of 87 in the office of the Commissioner of Police, Bombay.iii (Table II and III)

Similarly another political forum was inaugurated in Poona called the Servants of India Society in 1905 by Gopal Krishna Gokhale. With Tilak being now associated as an extremist within the INC, Gokhale left the Deccan Education Society to form this association. Along with him were a small group of educated Brahmins such as Natesh Appaji Dravid, Gopal Krishna Deodhar and Anant Patwardhan who overtly espoused social development but covertly pursued policies that would ensure Brahmin domination. The Society organized (urban related) campaigns to promote education, sanitation, health care and fight against untouchability and discrimination, alcoholism, poverty, oppression of women and domestic abuse through its organ The Hitavada (inaugurated in 1911) an English journal. In 1930, the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics was instituted in Poona as a centre for research and higher learning in economics by R. K. Kale (a noted economist and nationalist) from the funds of the Servants of India society.iv (Gordon, 1970)

Response of the Non- Brahmins or the Bahujan Samaj

This recognition of the preponderance of members of the Brahmin community in the government services and the industries led to a reassessment of strategies by the members of the Satyashodhak Samaj or the Non-Brahmin movement. The domination of the Brahmins was acknowledged in the late 19th century itself as is evident in Phule’s and later Shahu’s discourses. To counter this Brahmin domination, the leaders of the Bahujan Samaj urged the non-Brahmins to get educated.iv

However, as the movement itself was undergoing leadership change (the movement in the late 19th century was taken over by members of the ‘Maratha’ caste) the discourse oriented itself to assertion of ‘Maratha’ related issues. The
expression ‘Maratha’ itself was transforming, sometimes veering towards inclusivity i.e. of all non Brahmin jatis to exclusive claims of few jatis. By the early 20th century, the dominant expression ‘Maratha’ (that was legitimated through the 1921 and later 1931 census) came to mean those claiming kshatriya origins together with Kunbi peasant groups. The early attempts to organize civic and political associations specifically for the ‘Maratha’ community emerged from the informed and educated members of this community who were part of the non-Brahmin movement in the late 19th century.\textsuperscript{xlvi}

It was in this context that the Deccan Maratha Education Association (DMEA) was established in January 1883 in Pune, with William Wedderburn as its president and Gangaram Bhaumhaske as secretary. Mhaske was educated in a mission school in Poona and was an active member of the Satya Shodhak movement. He was also a qualified district court pleader and a member of the INC. For the DMEA, one of the many non-Brahman organizations in the late 19th century, ‘Maratha’ meant the cluster of ‘self proclaiming kshtriya’ Marathas and humbler Kunbi peasant families linked through kinship (real and notional); it excluded other peasant castes like the Mali (Gardner caste), which were very active in non-Brahman politics. The DMEA sought to appropriate the ideology of the non-Brahmin movement to very specific ends i.e. to organize a ‘Maratha’ community and ensure its entry in the available state sponsored fields.\textsuperscript{xlvii}

Associating a British official in some ways helped in legitimating Mhaske’s claims regarding the definition of ‘Maratha’. He argued,

“It is lamentable fact that the people belonging to the Maratha, Kunbi or cultivating classes have been owing to their deep ignorance more than to their admitted poverty, very backward in availing themselves of the advantages of the system of primary and secondary education established by the government during the last thirty years and more.” (O’Hanlon, 1986; 291-92)

Hoping to maneuver the direction and energies of the Non-Brahmin movement towards his project of (re)defining ‘Maratha’ he choose to portray them as the
most deprived and backward of all the communities. His discourse also harped on
the importance of the ‘Maratha’ masses and therefore the ‘Maratha’ community
was the rightful claimant of the benefits sponsored by the colonial state. He adds,

“It is hardly necessary at this time to state that the Maratha and Kunbi
population form the muscle and bone of native society. Their helplessness
and ignorance is a national disgrace and a danger which is fraught with
great evils to the whole community...This condition of things is by no
means an inevitable evil. At one time, not very distant in the past, they
numbered among them some of the renowned leaders of the Maharashtrian
armies and many filled its ranks. In fact these classes were the mainstay of
the Maratha power in its palmy days.” (O’Hanlon, 1986; 291-92)

Thus the DMEA employed these arguments and symbols not to campaign for a
fundamental diversion of resources and power to the whole community of lower
castes as envisaged by Phule but for the narrower and less radical purpose of
encouraging higher education among the non-literary and backward classes of
‘Marathas’ and Kunbis. Until 1889 the association’s funds remained rather
limited and its efforts were restricted to granting a small number of scholarships.
In that year however, Sayajirao Gaikwad, the Maharaja of Baroda, made a large
donation of Rs. 2400 per annum and the Maharaja of Kolhapur followed suit with
Rs. 300 per annum. With these increased resources the association was able to
reassert itself through support of Maratha-Kunbi education from the late 1890s.
The DMEA did not survive until the early 20th century and instead gave way to a
new organization called the All India Maratha Education Conference. (Omvedt, 1973)

In response the politics of the DMEA of forwarding parochial definitions of
‘Maratha’ Lokhande, an important Satya Shodhak member imagined another
connotation; in 1887 he founded the Maratha Aikyaeche sabha (the society for
Maratha unity) which invoked a military ‘ethos and tradition’ to claim the
category for an even more limited group of families:

“The name Maratha has really only ever been given to those who were
Kshatriyas. All other people were happy to accept the name of their trade
as their caste-name; but the name of Maratha has come to be given permanently to all those who have kept their mastery of their own land and who take pride in putting their lives at stake to protect it. Our habit of using Maratha for our caste name is really a matter of great joy: it means that our very name proclaims that we are the people of this land of our birth.” (Din Bandhu, 21 October 1904, quoted in O’Hanlon, 1986; 291)

With the ascendance of Shahu in 1894 as the ruler of the princely state of Kolhapur and the *Vedokta* incident questioning his origins, he became an aggressive adversary of the Brahmin community. Shahu who generously funded the non-Brahmin movement, for him it became a political platform through which he reoriented the discourse towards his two fold objectives- the first was that the non-Brahmin discourse became much more anti-Brahmin in content and the second was of reimagining the movement as a ‘Maratha’ movement. This gave an impression of two opposing blocs ‘Maratha’ versus the Brahmins- the ‘Maratha’ were to be the leaders of all non-Brahmin ‘communities’. In the later years of his reign, he also campaigned actively for the removal of untouchability, opening hostels and schools, and providing employment for non-Brahmins. One of his first steps was to downsize the Brahmin presence i.e. Brahmin employees in his princely state and increase the intake of non-Brahmin caste members especially ‘Maratha’. (Copland, 1973, Omvedt, 1973)

In 1894, Brahmins occupied a total of 104 jobs in Shahu’s government, while Non-Brahmins occupied 18. No untouchable occupied any government post at this time. By 1922, Brahmins occupied 69 of these jobs, Non-Brahmans 168, and one untouchable had been appointed. Similarly, the number of Brahman students in the Kolhapur schools in 1894 was 2,522, with 8,088 Non-Brahman students and 264 untouchables. By 1922, however, while the number of Brahman students had increased only to 2,722, the number of Non-Brahman students had shot up to 21,027, and that of untouchable students to 2,162. Although these figures do not give us a caste breakdown of ‘Marathas’ and others in the Non-Brahman category, it is worth postulating that the proportion of Marathas was higher, because of the many special educational privileges like hostels, scholarships,
concessions among other things, that they got, both as part of Shahu's promotion and the numerous Maratha caste organizations. (Shahu collection, Vol I to X, Copland, 1973, Omvedt, 1973, Phadke, 1989: 216)

Shahu did not limit the Brahmin-non Brahmin contestation to his princely state but took it outside its territories. Tilak and his Brahmin associates through the daily Kesari and Marattha, were the prominent actors who supported the Vedic claims of the Brahmins that the 'Marathas' were Shudra. The two main epicenters of this discourse therefore zeroed in at Kolhapur (the non-Brahmin majority) and Pune (Brahmin domination). It was in this context that Shahu decided to fund as many non-Brahmin civic associations in Pune and adjoining territories within the Bombay Presidency. It is pertinent to point out that Kolhapur occupied a unique position in the hierarchy of Indian princely states. By the standards of Baroda, Hyderabad or some of the Rajputana states, it was not large- but its ruling dynasty was acknowledged as having directly descended from the revered Maratha king Shivaji, and this gave the state a political eminence out of all proportion to its size.

It is no wonder that the descendants of the old leaders of the Maratha Confederacy, such as Holkar, Maharaja of Indore, the Gaikwad of Baroda, Pawars of Dhar, Pawars of Surgana, Bhosales of Nagpur, Shinde (Scindia) of Gwalior together with smaller allies, held Kolhapur in high esteem. Kolhapur was officially regarded as the premier state in western India and the Bombay Government assumed that Kolhapur was a valuable ally, capable of wielding enormous influence over western India. Thus when Shahu contested Brahmin domination outside Kolhapur he was supported in this endeavour by Gaikwads, Shindes, Pawars, Bhosales and other smaller chiefs of princely states. Covertly, the colonial state too supported activities that undermined and checked the domination of the Brahmins as the state recognized the growing clout of this community in nationalist politics. Led by Shahu, many of the 'Maratha' chiefs began to donate large sums of money and land for the non-Brahmin and

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. In a speech to the second session of the AISEC in 1908, Bhaskar Rao Jadhav, one of the prominent ‘Maratha’ intellectuals interrogated the early educational efforts of the ‘Maratha’ community. He observed that the DMEA had not been able to proliferate into common ‘Maratha’ masses. He critiqued the DMEA leadership by stating that they had concocted a very exclusive definition of ‘Maratha’ i.e. to aristocratic and ‘traditional’ lineages. In contrast, the Maratha Aikyecchu Sabha (organization for the unity of Marathas) of Lokhande had attempted to include all non-Brahmans among ‘Maratha’. He tried to give a middle ground whereby ‘Maratha’ would be inclusive of the Kunbis but exclusive to all other non-Brahmin communities. He argues

“a good deal of discussion began in Din Bandhu and other papers and finally the majority opinion was achieved that ‘Maratha’ should be used neither in the extremely narrow sense nor in the extremely wide sense but rather to refer to all who called themselves of Maratha caste.” (Jadhav 1908; 4 ‘The early history of Maratha Education’ Speech at Akhil Bharatiya Maratha Shikshan Parishad, 2nd session, Bombay, December 30-31)

The Conference had by the second decade of the 20th century began to proliferate all parts of Bombay provinces. The AIMEC also held successive conferences in the districts outside the Presidency and in the princely states, and was attended by not only the urban masses but also the rural folk. Local organizations, hostels and schools were sponsored by the AISEC. By 1919, a total of 92 affiliated organizations in the British provinces and 21 in princely states were listed; sixteen hostels were being managed for Marathas and other students; there were five reading rooms and six special organizations that included two ‘Maratha’ political
conferences and four ‘Maratha’ national organizations. (AIMEC, 15th session, Ratnagiri, 1922)

It became the most prominent vehicle of dissemination of the discourse on Bahujan Samaj and also of the ‘Maratha’ community. In later years the AIMEC became a political platform from which demands ranging from enumeration of Kunbis as Marathas to forging a political bloc became apparent. The AISEC organized many conferences especially in Poona and its adjoining urban areas of Ratnagiri, Nashik, Ahmednagar and Satara to induce ‘Maratha’ youth to take up education. It urged the ‘Maratha’ youth of the benefits of education and held campaigns for registering students. As one report suggests,

“We (AIMEC) met all the village Patils and Sarpanch urging them to prepare a list of all the Bahujan students who were illiterate and willing to learn…we told the villagers that we would provide scholarships and even boarding for the students…we impressed upon their minds that this was the only way to get employed in public services and the only way to end the Brahmin domination in this field.” (Vijayi Maratha: 1921; 5th October; 7)

The main objective of the AIMEC was to provide scholarships for ‘Maratha’ students who were pursuing education in the government schools and college. It also organized hostel and boarding facilities for these students. Thus the AIMEC may be deemed as the umbrella organisation of ‘Maratha’ civic associational form that was gradually becoming much more political in nature. However it was still provincial in nature in its formative years.

The AIMEC was more of a cluster of organizations lacking a centralised coordinating body. The participating organizations ranged from local or district organizations to organizations representing different factional groups. This was particularly true in Bombay where the existence of 26 separate ‘Maratha’ organizations illustrated long standing and localized factional ties: in particular, Bombay ‘Marathas’ had long been divided between ‘konkansthas’ (those from konkan and considered themselves superior) and ‘Deshasthas’ (from mainland).
Further each participating ‘Maratha’ organization had its own objectives and interests. Similarly, the Conference could not by itself be a vehicle for political effort and two ‘Maratha political conferences’ in fact emerged in direct competition with one another, one representing the non-Brahmin orientation – its discourse related to the Bahujan Samaj and the other with a ‘Maratha’ orthodox outlook. (Asavale, Report to the 5th session, 1912 and also Omvedt, 1976; 172)

These two camps came in conflict in 1917 when the Kolhapur and Satara (Deshastha) ‘Marathas’ and others decided to make a renewed effort to organise Maratha unity around the idea of a memorial to Shivaji and a focus on educational work; they did not use the AIMEC but created a new and separate organization called the All India Shri Shivaji Maratha Society (AISSMS). The AISSMS was established through a combined funding by Shahu of Kolhapur, Gaikwad of Baroda, Tukojirao Holkar of Indore and the Scindias of Gwalior. The foundation stone of AISSMS was laid by the the Prince of Wales on 19th November 1921 in Pune.

Prior to the inauguration of the SSMS, the AIMEC in 1913 established an institution called the ‘Maratha Vidya Prasarak Samaj’ (MVPS) in Nashik. It was in 1913 when the All India Maratha Education Conference was organized in Nashik; Udojirao Pawar the chief of Dhar Residency donated Rs. 10,000 which led to the foundation of the MVPS in Nashik. Further Udojirao Pawar also provided a grant of Rs. 2000 per annum to ensure that the MVPS becomes self-sustaining. Soon many patrons followed suit- Shahu Maharaj contributed Rs.15,000 Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda Rs.12000, Madhavrao Scindia of Gwalior Rs. 10000 and the then Industrialist Pandurang Javaji Chaudhari of Bombay Rs. 3000. The founders and core members of the MVPS were Shankarrao Kadam Kanaladkar, Bhausaheb Hiray, Kakasaheb Wagh, Annasaheb Murkute.

For organizational and management purposes these two organizations were deemed as separate and independent but in fact their core management consisted
of the same actors of the AIMEC. They were funded by the same sponsors and both of them professed the same ideology i.e. 'Bahujanaya Hitaya' (For the well being and happiness of the Bahujan masses). However in practice the MVPS and the SSMS advanced ‘Maratha’ interests. The fact that AIMEC was located in Pune; the core of the Brahmin domination (as Pune was the erstwhile capital of the Peshwa rule) made it important for ‘Maratha’ leadership to organize their interests through it. Thus the Association was not only an educational platform but also a political and social platform. Some of the activities of the AIMEC can be gauged from the references from Din Bandhu-

“A public notification to all Maratha students… Those students who are unable are economically weak can avail of the 28 scholarships awarded by the Association. Scholarships will be awarded on the basis of merit and also the need of the student. Contact the secretary of the Association”.
(Din Bandhu; 1909; 27th January; 3)

The AIMEC also urged the ‘Marathas’ (not only students) to mobilize for political causes. Such as for the demanding separate electorates for the 1909 local board elections in the Bombay Presidency

“…Marathas must now demand separate electorates…we are friends of the British government…and have served it well. The Minto recommendations have to be studies well…we are under-represented and we need to strengthen our presence…this is only possible if we become conscious…therefore we urge all educated Marathas to enlighten our illiterate brethren.” (Din Bandhu; 1909; March 7th; 1)

It was also organizing ‘Maratha’ students to enroll for the Military. Meetings were held in Ahmednagar, Satara, Pune and Nashik.

“…the Marathas have a martial tradition as even the Sarkar has accepted now. We must educate our jati brothers and also simultaneously spread the word that we should join the military and other public offices.” (Din Bandhu, 1912, 14th January; 3)

However it was the second organization called the Shri Shivaji Maratha Society (SSMS) established under the aegis of the AIMEC that became the most
important ambassador of defining ‘Maratha’ interests and safeguarding them. The AISSMS was an effort of the royal families to establish educational institutions that would emulate British public education practices and in the process sculpt a new imaginary called ‘Maratha’. In 1931, the Shri Shivaji Preparatory military School (SSPMS) was inaugurated to fashion this project.

Thus this period signifies various discourse of who the ‘Marathas’ are and this is contested through the ideologies of the disparate ‘Maratha’ educational societies. There was no concurrence of who the ‘Marathas’ are and each discourse was a strategy aimed at mobilizing certain groups of the indigenous actors through the imaginary of ‘Maratha’. Below I analyze the two institutionalized discourses.

Case study- Shri Shivaji Maratha Society and School


In 1921, the Shri Shivaji Maratha High school was inaugurated with the objective of educating the masses of ‘Marathas’ by way of educating them. 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)

The Society with the grants from Shahu disbursed student scholarships to ‘Maratha’ students, especially those coming from rural areas, who were economically weak. Rajashree Shahu Chattrapati’s Nivdak Adesh (Shahu Maharaj’s special mentions, Part I, entry 396, 3rd May 1921)

The Society was also mobilizing a public discourse on important issues such as politics, peasantry, and reviving and invoking the glorious past of the ‘Maratha’ rule. The school premise became the center in Pune to support the Satara based peasant revolt of 1919-1921; a revolt of tenants against Brahman and Marwaris (and occasionally non-Brahmin) landlords in association with the Satyashodhak movement or revolt which went on for about two years from April of 1919.

For instance this advertisement in the Vijayi Maratha suggests,

“Maratha students meet: All Maratha students in Pune schools and colleges- meet on 15/1/1922 at Shivaji Maratha School… This elocution competition has a fee of 50 annas for school students and one rupee for
college students. Tickets available with Shinde Master... Many prizes to be won... topics are 1) *Amcha Shetkari Varga* (our peasant class), 2) *Sakteche va mofat prathamik shikshan* (compulsory and free primary education), 3) Shivaji as a nation builder, 4) Maratha politics...to give names please meet B.G Jagtap” (Vijayi Maratha, Pune, Saturday 7th January 1922; 4)

The topics for the elocution signify a shift in the earlier discourses of the ‘Marathas’. The peasant imaginings together with the kshtriya past was in the years to come become the mainstay of the ‘Maratha’ ideology. The fact that the SSMS was evoking discussions amongst the student community on topics such as Maratha politics and on issues of primary education, signals a political strategy that was being put in place. The SSMHS became a site for political mobilization of the ‘Marathas’- especially for local level political contestations. The ‘Marathas’ also urged the Bahujan Samaj members to support ‘Maratha’ candidates. As this news report suggests,

“A meet to discuss the Pune municipality elections in March; All the Bahujans please attend this meet. The Brahmins have named one committee to field candidates in all of Pune. Tatya Pranjape, Lavate and Bhopatkar... all non Brahmins unite and come and vote for the Marathas. We must end the *peshwai* in Pune. Key speakers will be Keshavrao Jedhe, Shankarrao More, Baburao Jagtap, Bhaskarao Jadhav and Appasahab Jedhe. The venue of this meet is at Shivaji Maratha high school, Shukurwar Peth, Pune.” (Vijayi Maratha, 6th February, 1922; 2)

It is pertinent to mention that in 1919 the colonial state (recommendations of the Montague-Chelmsford report of 1918) introduced dyarchy that meant more representation in the provincial legislative councils. The Society was ensuring that it remained in the good books of the colonial state and hence urged the ‘Maratha’ students to desist from associating with the nationalist movement. The Society was now becoming the most important mouth piece ‘of’ and ‘for’ the ‘Maratha’ community. As is reflected in the newspaper,

“An appeal by the Shri Shivaji Maratha Society: we urge that Maratha students refrain from entering the Non-cooperation and Khilafat movement...it is not our fight. The Sarkar (government) is our ally...do
not be fooled by what Gandhi is doing...Maratha students in schools and colleges should not boycott...you may be expelled.” (Jagruti; 4th April, 1921;1)

The SSM high school became a site for special educational development activities- the premises of the School was used for tuition for ‘Maratha’ students in the evenings. As the following advertisement says,

“Attention all Maratha students...the Shri Shivaji Maratha School is organizing special coaching from Monday 23/1/1922 in the evenings from 7 pm to 8.30 pm daily. free of charge for classes fourth to seventh. Contact R.awaji Yevle (Secretary) , A.A Gavandi (Maths), R.S Surve (B.A) R.D Khaire (B.A) will take English. R.R Barge and V.M RAn (B.A) will take Sanskrit” (Vijayi Maratha, 1928, 15th May.; 5)

Special ‘Maratha’ guests were invited to deliver lectures that ranged from law to politics to agriculture, health and education. Shripatrao Shinde, editor Vijayi Maratha was invited to discuss ‘Duties of students’ on sat 4th February, 1922. Kirtivanrao Nimbalkar (MLC) was invited to discuss on politics and ‘Maratha’ interests on 10th March, 1924. Vitthal Ramji Shinde, the founder of the Depressed Classes mission was invited to speak of law and society on 17th April 1927 (Vijayi Maratha, Shikshak and Jagruti)

The society was a keen observer of the debates taking place within the provincial legislature not only in the Bombay Province but across provinces in India.

“The injustice on Marathas; There are only two sectors military and police for kshtriya related castes such as Marathas... in the recent recruitment drive not even one selected. Fauzdar, inspector, Deputy police inspector, Sub inspector, Assistant Police Sub inspector were filled up with minority caste members...we are taking up this matter with the authorities. Signed Gangajirao Mukundrao Kalbhor (MLC)” (Vijayi Maratha, 1933, 13th February; 5)

Similarly in the Bombay legislative assembly one Mr. Swami Aiyyar was criticized on the ground that he spoke of making education compulsory for the enrolment in the military. (Vijayi Maratha, 1922; 28th January; 2)
The Society was also working in tandem with the MVPS (of Nashik) in setting up boardings and conferences for the ‘Maratha’ students. ‘Maratha’ entrepreneurs such as Shankarrao Kadam Kanaladkar, Bhausaheb Hiray, Kakasaheb Wagh, and Annasaheb Murkute of the MVPS were part of the advisory committee of the SSMS. In the 1920’s, the MVPS and the SSMS discourse on ‘who the Marathas’ are becomes an important means of reimagining and perceiving the notion of ‘Maratha’. This discourse gradually draws boundaries of inclusion and exclusion—the perception that the peasant Kunbis may be accepted as ‘Maratha’ begins to gain credibility. The ideology that the ‘Maratha’ is inclusive of peasant and as kshtriya traits gradually finds a place in the public imagination. As one of the speakers at the All India Maratha Education Conference held at Pune contends,

“...who are the Marathas? We definitely have had a long history of war with intervening periods of peace. In times of peace, the Marathas cultivated their lands and during war took to their kshtriya dharma. We must convey our history to the masses. The Brahmins have distorted our history...don’t we know how the Peshwas treated us? It is this city that was once the heart of Brahmin domination, but today we can see how it is no longer true...” (Jagruti, 24th March, 1923; 2)

It is interesting to note that the SSMS was extremely vigilant about how the notion of ‘Maratha’ was interpreted by ‘non-Maratha’ community especially in pedagogic practices. For instance Keshavrao Jedhe’s close associate Baburao Dhane from Satara took a strong view to the ‘casual’ use of the term ‘Maratha’ in the text book meant for Matriculate students.

“History is not novel writing; ...how can any knowledgeable person write a history text book meant for the matriculate students. Professor B.J Vaswani has written- ‘The numbers of confederacy belonged to different casts. Peshwas were Brahmins, Scindia and Holkars were Shudras. Bhosale was Kshtriya. These separated them...’ Professor G.M Chiplunkar a respectable Maratha has in his Gyanprakash given a lot of details. Jati is not on birth but on karma. Those who perform the role of a kshtriya such as Shinde and Holkar how can they be shudras? We have sent a warning to Professor B.J Vaswani and asked him to delete such
rubbish...else we (SSMS) will file a suit against him." (Viajyi Maratha, 5th February, 1922; 5)

In the 1920s, the SSMS were specific in their imaginings of who the ‘Marathas’ were. This is borne out of the fact that the SSMS was also involved in inaugurating a weekly called ‘Shiv Chattapati’ in 1922. The owner was Kirtirao Bhimrao Nimbalkar (a nobleman from Phaltan) who was also the Member of the Legislative Council. The editor of the weekly was Keshav Ganesh Bagde who was a member of the legislative Assembly. Both of them were ‘Marathas’. These newspapers were employed to disseminate the ideology that the ‘Marathas’ were kshtriya and that they were distinct from the other non-Brahmin castes. (Vijayi Maratha, 14th January 1922; 3)

In 1922 the Society also set up a book depot called the Shri Shivaji Book Depot that published Bahujan and ‘Maratha’ related literature. They also stocked books which were sent to different parts of the Bombay province and adjacent areas. The book depot was within the premises of the School. (Vijayi Maratha, 1922; 12th March; 5)

The SSMS provided the necessary logistical support for this enterprise. Keshavrao Jedhe, Shankarrao More, Baburao Jagtap were closely associated with this weekly and through this media they were able to reach ‘Marathas’ in Pune. They published several articles invoking the ‘martial’ spirit of the ‘Marathas’. The weekly overtime became one of the mouth pieces of the Society (others being Vijayi Maratha, Hunter and Jagruti). The society also began publishing a magazine called Shikshak (teacher) that raised issues regarding agriculture, health, rules that can be useful for the rural folk and entertainment. This magazine was edited by Baburao Jagtap who was the principal of the SSMHS.

The SSMS also sometimes involved the colonial administrators to legitimize this discourse of kshtriyness. For instance while inaugurating the Maratha boarding at Phaltan (Satara), the SSMS together with MVPS invited the District collector Mayer for laying the foundation stone. Kirtivanrao Nimbalkar (MLC) together
with Jedhe and other ‘Maratha’ members were present. Mayer was offered pan and supari (Betal nut), garlanded and most importantly he adorned the ‘Maratha’ pheta (turban). He was also presented with a sword. A display of ‘martial’ skills in the form of dandpatta (a kind of long flexible sword) and bhalaphek (fighting with spears) among other sporting activities took place. Mayer, praised the martial spirit of the Marathas and added,

“I was in Sindh during the World War I and it was there that I actually came to respect the tradition of the Marathas... Maratha means strong and tough... They mix easily, and are fearless and straight forward. Day before yesterday we inaugurated the war memorial for the soldiers of WWI in Pune...there were so many Maratha heroes' (Vijayi Maratha, 1922, 1st January; 4)

The use of symbols and signs such as the ‘Maratha’ pheta, display of martial past through performance and through exhibition of war arms, the singing of powadas among others was one of the ways in which Jedhe and his compatriots created a discourse of who the ‘Marathas’ are. The statue of Shivaji was another important way of displaying a kshtriya identity. They also urged the state to nurture the ‘Maratha’ community by providing opportunities for them in the military and the public services.

The SSMS together with the All India Maratha Conference organized a meet in Pune in 1919. The statement, published in the Jagruti issue of 1 March 1919 was directed as much at the Maratha community as to the colonial government:

“The Conference of course expresses its loyal support [to the government] and expresses delight about the victory in the recent war. In battlefields across the world, brave Maratha heroes displayed their dazzling Kshatriya qualities in this war. Along with this report, therefore, we put forward a request that the Marathas be allowed to play a greater role in the army and display their military qualities, and that some educational institutions, especially a college be established to allow them to further develop these qualities.”

The high school was also a site of matrimonial engagements. On Sundays when the school was closed, its premises was used as Maratha vadhu-var suchak kendra.
(marriage fixing centre). Matrimonial classifieds were published in the newspapers such as the Vijayi Maratha, Shikshak, Jagruti, Hunter and the meeting place was the high school for prospective brides and grooms and their parents and relatives. There are instances of marriages being conducted in the premises of the school. The premises of the school were rented out to all non-Brahmin castes. It is interesting to note that the Maratha vadhu-var suchak kendra in the early 1920s made distinctions between high and low ‘Maratha’ and Kunbi. This continued to be made even after Kunbis were enumerated as Marathas in 1931. For instance an advertisement in 1935 states

“Maratha girl wanted. Should be fair, healthy, adept at home keeping...she should be in the age group of 12 to 14...she should belong to the shannaukuli (96 lineage) Maratha lineage...The boy is a Jamadar in the military ...belongs to a Deshmukh lineage, sub caste is Ghorpade...please write to Sambhajirao Deshmukh... or send details to Maratha vadhu-var suchak kendra, Shivaji Maratha School...”(Jagruti. 1935, 7th September; 2)

It becomes clear from the advertisement that the ‘higher’ the family, the stronger the patriarchal values. For instance the age from 12-14 means that the girl is usually not past her schooling (if at all she is educated), the idea that she should be homely, meaning that the purdah rule applies. The advertisement portrays how a ‘Maratha’ woman is imagined.

“Matrimony-Kedgaon (Satara) headmaster Krishnarao Laxmanrao Babar’s son Shivajirao Lance Naik, paltan-102, Grenediers please send details to Maratha vadhu-var suchak Kendra at Shivjai Maratha School, Pune or write to .... Dr. Appasaheb Annasaheb Kosle, Tasgaon” (Vijayi Maratha, 1925, 24th December; 7)

The School was also the site of anti-Brahmin protest. The protest took newer forms. For instance, during the Ganesh festival (inaugurated by Tilak) in Pune the School organized ‘popular’ cultural activities such as Tamashas (village folk drama) and Lazim (musical instrument) competetions. Satyashodhak tamashas followed the traditional form but with a new content. Thus, the traditional tamasha opened with an invocation to Ganpati, with an implication of support for
this traditional Brahman deity; however Satyashodhak leaders, according to one, counteracted this by explaining that the actual meaning was from gan or people and pati or leader and that it thus represented an invocation of the people as the source of rule. The second part, a dialogue involving Krishna’s encounter with milkmaids, was transformed into an encounter of the hero Satyaji with village Brahmin women, with sophisticated language is replaced by insulting and challenging language often leading to a dialogue on Brahmin tyranny. The traditional drama section features plays concerning the efforts of Brahmins and sometimes sowcars (moneylenders) to cheat innocent but generous peasants, while songs invoking opposition to caste and religious superstition and the oppression of the peasants were added. (Jagruti, 1927, 29th September; 3 and Vijayi Maratha 1923, 15th October; 4)

The school curricula endeavoured to sponsor ‘martial’ games. From the school archives I was able to get a glimpse of the sports activities. In the 1920s sports such as wrestling, malkhamb, Attya Paddya (similar to kabbadi) were common. It was not compulsory but students interested in it could pursue these sports. Some students who excelled in these sports were also granted special scholarships. They were even sent to Rajaram College (which was established by Shahu Maharaj in Kolhapur) for training purposes. Some students were encouraged to join local talims (gymkhana for wrestling and other similar sports). Pamphlets advertising certain important wrestling matches in Pune and the adjoining Kolhapur, Satara, Nashik and Ahmednagar were publicly displayed. (Internal files, minutes and pamphlets of the school from 1920 to 1955)

The SSMS critiqued the Deccan Gymkhana as being representative of the Brahmins only and commented that the sports that the Gymkhana promoted had no sense of ‘popular culture’ – they argued that the sports practices at the Deccan gymkhana were ‘western’ such as cricket, tennis, football. They did not have ‘traditional’ sports such as kusti (wrestling), Malkhamb and other ‘masculine’ sports.
For instance this news article interrogates Brahmin domination in civic spaces,

"Gymkhana ka Goshakhana (Gymkhana or private purdah system)...the Deccan gymkhana chief officer- Bhagwat purchased land at low price...constructed new buildings...new sports but not for the rural people. It has become an exclusive club... But the gymkhana is a public space. There are only Brahmin members... No place for palkhi (religious procession of Lord Vithal in which large number of individuals participate)" (Vijayi Maratha, 1922; 22 February; 3)

Similarly the “Society” with the help of grants from the AIMEC and patrons (Kolhapur, Baroda, Devas, Gwalior) organized many ‘Mardani’ (Masucline) sporting events across the Bombay Provinces. They even invited some professional wrestlers from Punjab and other regions just to impress upon the youth and also collect funds for scholarships for poor ‘Marathas; (Jagruti, 1927, 22nd August; 3 , Vijayi Maratha, 1930; 19th July; 6)

In the 1930s Jedhe and his ‘Maratha’ associates joined the Congress party. The 1930s onwards the school becomes the site of Congress related activities though the Satyashodhak and anti-brahmin activities are still part of the ethos. The peasant imaginations of ‘Maratha’ become much more common. The school becomes the site of many peasant related conferences, meetings and contestations. The uniform of the school is now khadi clothes and the school and its management is now involved in the Nationalist movement. (Archives and minutes of the school staff, 1930s)

In the late 1930s and the early 1940s, the kshatriya ‘Maratha’ imagining is revived when the WWII begins and many recruitment related activities are undertaken in the school premises.

“Public notice: all able Maratha youth are requested to attend this meet at Shivaji high school...in the past the Marathas have contributed largely to the British Sarkar by joining the military in large numbers...this is our tradition...we must take this opportunity and prove once more that we are true warrior caste...we have fought right up to Mesopotamia and North western frontier province in the past...we have taken up arms only when
intruders take our land...otherwise we are peaceful peasants." (Jagruti, 1941; 17th June; 5)

By the early 1930s after a large number of Maratha leaders joined the Congress party led by Keshavrao Jedhe, the Society’s discourse shifted from that of kshtriya to that of peasant imaginings. After joining the nationalist movement the Society members became more and more critical of the colonial policies.

"Shetkari and Sowkar (Peasant and the Moneylender)...meetings to discuss the nature of exploitation taking place...to send a memorandum to the government pleading to intervene...conferences that will be held at village level so that the peasants become aware of their rights and also so that we can put an end to this cruelty." (Vijayi Maratha, 1936, 28th September; 2)

The Society also took keen interest in the states development policies with regards to agriculture. The irrigation committees set up by the Bombay provincial government was debated within the council and outside it. (reports of the irrigation committee, 1920 to 1938; Bombay)

The ‘quit India’ movement also became a rallying point whereby large numbers of peasants and rural population participated in it. Pune was one of the centres and the School became one of the sites of mobilization. The ‘Prati Sarkar’ (parallel government) in Satara was also receiving support from the Society. Nana Patil the leader of the parallel government was later associated with the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP).

After independence the Society continued to play an important role in organizing the peasantry through the PWP. The school became one of the primary sites where meetings of the PWP took place. The School produced many of the local level leadership from Pune. Baburao Sanas, the first Mayor of Pune (1952) was associated with the school. The School also produced many bureaucrats, police officers, lower functionaries in public offices, cooperative leaders among others. During the Samyukata Maharashtra Movement (SMM) the School was actively used to propagate the idea of a separate Maharashtra State. (Interviews)
The school and legacy provided many of the alumni the symbolic, cultural and social capital to enter the field of politics. Personalities such as Shivajirao Dhere (MLA), Sambhaji Kakade (corporator), Shankarrao Nimhan (corporator) among others benefitted from the legacy of the institution.

To conclude what role did the Society and School play during the colonial and post colonial period that may have facilitated the ‘Maratha’ caste members to benefit from? After interviewing many actors associated with the Society and School and also through examination of the data, it emerges that the Society really organized a discourse that became the dominant discourse (which was also accepted by the 1931 census) that the ‘Maratha’ is a caste group that includes the peasant Kunbis also. Through this legitimation the social imaginary that the Marathas are peasant based emerges from the late 1920s onwards. With more devolution of authority to the indigenous actors in the form of provincial autonomy, this imaginary was organized as social capital to form a political bloc. Thus, after independence when the field of power was directly correlated to number of votes, the Maratha leadership could muster the necessary numbers by appealing to this social imaginary of the Marathas.

An alternate Social imaginary of ‘Maratha’: Shri Shivaji Preparatory Military School (SSPMS)

Shri Shivaji Preparatory Military School (SSPMS) was inaugurated in 1932 in Pune. It was one of the few military boarding schools in India. This School was organized by the All India Shri Shivaji Memorial society (AISSMS) which was established in the year 1917 through a funding by Shahu Maharaj, Gaikwad of Baroda, Tukojirao Holkar of Indore and the Scindias of Gwalior. The AISSMS inaugurated this school through an effort of the royal families to establish educational institutions that would emulate British public education. It was also meant to propagate an elitist kind of discourse about the kshtriya past of the ‘Marathas’. This is amply demonstrated in the aims and objectives of the school’s preamble.
“This school is meant to prepare students to enroll as officers in the British Indian Army...the school envisages a strict disciplinary and public school culture...it will be a boarding school and the students will be trained in British etiquettes, manners...the medium of language will be English...we hope to train many Maratha youth so that they can enter the military” (SSPMS, Objectives of the School; 2)

In 1932, Rajaram Maharaj (successor of Shahu) of Kolhapur was responsible in deciding the utilization of the building of the ‘Memorial Hall’ for the military school. The total area of the campus is 17 acres. The classes were started on 20 June 1932 with a total of 15 students. The school began from 4th standard and ended at matriculation. The main activities of the school were to impart military training and thus included regimentation of the body through physical training (western exercises), horse riding, rifle shooting, military drills, military band among others. A military instructor (retired honorary Captain) Hambirrao Mohite was appointed as the Bursor of the school and the principal was one Mr. Limbaji Khanolkar who belonged to a royal family in Kolhapur. (internal documents of the school). As this advertisement in the vernacular press,

“ As special school for the Maratha students. The school in Pune is going to specially train students in military culture. The All India Maratha Education Society with the help of Chhatrapati Rajaram Maharaj has inaugurated this school...this school is open for admission to all and there are even special scholarships for poor students.” (Vijayi Maratha, 5th June 1932;4)

However the school was really meant for students who could afford education here. The school even though inaugurated under the banner of the AISSMS had different aims and objectives. Having interviewed many associated people and reviewed the internal documents of the school it became clear that this was an enterprise of the ‘Khandani’ (feudal) ‘Maratha’ group to organize a civic institution that would cater to the needs of the rich ‘Maratha’ families. The fees in the 1930s per annum were Rs. 600 which was very high in those days. The idea
was to train and groom ‘Maratha’ with a specific form of embodied cultural capital i.e. military training. Some of the newspapers covered this project,

“The SSPMS is a school meant to create military officers. The Marathas must take the opportunity to join this school...there are even scholarships offered by the Maharaja of Kolhapur and Gwalior...it is the first Maratha public boarding school” (Vijayi Maratha, 1932, 12th August; 3)

In interviews with Captain Shivaji Mahadkar, the secretary of the AISSMS and the principal of the school said

“The uniform of the school was ‘western’ outfit. Blazers, neckties, shirts and pants. Sports included cricket (which was deemed to be a gentleman’s game), polo, tennis and football. These students were to speak in English all the time. The idea was to create a class of students who would be easily absorbed by the military colleges King George Indian Military Colleges (KGRIMC, established in 1920s). This was to be a feeder channel to these colleges”

The school records from 1932 to 1947 showed that the students primarily belonged to rich ‘Maratha’ families. The students came from all across India by the early 1940s. There were also cases of a few students from humbler backgrounds but managed to stay on due to scholarships. In the first couple of years since its inception the total strength of the school varied from 30 to 60 per annum. It was only in the 1940s that the strength of the students crossed 100.

Starting from its inception most of the students successfully enrolled in the KGRIMCs and later joined the military. A few of them became bureaucrats, Forest officers, Mamlatdars, Deputy District Collectors among others. It is pertinent to mention that candidates for the Indian Civil Service had to pass a riding test, Forest Officers duties included shooting animals such as tigers, elephants, and crocodiles, which posed a threat to persons, livestock, and property, and many officials regularly trekked through rugged terrain on tours of their districts. (School records 1932-1950)
In an interview with the a few pass outs of the school, offered an extended understanding. They were students of this school for a short duration in 1940s and some in 1950s,

"A discipline regimen set by the British and their ways became a part of our learning. Three meals a day, eating with a spoon, fork and a knife and even though the food served was 'Indian'. Though at times during breakfast we had bread, butter, eggs etc. We had physical training in the morning and sports in the evening. Some days were kept aside for inspection. Sometimes British officers used to visit our school and dormitories. It was an all round development- we had to learn history, mathematics, science, geography etc. We were also trained in military drills."

I interviewed members of the managing committee of the AISSMS such as Yuvraj Sambhajiraje Chhatrapati and Maharaj Malojiraje Chhatrapati of Kolhapur, Shinde Tukaram, Dilip Umbarkar, Rajkumar Patil, Ruturaj Tekawade and Uttamrao Patil on the aims and objectives of founding this institution. I also perused through the documents of the AISSMS to examine the ideology of the Society and also the practices that were inaugurated to make the project successful. The idea was to educate a very small elite section of the ‘Marathas’ and make them a reference group. But who were the ‘Marathas’ according to this ideology? Malojiraje Chhatrapati of Kolhapur who is the president of the Society contended,

"All those individuals who have a past ‘martial’ history are Marathas. So even the Holkars though considered generally as Dhangars are really Maratha because their families have been Sardars (chieftans in the past). They were great military chiefs in the past. But it is not only kings and military chiefs who are Marathas but all those with a ‘martial’ background who had served in the army of Chattrapati Shivaji Maharaj are entitled to be called Marathas."

From the records of the school it became clear that the students came not only from the Deccan region alone but from all parts of colonial India. Students from Rajasthan, Punjab, Baroda, Gwalior, Indore amongst others. In the earlier years of its foundation the school was an exclusive institution that catered to educational
(military) needs of boys who had ‘martial’ background i.e. Rajput, Dogra, Sikh, Pathan and Deccan Musalman besides the ‘Marathas’. The students were not from aristocratic families but from families that served in the government of the aristocrats. Many (from 1932 to 1947, 55 joined the military as NCOs). of the pass outs from this school went on to graduate from the various branches of the King George Royal Indian Military Academy (RIMC) to later enroll in the Military as Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs). Some of them joined the civil services and were promoted as Mamlatdars. Some joined the British Indian Forest service and still others joined the various branches of the public services.

After independence this institution lost its importance and was deemed to just any other educational institution. Though royal patronage continued, it did not attract students from ‘martial’ background anymore. One of the primary reasons for this was that the field of power had changed and the British military was now replaced by the Indian military. The field of military now demanded new kind of cultural capital and ceased to recognize the ‘martial’ credentials. In the post independence period the School lost its relevance as new specialize military schools inaugurated and funded by the state (such as Sainik schools) were established.

In the post independence period from 1947 to 1960 the royal patronage decreased and only continued in the form of symbolism and grants which were now in terms of scholarships and grants which were much curtailed and sporadic. Also during this period the School was gradually opened for admission to just about any ‘Maratha’. The School became a site of political mobilization during the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement (SMM) in the mid 1950s. After 1960, when the State of Maharashtra was inaugurated it received state patronage. Y.B. Chavan inaugurated a huge statue of Shivaji on the Campus and also agreed to merge the School within the State educational curricula. Some token grants were disbursed to the School.
Bourdieu’s (1978, 1988, 1990) groundbreaking work on sport sought to demonstrate how different classes and class fractions embody (often unconsciously) their points of honour and schemes of evaluation in their sporting practices 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. He sees sport training as a bodily practice in which the performer strives to reach a state where complex movements and responses become second nature. At this point these movements are embedded in the body beyond the reach of the conscious mind in a process through which the logic of the field in which the individual trains and plays comes to saturate the body. 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.

The field of sport appears to go against the intellectualist and aesthetic aspects of many high cultural and higher educational activities. Doesn’t sport represent the lowbrow side of the body versus mind, mass versus elite distinctions that are institutionalized in modern culture forms? And if it does, how can sport be used to draw culturally exclusive boundaries? A key to answering this puzzle lies in Bourdieu’s (1992), conception of gendered intra-class distinctions within the dominant classes. As Bourdieu (1978) posits

“ As the dominant fractions of the dominant class always tend to conceive their relationship to the dominated fraction- ‘intellectuals,’ ‘artists,’
‘professors’- in terms of the opposition between male and female, the virile and the effeminate….one understands one of the most important implications of the exaltation of sport…” (Bourdieu, 1978: 826)

The underlying principle of distinction according to Bourdieu (1984) is that the dominant classes cultivate the body for its own sake while the “popular” (working class and lower middle classes) treat the body as an instrument used towards some other end (as in giving up or sacrificing one’s body). (Bourdieu, 1984)

Bourdieu’s work on cultural capital can be seen as providing a fourfold typology that begins with asceticism and luxury as the elementary forms of cultural distancing. In the field of culture the two opposing principles are

“...luxury, as the manifestation of distance from necessity, or asceticism, as self-imposed constraint, two contrasting ways of defying nature, need, appetite, desire;... the unbridled squandering which only highlights the privations of ordinary existence, and the ostentatious freedom of gratuitous expense or the austerity of elective restriction” (Bourdieu, 1984:254-5).

These two principles can take either ‘elementary’ or ‘aristocratic’ forms. Aristocratic forms restrain or aesthetizicize asceticism or luxury by cutting out the excesses or immature enthusiasm for either principle or lead to applying the principles with greater ease, restraint and authoritativeness. (Wacquant, 1998)

Using Bourdieu’s (1984, 1990) theory, we would expect those with high levels of cultural capital to be drawn to more ascetic bodily practices and those with more economic capital to be drawn to sports that straightforwardly represent wealth, status, and power, and to use sports to embody and display personal qualities like a will to win, drive, grace under pressure, and sportsmanship that are sometimes grouped together as “character.” Although most sports can be approached in an ascetic manner, the so-called “fitness” sports that emphasize working and sacrificing to reshape the body, and to increase one’s energy and “health” most closely fit the ascetic principle. (Bourdieu, 1984)
Competitive sports that entail straightforwardly pursuing and displaying dominance and status, especially the ones that require great cost and provide opportunities for displaying wealth and status fit the luxury principle. We would expect that the dominant fractions will be drawn to or develop "aristocratic" forms of sport participation to draw boundaries between their lifestyles and those of the lower middle classes. Among ascetic sports a key dividing line should be between the sports that emphasize beauty and strength vs. sports that pursue more abstract and restrained goals of "health" and inner control of the body (cultivating the body for its own sake). Among luxury sports, the dividing lines should come in quantitative terms of how much wealth and status is being displayed and/or the dominant class sports should restrain the level of direct physical contact and violence between competitors (restraining straightforward domination and drawing the line of civilized/uncivilized exercises of power). (Bourdieu, 1988 and 1992)

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?

Alter (1992) argues that as social institutions such as caste have been thoroughly studied in their own terms, it is necessary to ask what cultural and social phenomena transcend these traditionally defined institutions. What aspects of social life do not fit so neatly or consistently onto the existing intellectual grid? How do these phenomena provide new insight into understanding caste and caste system? Anthropologists and other social scientists have traditionally attempted to assess caste system in its totality. But parts of the whole have not yet been compared against one another?

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) or the sporting sites 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. (Alter, 1992) 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. For instance, wrestling is not restricted to any one class of people; it is neither rural nor urban. In general, it tends to defy simple classification. However, to say that wrestling is not primarily a caste phenomenon or that it is not completely subsumed within religious, economic, or political systems is not to say that it is irrelevant to these spheres of life; quite the contrary.

During the colonial period certain ‘traditional’ sports possessed symbolic and cultural value especially when the state inaugurated the concept of martial race. The British had begun mapping cultural activities of the indigenous actors and a process of hierarchisation in terms of ‘preferred’ value system emerged. In this classification, certain ‘traditional’ sports such as wrestling, horse riding, marksmanship among many others came to be recognised as ‘martial’ and ‘preferred’ by the colonial state. Communities and individuals associated with such sports (that cultivated physical endurance and discipline of the body) were now at an advantage over others as they were able to get employed with this ‘cultural’ capital in services that supposedly required these skills—such as the military and para military forces.

There are some *talims* and *akhadas* also all over the district which are traditional centres for training athletes, wrestlers and gymnasts and generally they provide facilities for exercise and physical culture. A *talim* is usually managed by a committee of *panchas* or notables of the locality concerned. A *talim* is conducted by one or two senior persons known as *ustads* or masters who are much respected by their disciples. As trainer-gymnasts they train young people who come to the *talim* for exercise and for learning wrestling and other athletic arts. In villages, the local temple of *Maruti* (Hanuman) usually serves the purpose of the gymnasium.
but in towns, a *talim* usually has a building of its own. In its necessary paraphernalia could be included *lathis, bothatis, farigadga, lezims, dandpattas, malakhab, karela, jod-jodis, hate*, heavy stone-balls and *nalis* (stone wheels) and sometimes dumbbells and modern weight-lifting apparatus. Usually every *talim* has *hauda* (wrestling arena). Sometimes, a talim also has open ground attached to it as a play-field.

**The Talims (gymnasiums)**

The *talims* (a Persian word meaning a sports training centre, popularly associated with wrestling) have a long history in Western India. Some of the *talims* dates back to the time of Shivaji while some others to the time of Peshwas and some during the colonial period. I examine some *talims* in Kolhapur and Pune and trying to analyze the importance of these talims in organizing various forms of capital that an individual or group may use for the various fields.

The ‘martial’ race concept together with the urge to be recognized as kshtriya, the membership of *talims* became an important means through which the ‘Marathas’ imagined themselves. With the colonial rule taking root in the Deccan, some sections of the indigenous actors began to adapt to the British culture. These sections embraced westernization and this is reflected in their dressing, sporting activities, education, art and other forms of culture. For instance in Pune, the Deccan Gymkhana represented the western kind of sporting activities that ranged from cricket, to polo, to golf and tennis.

In contrast to these kind of ‘western’ sports, a ‘traditional’ sporting institution survives and was patronized by the ‘Maratha’ princes during the colonial rule. Why did these ‘traditional’ structures survive? What role did they play in assigning specific kind of identities?

I argue that the colonial state in order to justify their claims of ‘martial’ races, documented and legitimized certain ‘traditional’ sports as manly and masculine, a
desirable identity to possess. The colonial state through its racial classification introduced the notion of ‘martial’ and ‘effeminate’ bodies.

For instance, Major Betham (in his military hand book on Deccani Musalams and Marathas, 1908) draws on the innate relationship between ‘martial’ spirit and ‘manliness’ or the physique,

“The Marathas of the Dekhan are dark, seldom tall, with round faces, straight noses, thickish lips an high , bare and protruding cheek bones.
They are strong, hardy, enduring and muscular” (Betham, 1908; 76)

Similarly he describes why the Dekhani Marathas are hardy- because the physiographic necessities of the area conditions one’s body to be tough,

“ The Dekhani Marathas are a hardy race, pursuing agriculture almost exclusively. The Dekhan plains being an area of extremely uncertain rainfall, their condition is exposed to grave vicissitudes and though the soil is richly productive in good years, they are innured to privations arising from failure of harvest. The Dekhani, and his work cattle, alike, will live on food on which Guzeratis and inhabitants of other richer tracts of country could not exist...In Konkan-Ghat- Mahta the rainfall is regular and abundant, but the soil and crops are inferior. Shivaji’s best troops, Mawalis, were drawn from here; they were and still are, tough and wiry as a hard life and a hard country can alone make them. The Dekhani cultivator is, for the most part, backward in education and culture.” (Betham, 1908;73-74)

Taking this argument further, the colonialists argue that such a ‘tempered’ body and mind of an individual is the right mix of what is required for the military,

“ ...Dekhani Marathas are hardworking, temperate, hospitable, fond of their children and kind to strangers...they are illiterate, not many being able to read or write.... Though not particularly sharp they are minutely informed of everything relating to their calling; they are fond of talk and many have a fair knowledge of their country. They are better informed and more orderly than many other agricultural classes. They are mild-tempered, forgiving, seldom violent or cruel except in revenge. They are indulgent to their women and most attached to their children...Disputes about land often split a village into factions and give rise to quarrels and
fights...Their timidity makes them prefer stratagem to force. Still when roused they are not without courage and are by no means contemptible enemies.” (Betham, 1908; 73)

And now finally legitimating this discourse by stating the this ‘masculinity’ and ‘manliness’ is due to the process of socialization through sporting activities,

“Wrestling is a very favorite pastime with Marathas of the Dekhan. In a very large number of villages, there are houses regularly built and set apart for wrestling, where boys and men perform. At the Annul Fairs and on holidays and great occasions wrestling is indulged in, matches are arranged and prizes offered. The whole country side flocks to these entertainment and evince great interest in them.” (Betham, 1908; 78)

He adds,

“Another form of amusement is the ‘Malkhmb’. A pole is set in the ground on which hey climb and perform various evolutions...Dekhnis are very fond of lifting heavy weights and rolling big stone balls about. All this physical exercise stands them in good stead when they join their corps (military units). They take readily to gymnastics, hockey, etc...In the Konkan, Marathas are not so addicted to physical exercise, which places them at a disadvantage when enlisted, but they are very fond of organizing fights between bull buffaloes...” (Betham, 1908; 78)

It is in this respect that the ‘talims’ became important sites for cultivating this form of ‘masculine’ embodied cultural capital. Kolhapur as a princely state was famous for talims and was well known for producing some of the well known wrestlers of those times. Some of them are as old as Shivaji’s time and some were inaugurated during Shahu’s reign in the late 19th century. In Kolhapur, the Gangave (1882), Motibaug (1886), Shahupuri (1886), Khasbaug, Maidan (1890) and Khondaba (1913) are the oldest. I took these talims as case studies to understand how they became sites that provided cultural capital. (Kustigir Parishad prakashan, n.d, Pune)

On entering the talims one of the first impression one gets is through the pictures and photos hanging on the wall. It has pictures of gods (Hanuman also called Maruti), Shivaji, Sambhaji (Shivaji’s son) taming a tiger with his bare hands,
Shahu of Kolhapur, photos of pehalwans among others. Shivaji, Sambhaji and Shahu are usually shown bare till the waist is shown to be extremely muscular.

Though my interviews with *phelwans* (wrestlers) Shripati Khanchnale, Ganpat Andalkar, Maruti Mane, Harishchandra Birajdar and Yuvraj Patil (all of them are ‘Maharashtra Kesri’ title holders- the best wrestler title in the State) and many others in these talims, I learnt the following.

Individuals of all social (caste) categories and religions joined talims as it served certain interests. For instance many of the individuals during the colonial period joined talims as it provided the individuals with a support system. In earlier times many of the inter and intra familial discords over land and other related property, led to physical fights and sometimes even to murder. The individual could not look up to the ‘*ustad*’ and his ‘guru bandhus’ (colleagues) to help him out in times of trouble. The ‘*ustads*’ were also very well recognised publicly.

These *talims* were not only training centers of kusti (wrestling) as is the contemporary ‘popular’ understanding. Many other ‘masculine’ and ‘martial’ sports such as *bhala phek* (throwing of spear), *dand patta* (a special sword used for warfare), *veet phek* (throwing of stones) *lathi mar* (use of stick to defend), *malkhamb* (pole gymnastics), *bothatis* (martial art), *farigadga* (stone with a belt around the neck), *jod-jodi* (weight training), *hatte* (heavy stone-balls) and *nalis* (stone wheels) were practiced at the *talims*. Moti Baug and Khaus baug *talims* also had horse riding and *satmari* (elephant fights). (Interviews and Shahu diaries)

Shahu the Maharaja of Kolhapur was himself interested in these martial sports and especially wrestling. During his reign from 1884 to 1922 he patronized many wrestlers. From the Kolhapur *daftars* (office) this becomes clear,

“Catering to the food needs of the Pehalwans... In Panhala these pehalwans food requirement- advance money- the annual bills to be submitted to the new Rajwada. Rs. 6 to Usman and Sileman Pehlawan, Rs 6 for Fakira and Mohedeen Punjabi- total Rs. 12.” (Shahu Maharaj special orders, private account, order no; 196, 30th November, 1894; 5)
"Free new place for Pehalwans...In Shahpuri the trader lane no: 15/16 place to be given to Gyanu Gaikwad and Dhondi Jadhav Pehalwan (Shahu Maharaj special orders, Shahapuri order no: 290, 31 October, 1913)

Shahu also wanted these sports to be taught in the Rajaram College (which was inaugurated in 1882 in the name of his predecessor)

"To recruit teacher (Pehalwan)... Budi and Juma Pehalwan panjabi- selected for talim in Shri Rajaram College. To be paid from the Army fund workers.” (Shahu Maharaj special orders, private account, order no; 210, 29th September, 1913)

It was not only wrestlers that he patronized,

"Dandpatta teacher- Bala Nalavade...increment of Rs. 2 per month now Rs.8” (Shahu Maharaj special orders, private account, order no: 267, Volume 2, 29th September 1918)

These talims were also centres of military recruitment. The colonial government wanted to recruit Dekhani ‘Marathas’ in large numbers as they were deemed as a martial race. For instance during the first world war, the British approached Shahu and requested him to urge the ‘abled’ Marathas to serve in the colonial Army.

"Military recruitment... increasing the moral of people and urging ‘talims’ to send people to join the military.” (Shahu Maharaj special orders, World war tharav no: 26; 5th May 1918; 273)

The phelwans and other martial artists were also employed in large numbers in the personal army of Shahu Maharaj. The army was called as the Rajaram Army and was merged with the Indian army in 1947 as the ‘Maratha’ infantry as the first Jungi Paltan.” (Shahu Maharaj special orders, 19th January, 1910, 23rd May 1912, 6th January, 1913 no: 12, 45, 167)

The colonial government also sought to recruit some of the members of the talims directly.

" The tehsildars of each taluka must approach the talims to mobilize recruitment for the military...Maratha pehelwans preferred...other
The talims were thus sites of recruitment for the prince's army and also the colonial army. Individuals who trained at the talims and with some degree of literacy were easily able to find employment. Here the training of the body and discipline can be deemed as embodied cultural capital.

During the nationalist struggle the Talims also served the role of 'samajik Mandals (social trusts and organisations) around which festivals and popular cultural activity such as Shivaji festival, Ganesh festival, Dushera among others began to gain momentum. The ustads now became important public figures. After independence these talims even campaigned for some of the political leaders.

After independence these talims lost royal patronage and after 1960, were patronized by the Maharashtra. Instances of Vasant dada Patil, the chief Minister of Maharashtra patronized Dinanath Singh, one of India's and Kolhapur's legendary wrestlers. (Sakal, 7th November, 1978)

However after independence the value of the talim decreased. It no longer was deemed as important site of providing cultural capital meant for military recruitment. As the field of power got transformed in the post colonial period so did the fortunes of the talims changed. Talims now instead 'samajik Mandals (social trusts and organisations) continue to exist.

In Pune, four talims that I examined were the Nimbalkar talim (1908), Khajinavhir talim (1910), Gulche talim (1912) and Chinchechi talim (1915) (Kustigir Parishad prakashan, n.d, Pune). All talims in Pune were divided under two very famous vastads- Shivram dada vastad and Jagoba dada Vastad. The first vastad's influence was in East Pune region and the others in the West Pune region. The famous vastads in Pune during the early 20th century were vastad Gulam Datagir (Chandu bhai dada vastad talim) and Rambhau Ganpatrao Agarwale and Mahmudbhai Pahilwan, Shivram dada vastad talim). I interviewed Balasaheb Landge, Chimanrao Padwal, Nitin Padwal, Baburao Mohol, Shankar
Thorat, Shantaram Jadhav, Ashok Kondhere, and Shivaji Dhere among others who were part of the Kustigir Parishad. From them I learnt the following.

In Pune these talims in the early 20th century came to be the centres of non-Brahmin movement. Through sports, a new kind of ideology emerged that challenged the Brahmanic hegemony i.e. the binary of intellectuals (mind) vs. ‘traditional’ sportsman (body). These talims had a large presence of ‘Maratha’ youth. The fact that the Brahmin youth were ‘westernizing’ by adopting western sports such as cricket, polo, tennis among others and the non-Brahmins followed the ‘traditional’ sports was crucial in this non-Brahmin imagination. The Deccan Gymkhana epitomized the Brahmin community and way of life and the talims the non-Brahmin way of life.

In the early 1920s these talims were important as they provided youth opportunities to enroll in the military and especially the police force in large numbers. Most of the members belonged to peasant moorings. Some of them used to study during the day and attend the talims in evenings or early mornings. These talims were also closely associated with Jedhe’s Shri Shivaji Maratha society. Some of the high school children were also send here to practice all kinds of ‘martial’ sports. What is interesting is that all these talims are located close to the center of the old city i.e. the Mandai (the vegetable market and very famous because some of Phule’s speeches were made here). Many of the talim youths who were illiterate and poor even took to petty jobs such as coolie work. Some even joined the military in the capacity of private hands and worked as temporary labourers. (Vijayi Maratha, 1921-25)

In the late 1920s and early 1930s these talims also became important sites through which non-Brahmin ideology was disseminated through the formation of Mandals (social clubs, organisations) and became informal gathering centres for the peasants who would come from the outskirts of Pune to sell their merchandise. These peasants were also mobiised by Jedhe and other non-Brahmin actors for the advancement of the Bahujan Samaj activities. By the 1930s these talims became
informal centres of campaigning for the nationalist movement. Some of the members of these talims joined the Congress party during this phase.

In early 1940s these talims were also sites of the quit India movement. However it was in the post independence period that these talims became extremely active demanding a separate State of Maharashtra and now allied with the Peasants and Workers party and later Yashwantrao Chavan led Congress Party.

Post independence period the Mandals became more prominent and soon became sites of social networking for the Congress party. These talims also became the recruiting ground for popular sportman- in sports such as kabbadi, atty padya, kusti among others. Some of the prominent personalities who entered the field of politics in this period were Baburao Sanas (first Mayor of Pune), Mama Saheb Mohol (corporator), and Babanrao Padwal (Mayor), Anna sahib Magar (Mayor) among many others.

These talims when they were transformed as Mandals gave them a social network and funds for these networks which facilitated local level political mobilizations. These Mandals came to be controlled by the ‘Maratha’ dominated Congress party after 1960. Most of the ‘Maratha’ recruitment in politics and other fields requiring special kinds of cultural capital (such as popular sportsman, good orators, and problem solvers) gained political mobility.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored how education and sports were used as strategies by the ‘Marathas’ to take advantage of the changing colonial fields. The case of the AIMEC and the Shri Shivaji Maratha School demonstrate how discourses that urged disparate peasant communities to unite under the social imaginary ‘Marathas’. The AIMEC recognized the importance of educational qualification as a requisite for entry into the colonial fields and urged ‘Marathas’ to educate the youth. Similarly they forwarded the idea of the ‘Martial’ race and ensured that a
sizeable 'Maratha' youth enrolled in the military and paramilitary fields. The School became the site for various kinds of cultural activities ranging from arranging matrimonial alliances to organizing camps for military enrollment to mobilizing the non-Brahmins to addressing problems of the peasantry.

The talims became sites of enculturation of specific forms of masculinity that enabled the 'Marathas' and members of other peasant communities that wished to be included in the 'Maratha' imaginary to accumulate cultural and symbolic capital. These talims were also sites for military and police recruitment. But most importantly these talims were seen as 'peasant' cultural sites in contrast to modern gymnasiums and sports (such as cricket, football, polo, horse riding among others).