Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued and demonstrated why and how Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990, 1998) theorisation of practice, habitus, field and species of capital enables us to comprehend the complexities in societal phenomenon and the ways in which power is organised in society. I invoked his theory of practice/strategies in analysing how the individuals organised into a social imaginary called ‘Marathas’ in the colonial period. I have examined the strategies that were employed by the individuals and groups that facilitated their entry into this group and contend that this group itself did not have a uniform meaning at all points of time and came to mean different imaginings at disparate points of time as the analysis of the discourses suggest. I have also demonstrated how the colonial exercise (through census and affiliated practices) of superimposing real groups into imaginary model got embedded in the language and imagination of the disciplines of anthropology and sociology. On the basis of the strategies and practices that the individuals and groups employed in the ‘Maratha’ case question the structural understanding as caste. This is not to imply that casteism did not exist or that caste as an ideology was not used. I conclude from my field work data that ‘Maratha’ as a group implied many imaginings and these varied imagining organised spaces such that individuals could use strategies to become part of the ‘Marathas’.

In this thesis I set out to examine how ‘modern’ political processes enable individuals and groups (assumed to caste in existing social science terminology) to organise into political formations? And how these formations influence the way power is structured and distributed in society? In order to answer these questions, I examined the existing literature on state and politics in India. This eventually led me to assess how the Indian state was organised and how groups were organised to capture power. As much of the literature on state and politics on India focused on post independent period, meant that I has to examine how colonial rule
organised power and in turn how groups got organised. Additionally the central theme in the literature on state and politics in post independence period consistently focussed on the relationship and interface between caste and politics in India i.e. social groups in this instance were connoted as caste in the existing social science paraphernalia. With this exercise of mapping the discourses on caste and politics emerged a pertinent question. What does the scholarship (Kothari et al, 1970, Frankel and Rao et al, 1989) mean when they construe social groups in the framework of caste? This meant that I had to first draw up the genealogy of how and why the concept of caste got embedded in the social science literature and language i.e. historicizing and contextualising this nomenclature called caste.

I have argued that caste as a concept in social sciences has been objectified and essentialised in that almost all societal phenomenons is visualised through the lens of binaries of endogamy/exogamy, purity/pollution, consanguineous/affinal ties, individual/ community. Caste has also been construed to mean class, gender, tribe, race and ethnicity in disparate contexts. In this thesis I have drawn upon the recent literature (Quigley, 1995, Cohn, 1987, Bayly, 1988 and Dirks, 2001) that contends that the genealogy of the science of cataloguing individuals into groups which were termed as caste is anchored in colonial practices and governmentality.

I have argued that individuals and groups (construed as castes) have been misrecognised and examined in its objective framework employing the structuralist theoretical framework- through rules of exogamy/endogamy, purity/pollution, occupation based ranking among others. I further contend that the existing literature on caste and politics does not address the question of the role of colonial power/knowledge system in legitimating the nomenclature of caste. In doing so, I have argued in this thesis that the large section of the existing social science literature examines caste as a post facto phenomenon, an apriori received notion of what is caste. It is therefore not surprising that the element of temporality is missing in such analysis. From this literature one gets an impression that caste is a timeless, frozen, neatly compartmentalised, compact
monolith that can be quantifiable category. But caste is also a subjective experience.

To question these axioms I asked which theoretical framework can help me overcome this difficulty. I have argued that Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990) concepts such as social capital, habitus, field and practice enable one to circumvent the antimony between the structuralist and phenomenological and ethnomethodological scholarship or the objective versus subjective binary. By invoking Bourdieu’s (1990) theorisation one can bring in the component of time and space i.e. together with structural constraints and agency into the argument. I have argued that this enables one to better understand societal phenomenon which is extremely complex and dynamic. The structuralist scholarship maps the societal phenomenon through an objective lens thereby interrogating social interactions through the prism of rules and regulations- giving an impression of a timeless, frozen societal phenomenon.

In this thesis I have argued that dynamics of individuals and social groups can also be examined through the lens of agency i.e. as strategies. Why and how do actors form groups? How does power shape the organisation of these groups? What are the strategies through which they socially reproduce? What are the circumstances that shape their action? How and why do groups coalesce into large political formations?

I have taken the case study of the ‘Marathas’ to argue that this group (which in social science language and imagination is popularly construed as a caste/caste cluster) was a social imaginary that was organised during the colonial period under certain historical contingent conditions. Today in social science literature, ‘Maratha’ is deemed to be a caste/caste cluster and is construed to exhibit specific rules and regulations relating to marriage, decent, occupation structure among others. I have argued in this thesis that the meanings and imaginations associated with ‘Marathas’ changed from that meaning ‘people of a territorial region’ to that of ‘people of kshtriya heritage’ to that of a peasant group. The boundaries of this
social imaginary 'Marathas' expanded and contracted at various points of time depending on the circumstances. I have argued that the actors employed various strategies such as kinship, kshatriya heritage and peasant culture to become part of this social imaginary 'Marathas'. I further argue that these strategies by these actors were misrecognised by scholars (Karve, 1953, Sirsikar, 1970, Lele, 1982, 1990, Palshikar, 1994, 2002, Vora, 1996, Deshpande 1998, Deshpande and Palshikar, 2008) as rules thereby reinforcing the notion that this group is caste. It is in this context that I have explored Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) theorisation to overcome this limitation of straight jacketing and simplifying such dynamic social processes into a category called caste.

Below, I present my findings in a chapter wise sequence. In chapter two of the thesis, I have traced the genealogy of the concept of caste and also examined the ways and practices through which it got embedded and essentialized in social science language and imagination. I contend that it was the colonial power/knowledge component that led to classification of groups into nomenclatures such as caste and tribe. This practice continued in the post colonial period and found its way into the social science discourses first in anthropology, history and sociology and later in political science and economics. The theories, perspectives and methodologies of these disciplines unproblematically accepted the received colonial definition of caste. The colonial administrators had employed the nomenclature of caste to simplify and streamline administrative functions. Caste in the colonial period was understood through the lens of the Varna hierarchy- binary of purity and pollution and endogamy/exogamy. In the post colonial period it was this received notion that was most widely circulated in the social science discourse. Anthropologists such as Ghurye (1969), Karve, (1953, 1975) and Dumont (1966) reinforced this idea that societal organisation can be examined through the concept of caste. Ghurye (1952, 1969) and Karve (1953, 1961 and 1975) informed by the colonial episteme set out to document and codify the societal relations through the lens of endogamous jatis. They employed a combination of methodologies ranging from Indology, ethnography,
anthropometry and genetics to support their views about caste formation. Karve (1953) even undertook an exercise to map all kinship patterns and castes (jatis) in India.

Srinivas (1955, 1962) who had begun his village ethnographic studies in the 1940s introduced a new methodological tool called the 'field view' approach. As Srinivas's (1962, 1966, 1975) primary concern was to assess the impact of modern practices of the state such as adult franchise, political party system and the economy on the societal organisation his approach questioned the existing theories on caste that were anchored in the logic of Varna hierarchy. His theory and methodology was informed by the functionalist perspective of Radcliffe Brown (1950) and his queries related to how the caste system was responding to processes of representational politics. Srinivas (1962) contended that caste as found in the field was really jati and not Varna. He argued that there were innumerable jatis which could not be always neatly ranked within the four fold system and also that jatis did not always exhibit their economic and socio-political locations commensurate to their ritual standings. The hierarchy itself was contested and jatis with economic and political resources most times successfully claimed to have higher ritual ranking. It is in this context that he introduced the concepts of dominant caste and sanskritization to interrogate and register social mobility of various jatis. However as his theorisation on caste was informed by earlier anthropological work he unproblematically assumed that societal organisation was primarily organised through the framework of castes (jatis) i.e. social groups and political formations were castes.

This axiom that is social groups construed as castes soon got embedded in sociology (Beteille, 1965) and later in the language of the political scientists (Kothari et al. 1970). The political scientists explored the interface between societal groups (assumed to be caste) and politics. The permutation and combinations of various castes and electoral performance and dominance now became the hallmark of such studies. This exercise led to further essentialising of caste in such that politics was interrogated through the lens of caste dynamics.
where social groups and political formations were construed as caste/caste clusters.

In the 1980s, some social scientists (Frankel and Rao et al, 1989) in their attempt to register State level domination of certain caste groups recognised the difficulty in employing a universal nomenclature i.e. caste (jati and Varna). It is to the credit of these scholars who recognised the inherent weakness of such overarching classification because the meaning of caste changed at various sites and locations. It is for this reason that Frankel and Rao et al (1989) contextualised the term caste such that it could address it specific objective location- for instance a sub-sub caste (potjati/upjati), lineage, jati, Varna, caste cluster among others. They recognised the importance of addressing spatial connotations of caste but did not examine the temporal aspect- the role of colonial episteme in the institutionalisation of the idea of groups being categorized as caste. How and why were these individuals grouped and connoted as castes? What were the historical contingencies that enabled this process? Who were the actors and what were the motives?

Similarly Marxist scholarship (Omvedt, 1981 and Patil, 1981) following the received notion of caste and caste system, examined processes through which exploitation within the purity-pollution hierarchy occurred- in which occupation was an ascribed function. These scholars contend that in the post colonial period, there occurred a near-absolute correlation between caste and class. However this collapsing of caste into class led to a rather rigid frame of argument that privileged a class based analysis and foreclosed the option of assessing the role of other cultural and social categories and practices operating in Indian politics. However to the credit of these scholars, they introduced a new parameter in the analysis of caste (groups) i.e. class. They were also able to demonstrate the relationship between state, caste and class. But the structuralist framework did not allow the Marxist scholars to interrogate these group formations through the lens of strategies and practice as subjective social imaginaries and could only construe them in the continuum of caste-class.
Is the social order so neat and predictable? While focusing on rules (structure) does social research discount the role of strategies and practices of actors that are so fundamental in examining agency? How does one then ensure that both structure and agency get equal treatment in analysis? I have thus argued that following the received notion of caste the earlier scholarship collapsed and compressed multiple social complexities into the category called caste. I further contend that these scholars were limited by the methodological perspectives and the language available at those points of time to construe them otherwise.

It is in this context that I have argued that Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1985, 1990) conceptualisation of practice enables one to overcome this difficulty. Bourdieu (1990) contends that the representation of practices is misrecognition by the social scientists as structures having an immanent underlying code of rules and regulations. He suggests that the structuralists deem all social relations to be ‘objectified’ communicative relations and therefore assume that have a predetermined path and hence predictable.

Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990, 1998) theory and logic of practice emphasises ways in which structure is embodied and evident in practice which he calls the ‘habitus’. Habitus is therefore the site (in the body of an individual) which internalises structure and culture and enables certain dispositions to practice. He therefore suggests that within any social sphere or field a specific empirical investigation is required to locate and understand the habitus and its play within the objective relations of the field. Thus, Bourdieu (1998) observes,

“My entire scientific enterprise is indeed based on the belief that the deepest logic of the social world can be grasped only if one plunges into the particularity of an empirical reality, historically located and dated, but with the objective of constructing it as a ‘special case of what is possible’…” (Bourdieu, 1998: 2)

He thus construes the social world as a site of competition and struggle in which individuals try and accumulate various forms of capital that are apt for the fields in which they are operating. Actors perceive of their social environment in
different ways that are shaped by their habitus which is really a structured and a
structuring structure which organises the cognitive and evaluative structures that
organise perception of the actors.

Therefore employing Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) concepts I have demonstrated
through the case study of the ‘Marathas’ that instead of analyzing societal
phenomenon and organisation in terms of caste, one may interrogate it through
the lens of fields, habitus, capitals and practice/strategies. I contend that actors
have strategically operated in order to become part of the social imaginary called
‘Marathas’ depending on their habitus in order to enhance their capital and also as
a survival strategy. It is with this logic that I have assessed how actors strategized
in the given historically impinging conditions to organise through the practice of
kinship to claim ‘Maratha’ membership through blood or marital connexions,
claimed a martial descent again through kinship and/or by exhibiting certain
martial traits which were legitimated by the practice of martial sports, by
highlighting the peasant mooring to associate with the social imaginary called
‘Maratha’.

I have argued that the scholars (Karve, 1953, Sirsikar, 1970, Lele, 1982, 1990,
2008) who have examined the ‘Marathas’ have construed this social imaginary to
be a caste/caste cluster. I have further argued that they have examined ‘Marathas’
as post facto phenomenon i.e. as opus operatum. They have not assessed the
processes and contexts through which using various strategies, this social
formation occurred. I have argued that it was due to historical contingency that
allowed such a formation and if the contexts were different the end result could
have been different i.e. some other form of social organisation of individuals
having a disparate imagining.

Lele (1982, 1990) has argued that ‘Marathas’ is a caste cluster called the Maratha-
Kunbi and constitutes 31% (approximately 30 million according 2001 census, a
figure he reached after extrapolating it from the 1931 census report) of the total
population of the State of Maharashtra. He contends that the ‘Maratha’ Kunbi caste cluster is exceptional as in no other Indian State can one find such a culturally homogenous caste cluster of this magnitude. He opines that this caste cluster consists of innumerable jatis (sub jatis) which exhibit disparate social rankings. Further this cluster is internally stratified in terms of economic classes. He argues that it is through a common past heritage, culture and kinship patterns that these disparate jatis coalesce to form this caste cluster which behave as a political bloc in contemporary electoral democracy. It is not surprising that political scientists such as Deshpande (1999, 2004, 2006, 2009), Palshikar (1994, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2009) and Vora (1996, 1999) subscribe to this common sensical idea of a monolith caste cluster and reinforce it through election analysis reports and studies of voting behavior patterns. The underlying logic of their argument is that in an electoral democracy numbers become important and these numbers are organized and generated through a notion of caste loyalty. This caste loyalty in return is rewarded through sharing the spoils of the states’ resources.

Lele (1982, 1990) further contends that it is through hegemony i.e. by reinforcing strict group norms and practices that are anchored in the rhetoric of a common past that the cohesiveness of the caste cluster (political bloc) is maintained. But he does not spell out how and through what institutions does hegemony operate? How does hegemony allow for unity of such disparate groups to imagine themselves as ‘Marathas’ over long periods of time? Why do actors wish to be part of this group called ‘Marathas’? How and what were the historical contingencies that allowed for the organisation of the ‘Marathas’? Has it changed overtime?

In chapter three I have therefore argued that ‘Marathas’ is a social imaginary that was organised during the colonial rule. From the 1830s onwards as changes in the political economy ensued indigenous actors drew up newer strategies to organise the imaginary ‘Marathas’ as it was favourable to be located as such – allowed better entry point for employment in the colonial public services. Similarly the colonial policy such as introduction of the concept of martial race influenced this
imagining. Civic associations organised by the indigenous actors led to the broadening of the meaning associated with the imagining called ‘Marathas’. I also argue that the role of the leadership of the Satyashodhak and non-Brahmin movement was crucial in the organisation of this social imaginary. It was not only the ideology of the movements but the aims and interests of the leadership that finally shaped this imagining in particular ways. Patrons such as Shahu, Gaikwads and Scindia have also played an important role in this imaginings. But most importantly it was the colonial state that legitimated certain native claims that led this imaginary to become inclusive by the early 20th century.

In chapter four with the aid of case studies I have argued how kinship was employed as a strategy by the actors to become part of ‘Marathas’. The case studies also highlight that it is not rules that determine marital alliances and choices of preferential marriages, but rather it is the subtle manoeuvring of the actors who wish to accumulate symbolic, cultural and social capital. An actor usually chooses from the repertoire of past experiences which may then show some form of regularity which is misrecognised as rules by the researcher. Similarly I have demonstrated how the actors employed the notion of kshtriyaness to claim membership of this imaginary. With the military market open specifically to ‘Marathas’ (other than Deccani Musalmans) in the Deccan, the indigenous actors (natives) devised elaborative strategies to showcase their ‘Marathaness’. In the post colonial period those who claimed to be ‘Marathas’ on the basis of their ancestors having served the colonial army, continued to follow the pattern of joining the military. Additionally I have also shown through the case studies how preferences of the actors in marital choices and proclivities of joining certain professions are misrecognised as rules. These as I have demonstrated are not rules, but strategies that have been followed over generations which as Bourdieu (1990) opines is a doxic condition i.e. wherein a certain level of naturalisation takes place. This meant that even the actors have misconstrued these strategies and proclivities as rules and therefore have come to believe that ‘Maratha’ is a caste.
In chapter five I examined how strategies were drawn up by the actors using education and sports to become part of the ‘Maratha’ social imaginary. I have argued that the AIMEC and the Shri Shivaji Maratha School was organised so as to allow disparate peasant communities to that did not specifically have any ‘martial’ or kinship claim to be part of the social imaginary of ‘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 enrolment to mobilizing the non-Brahmins to addressing problems of the peasantry. It was through these sites that the masses of peasantry associated themselves with the social imaginary called ‘Marathas’ which was by 1931 census legitimated as a caste. Similarly I have argued that the talims (gymnasiums) 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). I contend that these sporting sites continued to play a crucial role in the post colonial period in recruiting political actors to local governance institutions such as the cooperatives, panchyati raj institutions and even the State level Congress party. Additionally these sites provided the actors the requisite cultural, symbolic and social capital to enter the lower bureaucracy.

In chapter six I have examined the period till 1960 and assessed how the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP) became the site for the mobilisation of the ‘Marathas’. I contend that it was through the PWP that the large sections of the peasantry were able to associate with the social imaginary ‘Marathas’. I have also traced the
trajectory of how the ‘Marathas’ soon captured political power in the State and inaugurated a new ideology of agrarian development.

In chapter seven, I have argued how the ‘Marathas’ once in power, inaugurated new institutions such as the cooperatives and the panchayati raj. Strategies using the notion of kshtriyaness and kinship were employed to become part of the ‘Marathas’ and through this connexion to enter state institutions. This I have demonstrated through case studies of how actors had to be necessarily recognised to enter the field of cooperatives, local self government and lower bureaucracy. Being a part of the ‘Maratha’ imagining enabled an actor to possess various levels of symbolic, cultural and social capital which facilitated entry into state institutions. In the post 1960s period, the field of politics/power was fashioned in such a manner that it allowed actors with ‘Maratha’ (meaning to be both kshtriya and peasant imagining) pedigree to successfully compete. Additionally as the state institutions were integrally connected to the field of power/politics entry into the State level Congress party and the state came to be channelised. I have thus argued that with the ‘Marathas’ entering all the fields of the state from lower bureaucracy to the legislature, from the military to the police services has led to the naturalisation of the idea of ‘Maratha’ rule.

To sum up my contention- I have argued that ‘Marathas’ is a social imaginary that has been misrecognised as caste/caste cluster. This imagining has shifted in its meaning at various points of time. I contend that it was due to particular historical contingencies that the imaginary was organised as it benefitted the participating actors as the colonial state allowed entry in public services only on the basis of recognition of caste/community. I have demonstrated this imaginary expanded overtime to include peasant groups that could display ‘martial’ antecedents and/or peasant moorings. I contend that this imaginary has always been flexible and therefore needs to be construed through the lens of strategies and practices rather than the rigid framework of caste and rules that detemporalises the process. I conclude that Bourdieu’s (1977, 1979, 1990) framework provides us with the
language and the methodology to overcome the absolutism inherent in the conception of caste.

Finally I wish to conclude by asking a set of larger questions- Can we (social scientists) examine political formations such as Kshtriya, Harijan, Adivasi and the Muslims (KHAM) or the Ahir, Jat, Gujjar and the Rajput (AJGAR) through the lens of strategies and practices of actors without loosing out on the rigour of how structure impinges on the actions of these actors? Can one instead of employing the term caste (in its objectivist stereotyped understanding) envisage such groups as a manifestation of subjective interactions that are nevertheless shaped by existing structural constraints? Can Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990, 1998) conceptualisations be invoked in such studies/research?