Acknowledgement

This has been a long, tumultuous and many a times a lonely journey. This journey dates back to the time I was pursuing my M.Phil thesis titled “Elite Dynamics and Caste Politics in a Poverty Alleviation Scheme: A Case Study of EGS in Maharashtra”. Whilst examining caste politics, some questions that emerged were those which have been incorporated in this thesis. As my M.Phil research relied on quantitative (though I also employed the qualitative methods) research designs and tools, I always felt that my findings only reflected the present (post-colonial) conditions. While in the field I was surprised to find so much heterogeneity in notions of what constituted ‘being’ a ‘Maratha’. I was intrigued by these complexities and plural understandings. These surprises in the field were one of the primary reasons for me to choose this area of research. Who are ‘Marathas’? Who decides whether an individual is a ‘Maratha’? What is the criterion for this recognition? Which knowledge legitimates these criteria? And how?

It is in this context that the memories, stories, experiences and social networks of my father, a retired Army Major proved crucial in this respect at an early stage of formulating the questions of this thesis. I have of course heard his life story many a times before, but it began to make sense when I began interviewing many other such actors who identify themselves as ‘Marathas’. His networks enabled me to enter the web of kin relations and his friend circle which allowed me to further increase the radius of my research. I was also lucky to be recognized as a ‘Maratha’ as this enabled me to be an ‘insider’. Being an insider enabled me to network easily but it also had its drawbacks. For instance it was difficult to get out of the ‘naturalized’ ways of comprehending practices, identifying nuances and reflecting on them. It was through discussions with many of my friends and colleagues that really enabled me to become reflexive.

From the initial field work there emerged much confusion- the fluidity and complexity of social life posed a theoretical challenge. It was here that Sujata (I take the liberty to call her by her first name now, but I must add that it was very
difficult to come out of this naturalized position) put me on to reading the work of Bourdieu. Not that I was unaware of Bourdieu’s work, which was introduced in the M.A and M.Phil course work but now reading and contextualizing his theorization in terms of caste posed a major challenge. Sujata’s personal library was a dream come true - I could find Bourdieu’s collection and also of many other scholars whose works were difficult to procure and sometimes access (I was able to photocopy many of these works and soon became a practitioner of the ‘pro-piracy’ movement that is strong in the global south and especially in Latin America). She prodded me on to read many more scholarly works. Her endless role of playing the devil’s advocate pushed me into rethinking and took me onto a new level i.e. sociology of knowledge. This led me into a new terrain that of power and knowledge construction. I could see myself moving from positions of absolutism to a position of immense fluidity and complexity. Sujata, well read as she is and as I see it retrospectively groomed me in this direction right from the beginning. It all began to make sense when I began archival work - discourse analysis and mapping memories. Even though she moved to University of Hyderabad in 2009 that did not pose a hurdle for our communication. We would sometimes speak on the phone for hours! Of course she is a task master. With the cell phone technology she had an excellent surveillance system in place and would ensure that I did not lapse one bit. When it came to writing the thesis, Sujata insisted and correctly so that I had to extremely careful with my language as I had to overcome the colonial methods, perspectives, theorizations and terminologies. This was one of the most difficult tasks that I had to face.

I was lucky to present my work at the Ph.D Laboratory organized by the International Sociological Association at Moscow University in 2008. I was able to interact with the students from different countries - Ana, Asuka, Claudia, Daniel, Francisco, Holland, Lou and Zahraa. The discussions with Prof. Izabela Barlinska, Prof. Marcel Fournier and Prof. Michael Burawoy and with the participants helped immensely.
I was also lucky to be a part of a book project titled “Exclusion, social capital and citizenship: contested transitions in post-apartheid South Africa and India” and edited by Tina Uys and Sujata (in publication). It was in this process that I was invited to University of Johannesburg three times from 2008-2009. In these meetings I was able to present some of my arguments that I have incorporated in the thesis. The idea that caste can be construed through the lens of social capital took me forward in my work. This exercise enabled me to read up on the vast literature on social capital. I was able to write a chapter for the book entitled “Caste as social capital: A case of citizenship and Maratha rule in Maharashtra, India”. The literature on social capital and other related areas is immense and unfortunately some material is not easily available to students from the global south. In this regard I wish to thank Prof. Vinay Gidwani (University Minnesota) for forwarding some of his articles. I also wish to thank my friends who are pursuing their doctoral studies in USA- Debjani and Apoorva who have also helped in this respect.

Teaching has its own benefits. Being a lecturer of sociology (post graduate) Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth for five years (coincidence that I began my doctoral thesis when I joined) has definitely helped me especially while teaching social theory. Discussions with faculty members from across disciplines also facilitated my understanding of the research subject. I wish to thank Shraddha, Jagan, Praveen, Jyoti, Manik and Vijay Karekar who have been extremely helpful. I also wish to thank the Vidyapeeth staff for being extremely accommodative especially when I during my field visit.

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