In this chapter I undertake an extensive review of literature on caste and politics. I examine how caste is a methodological category that is embedded in the colonial episteme and how over time it has come to be naturalised in social science discourse. Scholars collapse political and social mobilizations and the processes and practices in the over simplified category called caste/ caste cluster. Strategies and practices are viewed within the immanent category of caste- this means that the complexities of social phenomenon are collapsed into a tailor made monolith category. Moreover the notion of time and space are frequently absent from such analysis leading to unproblematic use of the term caste.

As Kaviraj (2010) aptly sums up

"Instead of believing that we can understand without recourse to history why what is happening now is happening he way it is, we must look more closely at the structures of social power existing over long term- and even start the structural story of the state not at the time of independence but much earlier."(Kaviraj, 2010: 2)

After all it was with the British colonization that the territorial boundaries of what we know today as the Indian state were delineated. What is also interesting is the way in which a dominant and totalizing knowledge system was instituted in colonial India and that prevails even to date. This is reminiscent of Foucault’s notion of ‘episteme’.

" This episteme may be suspected of being something like a world-view, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposed on each one the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape- a great body of legislation written once and for all by some anonymous hand...the episteme is not what may be known at a given period...; it is what, in the positivity of discursive practices, makes possible the existence of epistemological figures and sciences... (Foucault 1985: 191-2)

It is in this context that the theorization of Bourdieu (1977, 1979, and 1990) enables us to connect the past with the present through the introduction of
temporality and spatiality. In this chapter I argue that Bourdieu’s theorization of logic of practice and social capital offers a way to construe social and political processes and mobilizations as relational, contested and dynamic rather than fixed and given entities.

I have divided this chapter into five sections. In section one I begin by introducing the discourse on ‘Marathas’ as a caste and thus problematise and ask if how we may overcome the dilemma of examining this social imaginary through the lens of practice. In section two I assess how caste is understood in the disciplines of anthropology, history and sociology. Early anthropologists and sociologists examined caste through the lens of kinship patterns, lineage and rules of endogamy and exogamy. Caste was understood as the most important way in which the Indian society operated. This understanding of caste was informed by the discourse on the jajmani and the Varna classificatory system. Concepts such as sanskritization and dominant caste as a theoretical framework to understand power distribution and societal phenomenon in rural areas were also inaugurated. The field view provided an interrogation method to comprehend the complexity of caste system when understood in the framework of jatis. However these theoretical positions were found wanting as they were informed by the positivist classificatory colonial practices. Also they are not engaged in examining how caste is mobilised in the organisation of power.

In section three I undertake a review of literature on the interface between caste and politics. These studies can be considered in the following sub-categories: (i) research of political mobilization by interrogating roles of caste associations and caste organisations (ii) research of voting behaviour and (iii) research of local and State level politics that highlight the concept of patron client relationships. I argue that this discourse is embedded in the colonial understanding of caste and though in recent past there is recognition of this limitation, this scholarship does not have the available methodological conceptualization to overcome this problem.
In this context I argue that the political scientists in examining the role of caste clusters do not pay attention to the particulars i.e. the interrelationship and dynamics of individual caste groups that organize to form the caste coalition. Nor do they examine the processes and practices that enable the formation of caste coalitions.

In section four I examine existing Marxist literature on the relationship between caste, class and organisation of power. One set of Marxist scholars (Bardhan, 1984, Balgopal, 1988, Kaviraj 1997) privilege class categories based on economic interest and political affiliation rather than a caste as the operative element in assessing distribution of power. A class based analysis forecloses the option of assessing the role of other cultural and social categories operating in organisation of power. Other Marxist scholars bring back the importance of caste and relate it to class formation in India. (Rudra, 1981, Omvedt 1982) I argue that one of the limitations of both set of scholars is the failure to explain regional and State level analysis of distribution of power. Moreover their conception of caste collapses into the colonial classificatory construct.

In section five I operationalise Bourdieu’s theorization of practice and social capital. I also elaborate on his conceptualization of habitus, field and doxa to examine how the social imaginary called ‘Maratha’ got organized. I ask how it may help answer how rule is organized in a democracy such as India and can caste be construed as social and cultural capital.

In section six I elaborate on the historical methodology that I employ for collating my data. Primary sources include documents within the archives and the public domain (Newspapers, pamphlets, diaries, official papers and communications) together with case studies, interviews, narratives and life histories. Secondary sources are review of literature in social sciences, articles published in journals and books. I explain the logic of the temporal and spatial delimitation of my research universe. With this brief introduction I revert to the case of the ‘Maratha’ as a social imaginary.
Discourse on ‘Marathas’

The contemporary discourse on caste and politics in Maharashtra is embedded in the commonsensical logic that the ‘Maratha’ Kunbi caste cluster behaves as a political bloc. This caste cluster according to Lele (1982, 1990) constitutes 31% of the total population of the State. And therefore the corollary conclusion of this logic, that all these 30 million (2001 census) individuals votes as a unified monolithic political bloc. It is not surprising that political scientists such as Deshpande (1999, 2004, 2006, 2009), Lele (1982, 1990), Palshikar (1994, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2009) and Vora (1996, 1999) reinforce this notion 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. They reason, that for electoral success the one person one vote creates a context where caste based mobilisation of voters is an effective strategy for consolidation of votes. These scholars have also interchangeably used the generic term ‘Maratha’ to denote ‘Maratha’ Kunbi caste cluster in their research (Deshpande, 2004) has used the term Kunbi ‘Maratha’ also).

Lele (1982) has tried to define the characteristics of this caste cluster. He argues 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 further observes that this caste cluster is internally stratified in terms of economic classes. But the question then arises, how does it behave as a homogenous caste bloc when it comes to electoral voting? He argues that though the ‘Maratha’ Kunbi caste cluster is stratified, it is able to maintain cohesiveness because the constituent economic classes have a commonly shared social and cultural milieu. What is this cultural milieu? These are kinship relationships, shared memories and experiences that have allowed for circumventing economic disparities.
In trying to decipher the mechanics of this caste cluster Lele (1982) asks a pertinent question- who controls this ‘Maratha’ caste cluster (of many jatis) and how? He contends that an elite landed class control the ‘Maratha’ political bloc by virtue of which they rule the State. These elite ensure caste loyalty and social control over the group through two strategies. One is by disbursement of resources through well laid out patronage system and the second through hegemony i.e. by reinforcing strict group norms and practices that are anchored in the rhetoric of a common past. Lele (1982) contends that this hegemonic control of the elite over the caste cluster has not permitted the space for the organization of an equally powerful counter caste coalition. The opposition is either co-opted or the Martha elite through the state sponsors violence ensuring subjugation.

If hegemony can bind these disparate jatis together all the time over generations, the questions that come to mind are- What are the cultural practices through which ideology operates on an every day basis enabling the binding of these jatis? Can the elicitation by the elite of common historical transcendental bind individuals as a caste over extended periods of time? Lele (1982; 45-80) clarifies that hegemony is exerted at the level of kinship ties and alliances. He argues that the kinship practices predating colonial rule ensured the formation of the ‘Maratha’ caste cluster. He does not explicitly examine kinship networks and relies more on the anthropological and sociological scholarship. Similarly earlier research on the ‘Maratha’ caste cluster by political scientists such as Sirsikar (1965, 1970), Carass (1970), Rosenthal (1972) and Carter (1974) have relied on the definition provided by the social anthropologists and sociologists.

In order to trace this genealogy we need to examine how caste (jati) and caste cluster was understood in anthropological literature. For Karve (1953), Orenstein (1962, 1963 and 1970), Carter (1972) caste connoted endogamous social units or jatis. Additionally, Karve (1953) in her research ‘Caste and kinship organization in India’ was the first anthropologist to use the term caste cluster (Mandelbaum, 1970: 17 uses a similar term called jati-cluster) to connote a conglomeration of
jatis. She maintains that despite many endogamous jatis constituting a caste cluster they retain a separate cultural identity. She goes on to further argue that each constituent jati of the caste-cluster may therefore have no common genetic ancestry and may differ greatly from one another in cultural traditions.

However she contends that the Maratha Kunbi caste cluster is an exception to the rule. She observes that the Maratha Kunbi caste cluster was a conglomeration of multiple castes (jatis). She names six jatis in a descending hierarchy such as *Panchkulin*, *Saptakulin*, *Shehhanau kuli*, *Assal Marathas' or *kulin 'Marathas'*, *Deshmukh 'Marathas'*, and *Lenkavale* or impure ‘Maratha’s also called *shindes* or *Akarmasi* (11 months child) and the ‘Maratha’ Kunbi who are lowest in ritual status belonging predominantly to the small peasant or landless class. Karve (1953;72) argues that each jati is then located in a hierarchy according to its ritual rank based on the binary of purity and pollution. She further asserts that the permeable boundaries of jatis make it possible for individual families to attain a higher status through marital alliance and hence this caste cluster behaves as one large social continuum. This logic of Karve (1953) is embedded in the discourse on ‘Maratha’s expressed by the above mentioned political scientists.

But where did Karve’s (1953) understanding of ‘Maratha’ as a caste stem from? In her research on caste and kinship organisation (1953) she sets out on an ambitious journey to document and classify kinship practices in the whole country. Her assumptions were anchored in the Indo-Aryan race theory. This theory harboured the implicit logic that the four fold Varna hierarchy was developed with the Aryan invasion in ancient times. And over generations each Varna came to constitute innumerable jatis and these jatis splintered to form sub-jatis (*pot jatis*). However these jatis maintained their boundaries through strict endogamous practices. In order to ascertain the Aryan race theory, her research methodology used two enmeshed techniques. One was the documentation and classification of kinship terminologies and the other was anthropometric measurements on family, lineage, jatis and tribes. Based on these methods she concluded that in the geographical regions south of Maharashtra the Dravidian
kinship pattern prevailed and Maharashtra was the region of intermixture of the Aryan and Dravidian races. The question now is from which discourse/s did the Aryan race theory and the ethnographic and anthropometric methodologies emanate? This question takes us back in time to the colonial episteme.

Patel (2006; 382) in her article ‘Beyond Binaries’ argues how the anthropological and sociological discourse was enmeshed in the colonial episteme of the binaries i.e. of East and West, the colonized and colonizer, I and the other. She contends that in order to legitimize rule, the colonial state produced a knowledge system through which it hegemonised the minds of the indigenous actors. These hegemonic knowledge forms continued to inform social science scholarship long after the colonial rule ended. These discourses became embedded in the theories perspectives and the methodologies of the social sciences. In her words,

“This episteme...also informs perspectives and practices of these disciplines (anthropology and sociology) together with the placement of individuals in distinct academic traditions with its own sets of research questions, methods and methodologies.” (Patel, 2006; 382)

She further argues,

“These divisions of knowledge and thus of power as they are represented in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology...structure the ways in which distinct traditions of sociology have evolved but also continue to play a major role in defining theories, perspectives and methods of doing sociologies in the world.” (Patel, 2006:383)

In light of this argument I ask- is ‘Maratha’ which is really a social imaginary misrecognised in social science discourse as caste? I so, how did this misrecognition get embedded in social science language and discourse? How do we construe this social imaginary that functions as a group other than through the concept of caste? What is the methodology and language that one could employ to overcome this informed colonial episteme?

With the inauguration of colonial rule the political economy underwent certain changes. These new changes meant that the indigenous actors had to draw up
newer strategies. These strategies and practices of social and political mobilizations were misrecognised by the colonial state as caste. This category was further legitimated through colonial practices such as the census and colonial registers. The social science methodology and perspectives incorporated this category without questioning the historical contexts in which it was drawn up. This has led to essentialising of this category in social science discourse. Moreover as in the case of ‘Maratha’ as a caste, scholars examine the opus operatum rather than the modus operandi. The sense of temporality and spatiality is absent from such research. In the next section I trace the genealogy of caste as a monolith, immanent category that got embedded in the social science literature.

Caste through the lens of Anthropology and Sociology

The questions and debates on whether to include or not, caste in the 2001 Census (and now in the 2011 census) reminds one of a similar context that prevailed in the early 20th century. One of the major questions was how to define caste? Risley the 1901 Census commissioner had faced a similar problem. He states that when being asked the caste name a native would invariably answer in ways that were difficult for him to place the individual. In his words -

“He may give the name of a sect, of a sub-caste, of an exogamous sect or section, of a hypergamous group; he may mention some titular designation which sounds finer than the name of his caste; he may describe himself by his occupation or by the province or tract of country from which he comes.” (Risley, 1901; 538)

This difficulty in the definition of caste dates back to the early years of colonial conquest of the 18th century. Indian society was viewed through a Eurocentric gaze and these impressions were recorded by the colonial administrators, scholars and missionaries- also called the Orientalist perspective. Through this lens the colonisers constructed a binary- of the West and the East, of the ‘I’ and the ‘other’. (Said, 1978) The ‘other’ of course signified the indigenous actors as exotic, pre-modern, uncivilized, eccentric,
backward, sensual, despotic and lazy, immoral, passive religious and spiritual. The ‘orient’ existed for the West, and was constructed by and in relation to the West- a mirror image of what is inferior and alien “Other” to the West. This knowledge soon became a source of power, a modus-operandi through which the British were to rule India. As Dirks (2001: 10) argues

“...caste became the colonial form of civil society; it justified the denial of political rights to Indian subjects (not citizens) and explained the necessity of colonial rule...”

The colonial practices of domination through knowledge/power axis, soon ensured the naturalisation of the idea of a uniform, all-encompassing, ideologically consistent and conceived caste system as the underlying keystone of understanding India. As Dirks (2001) sums up,

“...colonial knowledge both enabled conquest and was produced by it; in certain important ways, knowledge was what colonialism was all about. Cultural forms in societies newly classified as “traditional” were reconstructed and transformed by this knowledge, which created new categories and oppositions between colonizers and colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East. Through the delineation and reconstitution of systematic grammars for vernacular languages, the control of Indian territory through cartographic technologies and picturesque techniques of rule, the representation of India through the mastery and display of archaeological mementos and ritual texts, the taxing of India through the reclassification and assessment of land use, property form, and agrarian structure, and the enumeration of India through the statistical technology of the census, Britain set in motion transformations every bit as powerful as the better-known consequences of military and economic imperialism.” (Dirks, 2001:9)

The colonial interests and imaginations also simultaneously led to a nationalist imagination emerging which was revivalist in nature. The nationalist imaginings recreated and reinvented the ‘tradition’ through glorification of the past i.e. through a civilisational and indological perspective. However as the Indian nationalist movement itself a manifestation of the colonial encounters their frame of questioning the various hegemonizing discourses that arose from the colonial experience unfortunately were informed and embedded in the colonial knowledge grid. Chatterjee (1998) argues that the colonial and the
colonized domains of knowledge production have not only acted in opposition to each other, but through this process of struggle, have shaped the emergent form of the other. He argues that the anti-colonial nationalists led by the middle-class elites first imagined the nation and by using the oriental discourse of West and the ‘other’ divided their culture into material and spiritual domains, and staked claim to the spiritual sphere, represented by religion, caste, women and the family, and peasants. Soon this position was naturalised and became ‘the’ representation of Indian society. (Chatterjee, 1998) It is in this respect that Dirks (2001) contends that the hegemonic character of colonial rule was most effectively felt on the history of the colonized. As Dirks (2001: 5) argues,

“[caste]... became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all “systematizing” India’s diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization. This was achieved through an identifiable (if contested) ideological canon as the result of a concrete encounter with colonial modernity during two hundred years of British domination. In short, colonialism made caste what it is today.” (Dirks, 2001:5)

Caste as understood then is an emergent category that got constructed out of the ideological contestation between two dominant ideologies. One representing the bourgeois colonial rulers, who gained political dominance in India through construction of hegemonic knowledge forms and the other, the Indian elite bourgeois nationalists nurtured by colonialism itself, who repudiated this oriental and colonial discourse. But in their endeavour to challenge the colonial knowledge/power grid, employed colonially constructed classificatory schemas. As Guha (1992) succinctly argues,

“...the knowledge systems that make up any dominant culture are all contained within the dominant consciousness and have therefore the latter’s deficiencies built into their optics.” (Guha, 1992: 216)

Caste as a category was contested in the pre-colonial and the colonial and therefore there could be no consensus on one understanding. In pre-colonial times the referents of social identity were innumerable. It was akin to region, village, residential communities, kinship groups, political affiliations among
others and one’s caste could change with a change in the matrix of political power. (Dirks, 2001; 13) The colonial state began documentation and codification of the caste way back in 1871 when the first census exercise was undertaken. The notion of caste then recorded was through the overarching simplified version of the four fold Varna model which itself was rooted in the Indo-Aryan racial theory. This racial theory was again embedded in the earlier discourses of Orientalism and Indology. It was in this context, informed by this episteme and legacy that in 1901 the then Census commissioner Risley decided to undertake both an anthropometric and ethnographic survey of the indigenous actors. Risley’s (1901) imaginings of caste did not reiterate the idea of a fixed and immutable ‘Orient’. On the contrary, he argued that the process of creation of new castes took place through change of customs, migration, and adoption of new function and so on. He argued that overtime due of fission and fusion many more sub castes were born. The only way to find out was through anthropometric measures and racial typifications. (Samarendra, 2008; 53)

He wanted a census to represent ‘intelligible picture of the social grouping of that large proportion of the people of India which (according to him) is organized, admittedly or tacitly, on the basis of caste... (Risley, 1901; 539, Census of India) The anthropometric method was employed by Risley (1901) to corroborate the notion that castes (jatis) were endogamous social units and through these measurements he intended to prove his position on this was not misplaced. He wished to demonstrate the perfect correspondence between his theory and one of the popular versions that was acceptable amongst the indigenous actors. However the problem of fitting every endogamous caste (jati) into the four fold Varna model became impossible. And therefore this experiment of classification of jatis was abandoned after the 1931 census. (Samarendra, 2008; 52)

The census was meant to simplify the diverse and multiethnic Indian society, to construct uniform and standardised understanding which would aid colonial
governmentality. However the census was also seen by the indigenous actors as an opportunity to legitimately move up the caste stratification and contest their position in the social hierarchy. Dirks (2001) has analyzed the cultural politics of caste during colonial rule highlights the strategies through which certain dominant groups came to be complexly constituted during the colonial period in often paradoxical ways. Ghurye (2008,) argues

"Various ambitious castes quickly perceived the chances of raising their status. They invited conferences of their members and formed councils to take steps to see that their status was recorded in the way they thought was honourable to them. Other castes that could not but resent this 'stealthy' procedure to advance, equally eagerly began to controvert their claims. Thus a campaign of mutual recrimination was set on foot. The leaders of all but the highest castes frankly looked upon the census as an opportunity for pressing and perhaps obtaining some recognition of social claims which were denied by persons of castes higher than their own.” (Ghurye, 2008; 40-41)

This idea, that the caste (jati) which was supposedly an endogamous kin group and was the microcosm of the social universe of the indigenous actors got embedded in the post colonial anthropological and sociological scholarship. The theories, perspectives and methodologies of social anthropology and sociology got enmeshed in ahistorial colonial epistemic axiom as Varna i.e. caste as a timeless, objective, stereotyped and as understood within the purity-pollution and occupational framework. Similarly caste as jati was viewed through this lens as a corporate lineage and kin group that regulates individual behavior and state-society relations. It is in this context that Ghurye (1969), Karve, (1953, 1975) and, Dumont’s (1966) work on caste needs to be understood.

Ghurye (1952, 1969) and Karve (1953, 1961 and 1975) relied on normative classical texts such as the Dharmashastras and Grihyasutras to define caste. Informed by the colonial episteme they 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.
Though Ghurye (1969) tacitly recognized caste as a contested category, he firmly believed that it could only be understood through the Varna model. (Dhanagare, 2007: 3416)

Karve (1953, 1975) uses the term caste to mean jati and caste cluster to mean a conglomerate of jatis. She argues that caste-clusters are made up of groups (such as former tribal units) that have managed to attain the same social rank at different times and places but have remained endogamous and thus retained separate identity. The groups making up a caste-cluster may therefore have no common genetic ancestry and may differ greatly from one another in cultural traditions. In her research on caste and kinship organization (1953, 1963) she systematically used anthropometry and ethnographic data on family, various castes, tribes and clans, as also linguistic data on kinship terminologies, religions and cultural regions of Maharashtra. However as mentioned earlier, her theoretical and methodological underpinnings neatly converged with the colonial episteme.

Thus the early social anthropologists and sociologists resorted to the dominant ways of classifications which were anchored in the colonial/nationalist episteme. Their queries were always anchored in the past and not the present. They were more interested in tracing the origins of caste. Their studies did not engage with the politics of the day. Their research gives us an impression that the social is detached from the political. This kind of analysis unfortunately falls within the colonial episteme. As Dirks (1987) argues that once the British colonized India, one of the first steps undertaken was to separate the political from the social. The social in time became the concern of the nationalists and the political of the colonialists.

Perhaps the most influential theory of caste developed in the anthropology of India is Dumont’s which is spelled out in Homo Hierarchicus (1970). Dumont’s theory of caste crucially depends on axioms—especially about the Brahman-Kshatriya relationship within the Varna hierarchy and the Purity and Pollution
binary- that relies on interpretations of the early Hindu texts. He augments this understanding through data collected predominantly from ethnographic studies of Indian rural society. The presumption here is that the structure of Indian society is ideally manifested in contemporary rural areas and that the social milieu and fabric of the contemporary villages are unchanged since ancient times.

The majority of Dumont's critics have questioned both his theoretical model and his ethnographic representation of the caste system. Scholars like Heesterman (1971; 1985) and Marriott (1969; 1990) object to the veracity of the interpretations of the Sanskrit texts undertaken by orientalists and colonial authorities. This approach relies heavily on religious texts which were represented subjective value systems of certain sections of society. Religion was a site of politics through which ideologies were contested and legitimated. (Fuller and Spencer 1990:88)

Similarly the most crucial criticisms of Dumont's ethnographic representation of the caste system have been inspired by historical research. During the early 1970s it became clearly understood that Indian society, and specifically its caste system, as described in the 'village studies' ethnographies of the 1950s and 1960s, were not something ancient that survived in 'traditional' villages. On the contrary, village society was the product of history and particularly colonial history. Cohn (1987) observes,

“...in some sense it might be argued that the British created the Indian village, and that they rigidified some groups and institutions, which formerly had been contingent and flexible, such as castes” (1987:195-6).

Similarly, Pocock's (1972) ethnographic research on the processes of social mobility on the Kanbi and Patidar castes in Gujarat opens up the question of how to really define the boundaries of a caste. He analyses the perpetual defining process of what it is to be a Patidar. He argues that until 1931 this large and influential caste in Gujarat was known as Kanbi. The acquisition of wealth and influence in the nineteenth century led both to a rise in the general
status of the caste and to economic differentiation within it so that the Patidar now consisted of a fluid hierarchy of villages, descent groups, and families at different levels of prestige.

The names Patidar and Kanbi are statements about these changes. As Patidar the whole caste asserts its unity in the sense that Patidar marries and dines with Patidar and its members share a common pride in the prestige associated with their caste name. As Patidar and Kanbi they distinguish different levels of superiority and inferiority within the caste. Pocock's analysis is in terms of the interplay of these integrative and differentiating tendencies and is carried out through examination of myths, narratives, commensality practices, marriage practices among other ethnographically recordable cultural traits. He argues that Patidar obtains confirmation of his status and identity in the marriages of his children and more particularly his daughters. His analysis focuses on the opposing pressures towards hypergamy and marriage between equals. Although he argues that the Saurashtra Kanabis are still looked down upon by Gujarat Patidars. Also, the Leva and Kadva divisions of Patidars are supposed to refer to sub-regional differences. Yet, from 1931 onwards, the Patidar identity has evolved as a regional or State level identity. (Pocock, 1972)

In the 1960s scholars such as Shah and Shroff (1958) examined a Gujarat village from a historical perspective to understand the structure and change among Barots - a caste of genealogists and mythographers. With the help of official records and rare documents, Shah (1964: 83-93) has also probed into the political system in Gujarat right from the eighteenth century onwards. In yet another study undertaken jointly with two other scholars, Shah has revealed that 'self-sufficiency of an Indian village' and an autonomous 'joint family system' as the dominant pattern in Indian rural households have been built as a 'grand myth' (Shah and Shroff, 1958).

Village records and documents as an invaluable source material that provided both data and insights for studying legal disputes- relating to caste, land, any
other immovable property, and agrarian issues. These studies recognized that caste was a contested entity. This view was also resonated by Desai (1964) in his work on patterns of migration in South Gujarat and also when he was made a member of the second Backward Class Commission in Gujarat, popularly known as Rane Commission (1983), wherein he questioned the logic of caste as the basis of reservation— for he felt caste was an extremely nebulous and flexible category. Similarly in the work (Shah and Desai, 1988) on the divisions and hierarchies in castes of Gujarat similar conclusions are reached.\textsuperscript{vii}

Srinivas (1955, 1962) began his village ethnographic studies in the 1940s and his latter studies were influenced by those of Shah and Shroff (1958). His theory and methodology was informed by the functionalist perspective of Radcliffe Brown (1950). Brown (1950:4) viewed lineage and kinship as the primary social units through which Indian society was organized. 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 social structure of isolated communities. His assumptions were premised on the idea that the received social structure as a total entity, which, while responding to exogenous influences, maintained its structural integrity. His queries related to how the caste system is responding to processes of representational politics. (Nimbark, 1964) For him political authority, alongside other elements of social structure, was an endogenous variable operating within the social whole (a well-defined and more or less autonomous structural entity). It constituted one of the functional elements of the ‘total social structure’ which ordered the arrangement of roles and determined one’s social status in the stratificatory system of the community. (Seth, 1999)

Since the analysis focused exclusively on the internal changes in the social structure of a microcosmic entity the discontinuities in this structure as well as the processes of structural integration taking place at a wider level of society through interactions between macro and micro processes were by and large
ignored. This kind of an approach suggested a re-affirmation of the basic principles of India's traditional social structure. The new political forms were perceived as responding to the needs of the 'total social structure' of the traditional order rather than as providing any serious challenge to its existence and continuation. (Seth, 1979)

Thus Srinivas's (1960, 1962, 1975) research concluded that status mobility was still by and large a caste phenomenon, and individuals aspiring to a higher status cannot do so by moving out of the traditional status system. They can hope to improve their status only as members of a specific caste group; and in their effort to improve their status they have to carry other members of their caste-group along with them. This is so because ritual status is still a predominant criterion of social stratification, and the acquisition of economic and political power by a status group in itself does not assure its rise in the social ladder. Srinivas argued that it was through the process of Sanskritization that social mobility takes place. He was also one of the first sociologists to examine the relationship between caste and politics. He introduced the concept of dominant caste to study power relations at village and local levels.

Using the functionalist approach similar kind of field work was carried out by S.C Dube (1968) on caste dominance and factionalism taking place in the jajmani system in rural areas. Similar research was carried out through out the country using the framework of sanskritization and dominant caste by S.K Chauhan, (1972), S Lal, (1973), T.K Oomen (1970), P.N Rastogi, (1963), K.L Sharma, (1973) and S.L Srivastava (1969) to either conform to the conclusions made by Srinivas (1962) or contest them.

Thus Srinivas (1959, 1962, 1966 and 1975) and other ethnographers, through their field studies came to the conclusion that the Varna model does not relate to regional specificity and thus reality. In his view caste is actually jati which is region specific. Within the Varna hierarchy or categorizations there are
innumerable jatis in any given spatial region and the given hierarchy is always locally contested.

Beteille (1965, 1969) using the Weberian framework, concerned with the processes of stability and change in society was drawn to examine the influence of 'political forces' on the system of social stratification. For him political development was one of the independent variables (alongside industrialization, urbanization and modern technology) which influenced the recognized social system. Thus, in his view, all elements in society were functionally integral, and hence he perceived the relationship between politics and 'social structure' in a dichotomous framework of modernity and tradition.

Thus the 'village studies', ethnographies and historical studies of locales made it clear that caste was being shaped by modern political and economic forces of modernization. It was thus argued that the caste-system had given way to a newly emergent market and the state. It was further observed that in this process of modernization led to dilution of the earlier ways of societal organisation i.e. system of ritual obligations and rights which once governed its economic and social existence and gave it an identity in terms of its status in the ritual hierarchy. Now caste functioned more in terms of identity and status. Recent studies such as Quigley (2000), Gupta (2000), A.M, Shah (2002) among others, highlight the dialectics between the political and the social and contend that each shapes the others emergence.

Thus while the sociologists and social anthropologists emphasized the resilience of caste, they also pointed out that certain structural changes were taking place in the caste system i.e. as understood through the Varna hierarchy. While it is often conceded that the microcosms of jatis may still persist as primary social groups based on kinship and endogamy (though significant changes are noticeable even in this respect), it is at the same time recognized that with progressive differentiation of economic and power structures new structural categories have been formed which are independent of, and
discontinuous with, the earlier political organisation of social structure and which cannot be discreetly located in the Varna and jati schemes of caste stratification any longer.

They argued that the new structural entities were political in nature and were called variously characterized as social circles, social networks, political factions or factional alignments. While studying caste, the earlier set of social anthropologists, historians and sociologists using the indological and colonial frameworks have not critically assessed the role of the colonial episteme in shaping the institution of caste. Caste in these studies seems to be a monolith and static entity. Also, these studies assume that the political is separate from the social and that caste is predominantly a social institution and only changes within the social such as processes of sanskritization would lead to change in this institution.

As Dirks, (Dirks, 1987; 8-10) has argued that in the process of administrative and political unification of the territories and the standardization and uniformisation of rules, the traditional authorities of the erstwhile kings was revoked; old forms of politics were condemned as feudal and exploitative. This impacted the dynamic and fluid arena of caste. Caste had always been an effect of and the source of the political. It had been shaped in fundamental ways by political struggles and processes. Moreover there were in pre-colonial India, the units of social identity had been multiple, and the interfacing and interstices were complex, dynamic and flexible. The referents of social identity were not only heterogeneous; they were also determined by context. As substantiated by Dirks (2002),

"The vital world of political action and community was, in fact, overtaken by colonial rule, and public life became increasingly defined as Western at the same time that the promise of universal modernity became more and more marked in national and racial terms. Meanwhile, public life was emptied of all "traditional" components- as the permanent Zamindari settlements of Bengal and Madras, and the intractable histories leading to indirect rule of one form or another in one-third of India (leaving princely states "intact"), produced a hollow simulacrum of India's ancient politics. 43
The British maintained in style these kingdoms, which had facilitated colonial conquest, as lavish museums of old India... Thus Britain sustained the fiction that it had walked into a vacuum and had conquered India.” Dirks (2001; 12)

Srinivas (1960) recognized the problem with Varna perspective to examine caste. He viewed the Varna model as the ‘book model’ and the jati model as the field view. Jatis then for him were real and these jati’s contested with each other in the realm of democracy to attain a dominant position. However Srinivas’s (1960, 1962) notion of caste as jati also is embedded in the colonial episteme.

With the exception of M.N Srinivas (1960, 1962) and Beteille (1965, 1969) none of the social anthropologists discuss the interface of caste with politics. Srinivas (1960, 1962) has acknowledged the emergent economic and political contexts and has argued through his concept of dominant caste and westernization how certain jatis become socially mobile. However in his research he does not conceptualise the relationship of caste with politics. Similarly Beteille (1965, 1969) argues through a Weberian lens how the emergent political and economic contexts have enabled a class within a few jatis to become an elite. He has also attempted to conceptualize power. For him power is related to status and status is related to the ritual position. Thus both these scholars conceptualised the effects of modern political processes and practices on caste system. They have argued that the caste system is no longer the only way to identify and locate jatis.

Review of literature on caste and politics

In the mid 1950s (Kothari and Maru, 1955), later Rudolph and Rudolph (1967), Kothari (1970), (Kothari and Maru, 1970), Hardgrave (1970), Elliot (1970), Sisson (1970), Zelliot (1970) and Rosenthal (1970) explored the interface of caste with politics in India. Their theorizations, perspectives and methodologies were embedded in Srinivas’s (1955) conceptualizations i.e. dominant caste, sanskritization and westernization. These scholars argue that
identities which were considered to be remnants of 'tradition' such as caste, religion and ethnicity had become an integral part of the so called 'modern' system of political institutions. Further they contend that these 'traditional' identities operate at collective levels by adapting to the modern democratic political framework and by transforming themselves, find an enduring place within it as parts of political modernity itself.

The most influential account on the interface of caste and politics was that of Kothari (1970) in his edited book *Caste and Politics in India*. He raised some pertinent questions- what are the facets of the interface of caste with politics in India? How is caste being reorganized in order to cope to these new contexts of electoral democracy? Does this process entail the politicization of caste? (Kothari, 1970; 5)

In this research Kothari (1970; 6) interrogates an important issue- why does political mobilization occur through caste? He argues that the political processes have to operate through an existing network of social ties and cannot occur in a vacuum. Informed by Srinivas's thesis (1955), for him caste meant an age old institution and the dominant way of organizing social life. He contends that the modern political processes induced the development of caste cleavages and realignments of these cleavages as political groups. The political system enables and sometimes compels disparate jatis to form political alliances. He asserts that this does not mean that the jatis intermingle at a social and cultural level. It is the political compulsions and the logic of common interest that temporarily force disparate jatis to organise as a coalition. Once the objectives are achieved newer permutations and combinations emerge. The conceptualization of dominant caste of Srinivas (1955, 1960) informs his research in his quest for identifying the sites of caste and politics interface.

"Although the empirical viability of the concept of dominant caste has been a matter of continuous debate, it seems to us that the political significance of a dominant caste situation has not been adequately stressed so far. Where splits and factions occur within the general framework of a dominant caste sharing a common heritage and a common idiom of
communication, politics serve as a medium of integration through adaptation and change. Factions within the same dominant caste also make it easy to bring in other castes to strengthen the support vase of rival factional leaders... a dominant-caste model of politics makes cross cutting loyalties more easy to develop than in the case of a confrontation of exclusive caste groups.” (Kothari and Maru 1970; 96)

Kothari (1970; 12) asserts that jati rather than Varna model should be employed to assess the interface between caste and politics. He argues just as Srinivas (1955, 1960) that the elicitation of Varna value systems can and has been used by jatis to justify their social mobility and also through this elicitation certain jatis have managed to form political coalitions. In his words,

“...the Varna symbolism employed by some castes (jatis) for social and political mobility...The symbol of kshtriya is both sufficiently indigenous and hallowed by tradition and sufficiently loose and nebulous to be invoked for claims to status and power. Because of the traditional claims of the kshtriya to be the class of warriors and rulers, the label is particularly handy for political purposes. It has been invoked by ritually differently placed groups for functionally the same purpose namely, a claim to high status and power” (Kothari and Maru, 1970; 96)

He cites the examples of the Coorgs in Karnataka, Jats in Rajasthan and Punjab, ‘Maratha’s in Maharashtra, Kammans and Reddy’s in Andhra Pradesh, Ahirs, Kurnis and Koeris in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Kathis in Saurashtra and Bariyas in Gujarat to explicate his argument.

This understanding of caste is embedded in Srinivas’s (1955) conception of dominant caste. Srinivas’s (1955) village studies approach of examining caste relations overtly assumed that caste and community was outside the realm of the political. This is also resonated in Kothari’s (1970) formulations. Another question that comes to mind is whether such a politicization of social groups effects discontinuities and disintegration of an entrenched social order or only modifies it in some respects.

Elliot (1970) examined the political mobilization of the Reddy and Kamma castes in three villages of Andhra Pradesh. She argues that the discourse of caste in politics in India concerned itself with the interface between the societal
groups and the new institutions of political life. These scholars, she observes, primarily investigated two interrelated issues- the transformation of a caste-based society as its members begin to participate in the new institutions and the impact of such primordial loyalties on the electoral politics. (Elliot, 1970; 129)

She further observes that in taking this position the scholars assume caste is a significant social group. In trying to reverse the objective of investigation she explores the necessary conditions such as the various forms of organisation (caste associations, caste panchayats, caste unions) that permit the articulation of caste as a significant political group. In her words,

"The question would focus on whether these groups articulated a broad caste loyalty in modern politics, or formed other kinds of associations with different ideologies and mixed caste memberships...the experience of similarly placed groups confronting similar political systems may help in suggesting variables which differentiate between conditions producing caste organisations and those producing other kinds of political organisations." (Elliot, 1970; 129)

In her research as in Srinivas's (1955), assumes the village society to be the ideal microcosm of studying caste. Following Srinivas (1955, 1960), she employs the functionalist theorization of how the disparate jatis are interrelated through an overarching and integrating occupational hierarchy or the Varna frame. She notes,

"The basic structures for both horizontal and vertical mobilization exist in the traditional village society. Every villager is a member of several groups in the village which may be ranged schematically along the same two dimensions of a smaller scale. As a member of a family and caste he interacts with persons of similar social status, participating interrelationships of ritual, kinship and group regulation. As a member of the occupational group in village he interacts with persons of different caste n occupation, conducting relationships based on economic exchange..." (Elliot, 1970; 129)

These scholars who examined the interface between caste and politics assumed that caste was exclusively a social phenomenon that had its own principles through which it reproduced itself and it was related to politics only at its interstices. They also argued that caste was an important conduit through
which political mobilizations occurred and that politics in turn politicized caste. However there was no theorization to explicate how the economy, society and polity are really enmeshed in and through the state. Moreover this scholarship was informed and embedded in the functionalism of early social anthropological and sociological meanings of caste as a given- interdependent, regional and immutable.

Additionally these scholars examined the ways in which caste was drawn into politics and how in turn how caste was politicized. It is therefore no wonder that this discourse is informed by methodologies of examining political behaviour. According to (Seth, 1979), this discourse can be classified as (i) Studies of political mobilization (for instance G. Shah, 1975) (ii) Studies of voting behaviour (Sirsikar, 1965) and (iii) Studies of local and state level politics (for instance the work of Rosenthal, 1970, Carter, 1974).

It is not therefore surprising that their analysis of caste is confined to political behaviour or organisation of caste based organizations within and through political parties. However such analysis can have an imposition of ‘truth’ (deemed to be) thus legitimizing the position of those controlling the field of power/politics. As Wacquant (2004) observes,

“Bourdieu questions the three tacit tenets at the basis of polls that everyone can and does have an opinion, that all opinions are equal, and that there exists a prior consensus on the questions worthy of being posed to argue that “public opinion” as presented in the form of spot survey statistics in newspapers is a pure and simple artefact whose function is to dissimulate the fact that the state of the opinion at a given moment is a system of forces, of tensions. Polls are an instrument not of political knowledge but of political action whose widespread use tends to devalue other means of group-making, such as strikes, demonstrations, or the very elections whose formally equalitarian aggregative logic they ostensibly mimic.” (Wacquant, 2004: 7)

Moreover the assumption that caste as an identity is fixed and therefore logic of electoral arithmetic of political loyalties and voting behaviour can be anticipated is itself questionable. As Gupta (2000) has demonstrated in his
book ‘Interrogating Caste’- he has through his research on Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra argued how the positivist framework of correlating caste based loyalties and voting patterns does not conform to the ground realities. He contends that the notion of caste has to be examined beyond the binaries of purity and pollution. His work demonstrates that any notion of a fixed hierarchy is arbitrary and valid only from the perspective of the individual castes. The idea of difference, and not hierarchy, determines the tendency of each caste to keep alive its discrete nature and this is also seen to be true of the various castes which occupy the same rank in the hierarchy. It is, in fact, the mechanics of power, both economic and political, that set the ground rules for caste behavior, which also explains how traditionally opposed caste groups find it possible to align in the contemporary political scenario. (Gupta, 2000)

Another set of scholars such as Brass (1968, 1984, 1985, 1990), Frankel and Rao (1989), Kohli (1987, 1988, 1991), Lele (1982, 1989), Rao (1964, 1972) began interrogating the interrelationship between caste and politics with slightly different assumptions. However this endeavour was informed the earlier discourse in more than one way. This discourse assumed just like the previous one that the state’s institutions and practices in the post-colonial period had inaugurated processes of structural differentiation and discontinuities in the received social order. This scholarship deviated from the earlier one which viewed caste as one among the many constituents of social structure. Caste was not considered as the singular principle of social networking and organization but there were other ways of imagining social reality.

These scholars examined the processes of articulation and mobilization, splintering and aggregation, of the existing assemblage of the many social constituents such as caste, class, religion, language and ethnicity. And how, this matrix of social identities was employed for political ends. They examined the operationalisation of the various enmeshed social milieus interfacing with each other for generation and reproduction of political power. Other identities
such as class, ethnicity, language and region were also given due importance in this schema. In their pursuit of exploring different contexts (social, economic and demographic) of political behaviour these scholars advanced theorizations of political power.

It is no wonder then that these scholars were drawn to political sociology. These scholars conceive involvement of caste in politics as a process of 'politicization'. Two divergent views of politicization, however, are discernible in this discourse.

According to these scholars politicization is a process that transcends primordial loyalties (such as caste, religious and ethnic considerations) and introduces associational and non-ascriptive principles of political organization. These scholars like the earlier ones were more concerned in examining political processes rather than social structures. Thus these scholars view the interaction between caste and politics in terms of a process that has implications for the generation and distribution of political power in society. (Rao, 1964, 1972, 1989, Brass, 1968, 1990, Kohli, 1987, Frankel and Rao, 1989 and Frankel, 2005)

These scholars contend that the process of political participation had opened up opportunities for the recruitment of new elite (in defiance of principles informing the prevailing social structure of purity and pollution). The mobilisation through caste identities and support bases had led to schisms and new alignments amongst members of these jatis as necessitated by the exigencies of political parties (again cutting across traditional hierarchical divisions), and thus gradually came to function as ‘interest’ or ‘pressure’ groups undermining their social and ritual characteristics. The implication of these changes on caste structures, it is argued has been of accretion and differentiation of roles, of fusion and fission of segments, of formation of new corporate groups or caste associations, and of the emergence of class like structures within the framework of caste. It is as part of this general concern

However it was the research of Frankel and Rao (1989) that attempted to bridge the various discourses on politics in India. There was recognition that the earlier research on caste and politics could not effectively explain the organisation of political power in India. It was by now accepted that caste was not the only variable through which political mobilization occurred. Thus, to encompass the various variables consequential for organization of political groups they inaugurated an interactional framework through which the linkages of caste, class and ethnicity could be examined. Also, this ‘dynamic’ model deemed caste, class and ethnicity as social processes and as social formations rather than an ineluctable modality of political participation. As Frankel (1989) argues

"Such an analytical strategy emphasizes the importance of the situational context in determining which one of multiple identities will emerge as primary in the competition for social, economic and political advantages...the framework used in these volumes concentrates on changes introduced into society by the modern state.” (Frankel, 1989; 18)

This approach reckoned caste, class, ethnicity as heuristically distinct yet mutually interpenetrating domains. Unlike earlier research that limited itself to assessing the interface of caste with politics this research was- mapping of regional variations of dominance and power through an interactional framework across disparate States. And also of assessing how caste, class and ethnicity intersected and interfaced with the new political and economic institutions and processes to enable dominance of a few castes in different States. Frankel (1989) defines the characteristics of dominance and distinguishes it from power as,

"The term dominance is used to refer to the exercise of authority in society by groups who achieved politico-economic superiority and claimed legitimacy for their commands in terms of superior ritual
status, or through alliances with those who controlled status distribution.” (Frankel, 1989; 2)

By contrast, the term ‘power’ is used to refer to the exertion of secular authority by individuals appointed or elected to offices of the state, who claim legitimacy under law to make an implement decisions binding on the population within their territorial jurisdiction. This distinction departs from the Weberian formulation of domination, which is often used interchangeably with authority.

Rao (1989) admitted that the prevailing notion of caste from earlier research was problematic. And for a project of this magnitude and complexity, one had to first delineate the various received meanings of caste. Rao’s (1989) dilemma and recognition of the complexity of defining caste is best expressed below-

“It is necessary in any empirical investigation to define the spatio-temporal context in which a caste group or category is located and the specific meaning or sense in which it is used. Unfortunately a single term caste is employed to connote different structural orders such as the smallest endogamous sub- sub- caste for which local words like jati, quom, dudh (milk) and biradari are used...a higher order consisting of several sub castes...and still higher level of varna order...the term ‘caste’ is also used to refer to a category of cognate sub castes as a unit of association across different parts of India (eg. Kurmi). It is used to refer to a category of different named sub-caste groups at the pan-India level (the untouchable castes). Finally it is used to refer to ideology as in caste ideology...we shall use the term with qualifications in a given empirical context...to designate respective territorial levels, structural orders an units of operation.” (Rao, 1989; 22)

In his endeavour to enlarge the notion of caste from its embedded location in the Varna hierarchy he re-theorizes caste such that it interrelates to class. He thus questions the received understanding of caste which is that caste is a hereditary, as a function of descent and as a closed endogamous group. He argues that this generalization ignores the role of social mobility. But he was also aware that some scholars employed a Weberian understanding and deemed caste as a status group (such as Beteille, 1965, 1969). He counters,
Following Weber’s formulations of these conceptions many sociologists and social scientists working on caste in India have equated it with status group. This has led to a serious misconception of the nature of caste and the caste system. To say the least, caste is not identical with status group. There are two notions in the concept of status group, namely status and group. Status is not collapsible with caste as status obtains also in class and ethnic groups. Conversely occupation (i.e. class position) is a part of the caste system. Moreover, caste as a group applies only to the sub-sub-caste level. Caste at higher levels of structural order is a category which admits status differentiation (and conflict) within it. Although it has the potentiality of group formation under defined, religious, social and economic conditions, it cannot be asserted that caste at higher structural levels is always a group…” (Rao, 1989; 23)

Therefore his question was- if social status is a common component of caste and class, how are the determinants of status in caste different from those of status in a class? And what are these? By raising these questions, Rao (1989) begins to interrogate the relationship of class with caste. He is influenced by the Weberian conception of class- that it is a category of people whose situation is determined by the market wherein they share common economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for earning income. Classes as such were groups and the social action that brought forth class situations is not basically action among members of the identical class but and interaction among members of different classes. Social actions that directly determine the class situation of the workers and the entrepreneur are the labour market, the commodities market and the capitalist enterprise. In short class was the kind of chance accessible to the individual in the market. He argued that the caste system was seen only in the context of religious ideology without reference to economic and political dimensions.

“The caste system in the context of relations of production and the exercise of power incorporates economic and political dimensions and here the system of inter-caste relations rather than caste category gains primary importance.” (Rao, 1989:30)

When relating class to caste he argues that the status in caste is determined by two criterion- economic (occupation, property, wealth, land) as well as by ritual, social and educational considerations.
"It is obvious that the source of legitimacy of the caste system in Hinduism is religious. ...This ideology also incorporated a material axis of status manifested in the differential category. In turn, the material inequality among the different varnas is sustained by the religious belief system... at the jati level specific jobs and occupations were associated with sub-castes or sub-sub-castes...The value behind the caste system invested callings and occupations with notions of purity and pollution determining not only ritual hierarchy but also differential allocation of material resources...thus the economic basis of division of labour combined with the ritual status of purity and pollution was responsible for differential access to material resources of production and differential allocation of rights an responsibilities. The production organisation which centered around land at the village level was strengthened by the jajmani system and patron-client relations of service. (Rao, 1989; 25, 30-31)

It is also argued by these scholars that newer ways of interest articulation and ethnic formations in Indian for instance, caste associations have become part of the modern political process (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967; Shah, 1975). In some cases, they form part of broader caste movements with a defined ideology engaged in collective mobilization. Under such circumstances, caste clusters (including cognate jatis and sub-jatis) tend to develop into large ethnic blocs competing for ritual, economic and educational advantages and struggling against a position of subordination in a bid to gain positions of dominance. (Rao, 1989; 39)

Harriss (2003) using the paradigm of class-caste has typified Indian States into four groups- a) States where upper class/caste have persisted that include Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan b) States where upper caste/class dominance has been effectively challenged that includes Bihar and Uttar Pradesh c) States with regimes dominated by middle castes/classes which include Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Punjab d) States in which lower castes/classes have been more strongly represented which are Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Frankel (1989) has examined how the lower castes were able to mobilize across jatis through the Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS) in the 1980’s in Bihar and contested the dominance of the upper caste i.e. of Brahmin,
Rajputs, Bhumihars and Kayasthas. Z.Hasan (1989) traces the rise of middle and low caste groups that are benefitted through the green revolution and how they organize through the Bhartiya Kranti Dal to capture power in Uttar Pradesh. Similarly Washbrook (1989) assesses how low caste movements in Tamil Nadu lead to the inauguration of a political Party called the DMK. Alexander (1989) has examined how the agrarian movements in Kerala and Tamil Nadu allowed for the consolidation of disparate lower caste jatis such as Izhavas, Pannaiyals and Adiyans, Parayas and Pallas as a political bloc to challenge the dominance of upper castes such as the Brahmins, Vellallas an the Nairs.\textsuperscript{xv}

Shah (1989) who explores caste dominance in Gujarat recognizes the difficulty in defining caste. He argues,

"One faces similar difficulties in using the term caste. Hierarchy, endogamy, or marriage circle and social commensality together form the main principles of caste. It is relatively easy to identity caste groups, the members of which are bound together by \textit{roti beti vyahar} at the village level. Their status in the village social hierarchy can also be identified. However not all castes are endogamous. Sometimes the levels of hypergamy are so many that one finds it difficult to decide where one caste ends and the other begins. The difficulties are also enormous when one attempts analysis at the level of the state as a whole. Those who claim to be members of the same caste but reside in the different parts of the state do not enjoy the same social status in the different villages in which they reside. They also do not necessarily share the same social customs, occupation a lifestyle. In fact from the point of view of social characteristics they may be closer to the members of other caste groups of the same locality than to those of their caste members living in different parts." (Shah, 1989; 59)

He contends that the economic and occupational changes that have occurred in the post-independence period have led to the development of classes within caste. And these castes and caste groups are realigning and changing. However, he adds, that the elite amongst the caste invoke caste ideology or caste consciousness among the members to obtain support of caste members.
“The political dimensions imply that the members identify themselves as belonging to one caste and share the same nomenclature of caste against the members of other castes for purposes of political action. In some cases they may even invent a new name to encompass various caste groups. I use the term ‘caste sentiments’ to indicate the subjective sense of caste members (caste for itself), who feel a sense of ‘we-ness’ as against the members of other castes. This sense of identity may be based on real, or imaginary, common historical heritage. It retains the connotation of ‘status’ involving the principles of purity and pollution which has however become less relevant in recent years.” (Shah, 1989; 61)

Thus, these scholars have attempted to first problematise the concept of caste as jati and have argued that with the economic and political opportunity structures, these castes are becoming more complex as classes within them are developing. Additionally these jatis are moving beyond the logic of the purity-pollution frame to organize as caste clusters and political organizations. They argue that it is not only through the modicum of caste that the political organisation takes place. They contend that it is also through other identities such as class and ethnicity that political mobilization is occurring. They argue that electoral democracy creates spaces for contestations that eventually tolerate participation of multiple interest groups in the functioning of the state. The firmly entrenched everyday practices of collective living allow for communitarian identities such as caste, class, language and religion among others to participate in these spaces.

As Rao succinctly argues,

...power is dispersed and the opportunity to exercise it obtains potentially in diverse social situations and that if one wishes one can use this opportunity, establishes linkages between the society and state. It implies that power (in a general sense) is not confined to the state, although special forms of structures of power are associated with the state. At the same time, there are distinctive forms of power associated with caste, class and ethnic situations which are in the realm of society. A useful analytical distinction can be made between dominance in the domain of society and political power in the arena of the state. The distinction between dominance and political power overlaps with that between society and state to considerable extent. While dominance is characterized by power of command (ideally perceived as legitimate authority) political power is
characterized by the state’s monopoly over the legitimate use of force (Rao, 1989; 40-41)

The credit of these scholars is that they introduced other variables in the organisation of political organisations and mobilizations. They have also attempted to problematise caste and also critically assessed through their interactional model how caste is adapting to the political necessities. However, we can see it there are three limitations of this discourse. First, this scholarship is premised on the axiom that society and state are two exclusive realms. Second, even though they recognize the definitional problem of caste and have tried to problematise it, these scholars have integrated the received anthropological notion that jati status is embedded in the Varna logic. But most importantly they do not have a methodological conceptualization to overcome this problem. Third, they have not theorized on the state and therefore, they assume that in electoral democracy, power is structured primarily in and through the state legislature. This leads me to ask, if rule can also be perceived through the prism of other state institutions and apparatuses such as bureaucracy, police, military, judiciary and other executive organs? Moreover is rule not organized through ideological imaginations such as symbols, signs, value systems and ideology?

This last question leads us to an assessment of the state and the way it interfaces with the ruling class. Marxist political scientists (Bardhan, 1984, Balgopal, 1988 and Kaviraj 1997) contend that the Indian state is a capitalist state and is controlled by a ruling class coalition of three classes i.e. capitalists, the rich farmers and the bureaucratic managerial elite. They are a coalition of interest groups possessing material, social and cultural resources. They argue that this ruling class can rule only when they exist as a coalition because capital is not an independent and dominant entity in Indian society and state. The Marxists theorize the concept of state and with it rule.
Marxist discourse on Caste and Class

Marxist research has theorized the central structures of state power and their relationship with dominant organized forces in Indian society. They have focused on the state as the site of reference and have argued that it is through this lens that the nebulous power relations and the politics of power in the democracy can be gauged. Marxists argue that the Indian state symbolizes bourgeois interests and therefore it is a bourgeois state. Marxists such as Kaviraj (1997), Balgopal (1988) and Sanyal (2007) for instance visualizes the state as the primary site wherein power and authority are centralised and its control has enabled the ruling class coalition to dominate and hegemonise the subaltern classes. Bardhan (1984) identified the capitalists, the rich farmers and the bureaucracy as the three dominant classes, competing and aligning with one another within a political space supervised by a relatively autonomous state.

The dominant class coalition model was employed by Kaviraj (1989) in which, by using Gramsci’s idea of the “passive revolution” as a blocked dialectic, he was able to ascribe to the process of class domination in postcolonial India its own dynamic. Power had to be shared between the dominant classes because no one class had the ability to exercise hegemony on its own. But sharing was a process of ceaseless push and pull, with one class gaining a relative ascendancy at one point, only to lose it at another. Kaviraj (1989, 1997) provides a synoptic political history of the relative dominance and decline of the industrial capitalists, the rural elites and the bureaucratic-managerial elite within the framework of the passive revolution of capital.

In a recent intervention Chatterjee (2004) further qualifies the conventional Marxist understanding. He argues that political power can be examined in terms of contestations between two spheres- a congruous civil society (urban middle classes that follows the normative cultural models of the bourgeoisie) and a more ill-defined political society (consisting of the rural and urban poor).
He contends that the capitalist class in India exercises its considerable influence over both the central and the State governments not through electoral mobilisation of political parties and movements but largely through the bureaucratic-managerial class, the increasingly influential print and visual media, and the judiciary and other autonomous regulatory bodies.

According to Kaviraj the state in India is a bourgeois state because- a) dominance enjoyed by the capitalist class, or a coalition of classes dominated by the bourgeoisie b) the state form is bourgeois; i.e. parliamentary democratic form as being historically a bourgeois form of government in which political grievances do not reach a level that disrupts the minimal stability required for capitalist production and c) The state expresses and ensures the domination of the bourgeoisie and helps in capitalist reproduction and a subordinate reproduction of other types of economic relations by imposing on the economy a deliberate order of capitalist planning. Those directives functions that capital cannot perform through the market (either because the market is imperfect or not powerful enough, or because such tasks cannot be performed by market pressures) the bourgeois state performs through the legitimized directive mechanisms of the state. (Kaviraj, 1997: 48-49)

Colonial policies together with certain historical incidents structured this form of democracy in India. These were a) integration of the Indian economy in the capitalist international market and its division of labour b) the received structure of colonial economic retardation and c) the preference of the leadership of the new Indian state in favour of a capitalist strategy of economic growth through a set of basic legal and institutional forms- such as the format of legal rights in the constitution, the set of ordinary laws ruling economic and corporate behaviour, the enactment of industrial policy and other similar initiatives. (Kaviraj, 1997: 47)

Thus an assessment of the ruling class dynamics - the contradictions and contestations on the one hand in which these coalitional partners try to outflank
one another and on the other hand consensus building through coalition so as not to threaten and rupture their rule enables us to comprehend the changes occurring at the level of democratic politics. The political process can thus be described in terms of changing patterns of checks and balances in the ruling class coalition. (Chatterjee, 1997: 42-43)

Balgopal (1988) argues in a similar vein that the leadership (which emanates from the ruling classes) and the state are symbiotically linked wherein the state creates channels of patronage networks that link the interests and thus the loyalty of the masses to the ruling classes. He further argues that it is through the state that the leadership enriches them and it is through the state that they lay claim to the loyalty of the masses. Thus it is through the state that the political elite extends its patronage and maintains its legitimacy.

According to Kaviraj the ruling class in India is a coalition of interest groups possessing material, social and cultural resources. These are the bourgeoisie, the landed elite and the bureaucratic managerial elite. They can rule only when they exist as a coalition because capital is not an independent and dominant entity in Indian society and state. Similarly due to certain historical and sociological reasons single-handed and unaided dominance in society is also ruled out for the other propertied classes. He therefore argues that this coalition is not an effect or an accidental attribute of a dominance which is otherwise adequate; it is its condition. (Kaviraj, 1997; 52-53)

However he opines that it is the capitalist bourgeoisie who are the dominant group within this coalition because it is this section that has a coherent and internally flexible development paradigm. He further argues that the Precapitalist elements are still rooted in the feudal mode and do not have an alternative coherent ideology through which to operate; their efforts have been restricted mainly to adjusting to this capitalist transition and ensuring survival plans for their own class. They have contented themselves by operating not, as an alternative leading group, but as a kind of a relatively more reactionary
pressure group within the ruling combine trying to shift or readjust the balance of policies in a retrograde direction. (Kaviraj:, 1997: 52-54)

One of the major problems faced by the traditional Marxist scholars was employing this overarching ruling class argument in understanding local and regional societal level phenomenon such as caste based politics. This rather rigid frame of argument that privileged a class based analysis foreclosed the option of assessing the role of other cultural and social categories and practices operating in politics. Its ‘universal’ premise based on the class analysis, internalized the logic of homogeneity that also proved to be a hindrance in examining the micro level politics.

Chatterjee (1997) also deviates from the classical Marxist school. He presents his argument in the period of post liberalization i.e. post 1991. He argues that although the state continues to be the most important mediating apparatus in negotiating between conflicting class interests, the autonomy of the state in relation to the dominant classes appears to have been redefined. Crucially, the earlier role of the bureaucratic-managerial class, or more generally of the urban middle classes, in leading and operating, both socially and ideologically, the autonomous interventionist activities of the developmental state has significantly weakened.

He points out that the critical difference, as he points out has been produced by a split in the field of the political between a domain of properly constituted civil society and a more ill-defined and contingently activated domain of political society. Civil society in India today, peopled largely by the urban middle classes, is the sphere that seeks to be congruent with the normative models of bourgeois civil society and represents the domain of capitalist hegemony. If this were the only relevant political domain, then India today would probably be indistinguishable from other western capitalist democracies. But there is the other domain of what Chatterjee calls political society which includes large sections of the rural population and the urban poor.
These people do, of course, have the formal status of citizens and can exercise their franchise as an instrument of political bargaining. But they do not relate to the organs of the state in the same way that the middle classes do, nor do governmental agencies treat them as proper citizens belonging to civil society. Those in political society make their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of stable constitutionally defined rights and laws, but rather through temporary, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations. The latter domain, which represents the vast bulk of democratic politics in India, is not under the moral-political leadership of the capitalist class. Hence, his argument is that the framework of passive revolution is still valid for India. But its structure and dynamic have undergone a change. The capitalist class has come to acquire a position of moral-political hegemony over civil society, consisting principally of the urban middle classes. It exercises its considerable influence over both the central and the state governments not through electoral mobilisation of political parties and movements but largely through the bureaucratic-managerial class, the increasingly influential print and visual media, and the judiciary and other independent regulatory bodies. (Chatterjee 2004)

Scholars such as Rudra (1981), Patil (1979), Omvedt (1981) argue that the traditional Marxist theoreticians did not pay enough attention to caste and similar issues in India. Marxist historians too did not give much importance either. Omvedt (1981) argues that the Marxist organisations and their ideologues find it easy to explain caste behaviour simply as a manifestation of class behaviour. The methodology employed by such Marxists does not pay much attention to the history of class formation in India or to the nature of pre-capitalist formations in India and the relevance of caste to it. Omvedt (1981) believes that at the time of Independence, Indian agriculture was predominantly feudal in character, though important elements of capitalism had risen. This was a ‘caste-structured’ form of feudalism which existed before the colonial period. When the colonial state no longer officially enforced the
caste system, ‘caste’ and ‘class’ began to represent separate social phenomena, but there was still a near-absolute correlation between them. Because of the particular caste aspect of Indian feudalism, Omvedt affirms, the anti-feudal movement was expressed not only through peasant revolts but also in the radical anti-caste movements. (Omvedt 1981)

In the context of modern India how have policies initiated from above affected the social structure and the relations among the various groups in the village? What has been the impact of various social and political movements in rural India on the group relations? Omvedt (1981), argue that the hesitation to grant a degree of autonomy to political and cultural factors by some Marxist scholars and the tendency to explain every situation only by an overarching category of class struggle is responsible for the Marxist scholars to relate class to caste and hence to comprehend the questions related to caste identity and caste politics.

With the introduction of electoral politics soon after independence it was realized that it tended to reinforce the strategic position of the dominant land owning castes by enlarging their role. The leadership that emanated from the propertied class, which was in many instances was analogous to the landed caste, was able to control the vote banks and thus, was to a great extent successful in protecting their interests. The pre-existing kinship, castes and the economy were intrinsically bound together very closely contrary to the perception of the leadership under the helm of Nehruvian socialism. No wonder with elections at the turn of independence the political regime in India was coalitional in nature representing different class interests i.e. the bourgeoisie and the landed classes on the one hand and workers and peasants on the other. Also, the bureaucracy and the intellectual elite played a major role. Together they constituted the elite. (Kaviraj, 1997)

In addition to class interests, the polity in India is considered coalitional on the basis of political ideology. With the introduction of electoral politics, the country witnessed the growth of political parties espousing disparate political
ideologies, some even in contradiction with the other. The multi-party spectrum in the early 1950s to early 70s included, communist parties at the left of the spectrum, the Congress party close to the centre and the Jan Sangh at the extreme right. In these coalitions and ideologies caste played an important role as a strategy for political mobilisation. At the eve of independence and decades after that the rural settings exhibited forms of feudal or at least semi-feudal practices. How do the Marxist scholars confront this reality?

Some Marxist scholars (Lieten, Prasad, Pandit, Ranadive all 1979, and Mukhopadhyay, 1980) argued that the traditional system of economic and social interdependence between social groups (castes), known as the jajmani system was disintegrating. In the place of cooperation, competition between castes and between groups of castes had become an active principle of village social structure. The authority of a dominant caste which regulated the jajmani system and functioned as an agency enforcing the norms of the traditional social structure is now being challenged by hitherto dependent caste groups occupying lower and dependent status in the traditional social hierarchy.

Often, such competition assumes the form of acute tensions and violent conflicts between social groups. It is, however, misleading to view these conflicts in terms of an intercaste relationship. For, the issues on which the different castes come into conflict have no bearing on caste beliefs and values. The conflict between castes does not stem from the fact that they are caste. The people belonging to different castes may be treated as groups of people and these, like groups in any society, come in conflict with one another for such reasons as control over economic resources, social dominance, self assertion, or the desire for autonomy. In brief, the relationship of conflict and cooperation between these social groups is determined by the place they occupy in the changed economic and power structure of the village community rather than by their status in the traditional hierarchy.
The built-in mechanism of the entrenched social structure which helped reduction of tensions within a caste and resolutions of inter-caste disputes (which indeed existed even in a traditional village system characterized by functional interdependence and caste groups) have also become ineffective. The caste panchayat, the village council of castes, and even the dominant caste have lost their sanction to enforce any settlement between contending parties. Scholars argue that this process has led to fragmentation of the caste-based power structure of a village community, and the emergence of new integrative principles of allocation and distribution of power. (Roy, 1979, Rudra, 1981)

In order to cope with the insecurities generated by these changes in the traditional social structure, castes take recourse to political organization. Political organization provides caste with a new source of security which helps to reduce tensions. Inter-group conflicts are also contained by political parties and leaders seeking the support of various social groups. In the process, political factions rather than castes become important units of village power structure. These factions are not concomitant with castes. Their membership consists of individuals and families belonging to several castes. They are more like personalized groupings or multi-caste power alliances. xvii

However within the Marxist scholars there were disagreements regarding the mode of production in Indian agriculture. This debate was captured in the Economic and Political Weekly from 1978 to 1981 which was summarized by Thomer (1982). She argues that the existence of widespread tenancy and/or share-cropping does not necessarily indicate the presence of feudal relations of production; nor does the concentration of landholding together with cultivation of small units by large numbers of peasants. She contends that the shift from exploitation through tenants to large-scale or intensive farming by means of hired labour does indicate capitalist relations and the growth of capitalist farming. Servile, debt-bonded, and/or traditionally tied labour has been largely supplanted by free, relatively mobile, wage labour, paid (if meagerly) for the most part in cash. Investment in modern, scientific agriculture has enormously
expanded, and has resulted, on the whole, in enhanced production, at least of certain crops in certain areas. Tenancy and share-cropping arrangements have in many regions been adapted to the new economic and technical requirements. Yet master-servant types of behaviour, extra-economic constraints, rack-renting and usury have by no means disappeared. A particular feature of the Indian scene is the vast mass unemployment or under-employed who, if they cannot emigrate and find jobs outside of agriculture, exercise upward pressure on the rental price of land, and downward pressure on wage rates.

Rudra (1981), argues that caste hierarchies reflect economic power and ownership of land. As bourgeois relations developed, the institution of caste began to disintegrate, but the process was not smooth. It is usually at junctures that the resources being scarce, mobilisations take place in terms of primordial identities such as caste, language and region. He further argues that in mixed capitalist economy of India, caste persists as a part of the feudal ideology. But it also serves the bourgeois system since one of its functions, a strategy that the elite have resorted to for ensuring reproduction of the system.

Some of the Marxist scholars have analyzed the 'forces of modernization' at the macro society like the abolition of zamindari, the introduction of community development or panchayati raj, the functioning of political parties and the holding of elections, as an explanatory variable and examine its influence on village social structure or specifically on caste structure. (Chibbar, 1968, Mukherjee, 1961, Mukhopadhyay, 1980, Shah, 1969)

And some others have assessed specific change-variable (Lieten, Prasad, Pandit, Ranade, 1979) and Mukhopadhyay (1980). They have focused more on the changing economic and power structures of village communities. They investigated the problem of structural differentiation in a more systematic manner. These are the studies of changing economic and power structures of village communities. Focusing on situations of inter-group tensions and conflicts in village society, they examine structural changes in the caste system.
basing their analysis on comparative data obtained from a number of carefully selected village communities they draw attention to new patterns of conflict and integration that have emerged in the village social structure, patterns which are characteristically different from those in a caste society. They also discuss the caste-class continuum. 

However scholars who have argued through the lens of ruling class have rarely interrogated the interrelationship of caste with politics. Further, by employing this overarching ruling class argument in understanding rule they have not been able to assess the local and regional societal level phenomenon of power distribution. And thus their argument foreclosed the option of assessing the role of other cultural and social categories and practices operating in organisation of power. Some Marxist scholars such as Rudra (1981), Omvedt (1982) bring into discussion the interrelationship of caste with class in conceptualising the formation of power structures in India. They critique the earlier Marxist scholars on the ground that they explain caste behaviour simply as a manifestation of class behaviour. Recent interventions (Barbara Harriss, 2003 and Fernandes, 2007) have been more inventive ad sophisticated that suggests that a class analysis need not always be located within the framework of the relations and mode of production but may be understood as a function of consumption and or culture i.e. ideas, symbols, signs, identities and reinvented memories. Additionally scholars who recognize the interrelatedness of caste and class slide back into the colonial episteme of caste i.e. caste as an immutable category.

It is this context Bourdieu’s (1990) conception of social capital becomes useful to examine rule and domination the ‘Marathas’ and examine how power is organized and channelized through various institutions, strategies and practices. His theory of power is rooted in the cultural reproduction of power which operationalise through the logic of practice i.e. through the dialectic interaction between the habitus and the fields.
Bourdieu's Theorization of habits, field, capitals and power

As mentioned earlier I examine the ways and contexts in through which the 'Maratha' a social imaginary got constituted from the late 19th century to the early 20th century in and through the colonial encounter. This notion of their being a group was present since pre-colonial period. However it found legitimacy in the context of colonial governance practices which used the anthropological knowledge of Indian society as being divided into castes. The colonial state recognized caste as the principal social identity through which societal relationships could be understood.

With the coming of the East India Company and later the British crown many changes were heralded. The unification process entailed administrative, economic and judicial/legal integration as the British Indian territory. One of them was the introduction of the land settlement act that reorganized disparate social and cultural geographies. The colonial state then inaugurated changes in the existing land tenurial practices in order to maximize profits. The new policy called the ryotwari system was introduced in which the actual cultivators of the land were by and large recognized. The ryot was recognized by his caste. The caste identity was legitimated through the classificatory colonial categories i.e. census. Colonial authorities reinvented categories such as martial race which also reinforce caste as the fundamental category of formal recognition.

The colonial state also inaugurated 'modern' political institutions and economic processes such as the economic market, bureaucracy, military market, administrative institutions, political and legal institutions among others. These were seen by the indigenous actors as opportunities of employment. These opportunity structures however were inaugurated to facilitate colonial governance and therefore had restricted entry usually at a subaltern level.

I argue using Bourdieu (1990) that these opportunity structures were the field of power (politics). Each field and sub-field had logic of its own and these fields required certain level of competence for anyone to enter it. Further I'm also
arguing in my thesis that with these two events taking place i.e. caste as 'the' officially recognized identity and the inauguration of new fields, the indigenous actors began drawing strategies that would enable them to access them. Given this opportunity they had to create their own strategies which came from outside the field. This, I argue emerges through the habitus. These strategies had to be put in place because colonialism only understood caste identity as the mode of entry play and legitimation in the field of power.

I contend that these strategies took many forms but the most important was organizing around the category of caste which the British formally recognized. The organisation of these categories was malleable. Caste was not a closed static group but rather a contested category. I'm arguing that by formally recognizing only one model of caste i.e. Varna, the colonial state set into motion a process to freeze caste into the four folds through the census and other colonial records. However the colonial state found this to be an impossible task and hence quit this procedure in 1931 (the last caste based census). This combination of strategies has embedded layers. Thus I am contending that caste is a set of strategies that operationalise as social capital.

I assert that the social scientists have misrecognised these strategies of the indigenous actors to coalesce into groups that were formally identifiable by the British as caste. These are not castes but nebulous groupings of individuals with the objective of accessing the fields. An individual could thus identify with any group i.e. as long as he had the right credentials i.e. capital. I therefore contend that caste is really a social imaginary that was constructed during the colonial rule.

Thus I'm arguing that the so called 'Maratha' (caste as social science discourse posits it) social imaginary got organized in the colonial period through certain strategies. What were these strategies? I argue that the first strategy employed by the 'Marathas' was that of kinship. Kinship meant marital alliances, notional and fictitious kinship. Kinship was the principle way of organizing social
networks or social capital. Kinship became one of the important ways in which
the indigenous actors organized themselves to enter fields such as local level
administrative authority structures (such as land revenue clerks, village heads,
and village kotwals among others).

The second strategy of the “Marathas” was kingship. Through this strategy the
“Marathas” were able to legitimate their martial race credentials. This strategy
was inaugurated to enroll in the military, police and other ‘martial’ and
‘masculine’ related fields.

The third and the fourth strategy complemented the first two strategies. These
were education and sports. As the administrative and politico-legal fields
demanded that literate indigenous actors only be employed, the ‘Marathas’ began
to accumulate this form of institutionalized cultural capital. Sports were also
used as a form of institutionalized cultural and symbolic capital which was useful
for the martial race strategy.

All these four strategies were helpful in organizing what we misrecognise as the
‘Maratha’ caste cluster. By 1931 this caste cluster was more or less delineated
through the census. By 1909 the colonial state had introduced local level
councils and by 1919 dyarchy (two levels of representative councils). However,
now newer strategies were required to enter the fields as the colonial state had
introduced provincial legislatures in 1935.

The fifth strategy which was important as it was inaugurated at the eve of
independence with a recognition that the new state would adopt a democratic
form of government. This meant that electoral fortunes would determine the
channel towards political power. This was also a period when the peasant
organisations were springing up all across the country. It was in this context that
the strategy of ‘Maratha’ as peasant imaginary was inaugurated. After
independence in 1947, this strategy assumed a very important role as it helped in
consolidating many disparate groups of people into the so called ‘Maratha’
imaginary.
In the post independence period the fields got reconstructed in the context of electoral democracy. Power was now routed in and through the state. The principle of one person one vote now created spaces for the organisation of caste blocs and coalitions. In some States the caste blocs took the form of caste coalition and clusters. Modern institutions of education and sports together with decentralized and local state institutions such as the Panchayati Raj Institutions and cooperatives enabled ‘reimagining’ and identification with ‘Maratha’. These strategies found further legitimacy after independence due to special circumstances of political processes in Bombay state and later Maharashtra.

After independence the Nehruvian ideology gained importance the Central or National level. His temples of modernity meant inauguration of newer industries and science and technology centers. This discourse invoked the importance of individualism, occupation, industries etc. However the Bombay State (which included today’s Gujarat and Maharashtra) was the undivided territory and the elite belonged to the Brahmin and Bania and other Non ‘Maratha’ groups.

It was thus in the 1950s that this peasant identification strategy operationalised in terms of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement (SMM) that was demanding a separate state for the Marathi people. In 1960 Maharashtra was separated and since then the ‘Maratha’s have been using these strategies in interwoven ways to maintain their domination. This practice of maintaining their power is really rule.

Bourdieu (1977, 1984) suggests a social theory of power that is capable of interrogating the relationship between culture, stratification, and power. Moreover, in comparison to the Marxian concept of ideology, Bourdieu’s language of symbolic power stresses that culture does not simply reflect underlying economic and social relations but it also constitutive of them. Naming and classification, the capacity to use symbolic forms to form associations and divisions, helps bring into existence and give identity to social groups and define their inter-relationships. Culture has a relative autonomy from the economy. In modern differentiated societies, Bourdieu stresses that
the state, through law, official classifications, and particularly education, institutes fundamental frames of reference, perception, understanding, and memory. It therefore monopolizes the means of symbolic violence as well as of physical violence.

Bourdieu argues

"The state concentrates treats and redistributes information and, most of all, effects a theoretical unification. Taking the vantage point of the whole, of society in its totality, the state claims responsibility for all operations of totalization (especially thanks to census-taking and statistics or national accounting) and of objectivization, through cartography (the unitary representation of space from above) or more simply through writing as an instrument of accumulation of knowledge (archives for example), as well as for all operations of codification as cognitive unification implying centralization in the hands of clerks and men of letters" (Bourdieu, 1999: 45)

The state regulates the classification struggle among social groups by giving some classifications and categories official legitmation and rejecting others. In this regulatory function, the state institutionalizes its own specific form of capital, statist capital, a kind of meta-capital that consecrates and renders official the most legitimate forms of powers.

Bourdieu (1977, 1979, 1984, 1990) suggests a social theory of power that is capable of interrogating the relationship between culture, stratification, and power. His theorisation examines how by way of cultural symbols and practices, ranging from artistic tastes, style in dress, language and eating habits to religion, science, and philosophy function to organise distinctions and hierarchies in society. As my thesis is examining how imagined groups (caste in received social science language) as an identity for actors becomes an important conduit to capture power and later legitimate this power by instituting a set of ideas that are then naturalised by the masses. This internalization of the dominant values I argue through the Bourdieu's (1990) theory of rule.
In this thesis I ask - how does such a large population (of 30 million approximately) imagine themselves through the imaginary of ‘Maratha’? In doing so I ask what were the historical contingencies, contexts and social sites that provided space for the construction of such a social imagery? Why and how did this social imagery get constructed? Who were the actors involved and what was the content of the social imagery? What were the communication channels and practices through which this social imagery gets embedded in everyday practices and individual bodies? I also ask how the certain colonial practices and institutions became sites for contestations and reimagining the social imaginary called ‘Maratha’.

In answering these questions I invoke the Bourdieu’s (1990) theorisation of social, cultural and symbolic capital in tracing how the social imaginary called ‘Maratha’ got organised by the late 1930s. I also ask how once in power in 1960, how and through what strategies and practices do the ‘Marathas’ naturalize rule.

By rule I mean the ways through which hierarchy and domination of the ruling class persists and reproduces intergenerationally without powerful resistance. The masses internalize their conditions of domination as normal, inevitable, or natural, and thereby misrecognize the true nature of their social inequalities by accepting rather than resisting them. It is pertinent to note here that this argument corresponds with Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony.

Bourdieu’s argument of fields and capital is instructive in the way that it extends the analysis of power to more subtle and disguised expressions i.e. beyond that of material advantage and coercion alone. Power requires justification and belief- a naturalisation of the system. Bourdieu argues that in the process of the construction of the state a simultaneous process of the construction of a common historical transcendental i.e. common cognitive frameworks, memories, perception, symbols, thought and a certain kind of reason gets naturalised and becomes immanent to the masses. This
internalisation of value systems through the process of socialisation- in the family, schooling and through interactions in society provides the necessary impetus for the reproduction of the system. This embedded dominant knowledge system is situated within the individual that operates at mental and cognitive levels, which Bourdieu terms as habitus. (Kalpagam 2006: 86)

Thus, Bourdieu’s (1984) theorisation of habitus and fields together with his conception of species of capital prove to be instructive for examination of how the ‘‘Maratha’’ caste got organized. In my thesis I interrogate the ways of forging ‘‘we-ness’’ i.e ‘being a community’ of the ‘‘Maratha’’ caste. I also examine the ideology, processes and practices through which caste members internalize these value systems that suggest a unified social experience i.e. of social imaginary (Lacan, 1968) of being a ‘Maratha’.

Bourdieu proposes sociology of symbolic power in which he addresses the important topic of relations between culture, stratification, and power. He contends that the struggle for social recognition is a fundamental dimension of all social life. In that struggle, cultural resources, processes, and institutions hold individuals and groups in competitive and self-perpetuating hierarchies of domination. Bourdieu focuses on how these social struggles are embedded and interwoven through symbolic classifications, how cultural practices place individuals and groups into competitive class and status hierarchies, how relatively autonomous fields of conflict interlock individuals and groups in struggle over valued resources, how actors struggle and pursue strategies to achieve their interests within such fields, and how in doing so actors unwittingly reproduce the social stratification order. Culture, then, is not devoid of political content but rather is an expression of it. (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984)

In this thesis I am using the Bourdieun lens to argue how the caste is social capital and how this social capital enables organisation of rule. I ask how caste is related to the field of politics. How does the ideology and practice of caste
allow the formation of the habitus? What is the relationship between different fields and caste? How are the fields constructed? How do agents act strategically depending on their habitus enhance their capital?

The concept of field of power was elaborated by Bourdieu (1990) to further qualify the Marxist understanding of the "ruling class". His theoretical position makes possible a relational approach to understanding distribution of power and also provides an alternative view of the state (rather than an organizational monolith) i.e. he reveals the internal divisions and struggles of the actors that the state constitutes. He points out the multiple sites and constellation of interlinked institutions within which the holders of various species of capital (economic, religious, legal, scientific, academic, artistic and symbolic) compete to impose the supremacy of the particular kind of power they wield. (Bourdieu, 2000: 215)

This theorisation is especially useful while analysing class rule in democracies and in my thesis the nature of the colonial state and later the Indian democracy. Bourdieu analyzes power in three overlapping but analytically distinct ways: (1) power in valued resources (capitals), (2) power in specific spheres of struggle (fields), and (3) power in legitmation (leading to the operationalisation of the phenomenon of symbolic violence). (Swartz, 1997, Wacquant, 1998)

Bourdieu conceptualizes valued resources as capital when they function as social relations of power by becoming objects of struggle. Capitals can be created, accumulated, exchanged, and consumed. Bourdieu places the source of capital, not just in social structure but in social relations and connections. For him social capital entails

"the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." (Bourdieu, 1984: 249)

Thus, Bourdieu's (1985) conceptualisation of the social capital is instrumental, in that, it centres on the benefits accruing to individuals which are convertible
into economic and cultural capital (includes the embodied cultural capital that confers power and status) by virtue of participation in groups and on the deliberate, construction of social networking (sociability) for the purpose of creating this resource. His conceptualisation attempts to show case the 'constructedness' of social capital and that it is used for specific instrumental ends such as domination Cultural capital can also be described as cultural competence. Like economic capital, it conveys legitimacy, and a legitimacy regulated by institutions within the society. In the case of cultural capital, that legitimacy is regulated not by the government but by educational and artistic institutions. Cultural capital can be converted into economic capital, just as economic capital can be converted into cultural capital. However, these conversions happen at different rates of exchange.

Capitals as forms of power exist not in isolation but relationally in what Bourdieu calls fields. Fields denote arenas of production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolize different kinds of capital. (Bourdieu, 1990, Swartz, 1997)

Fields are structured spaces that organize around struggle over specific types of capital. Field struggle, for Bourdieu, has two distinct dimensions: struggle over the distribution of capitals (i.e. struggle to accumulate the more valued forms of capital or to convert one form into another more valued form) and struggle over the very definition of the most legitimate form of capital for a particular field.

Bourdieu (1989, 1993) conceives of fields (or spaces) as relatively autonomous social microcosms, exhibiting, their own distinctive structures and dynamics and functioning according to their own inner logics. He posits a multiplicity of such spaces in any complex and differentiated society. Modern society, he claims, is marked not by the ascendancy of any one singular logic like that of the social relations of production but by the existence of a number of more or
less independent social universes that, although empirically interrelated and mutually determinative (and structurally homologous), nonetheless obey, again to some extent, their own inner laws and principles. What happens in (any one of these fields),” he writes, cannot be understood by looking only at external factors. (Bourdieu 1998, 39)

Another characteristic of fields is that actors and entities within them not only have interests (and therefore corresponding strategies of action) manifest in the discrete positions they occupy relative to others in the field but also have shared commitments to and investments in the field overall. Bourdieu describes these ties as an illusio, or “objective complicity which underlies all the antagonisms” (Bourdieu 1993; 73) or tacitly shared interests, concerns, and ultimate beliefs that constitute of those actors. Bourdieu points out those such unspoken agreements are often lodged at the level of the habitus.

Those actors who occupy the most dominated positions in the field tend also to be those with habitus least well-suited for the contestations specific to that field. However, commonalities at the level of habitus also serve to bind all these actors together, even despite the structural tensions that tend to separate them. (Bourdieu 1993; 74)

Bourdieu (1990) indicates that the nodes or positions within a field are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents, or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). In other words, positions within a field, including those that mark the dominant and dominated poles of that field, must be analyzed in terms of the distinctive profiles of capital associated with them. Bourdieu refers here to “species of capital” in the plural: while capital most often connotes material or economic resources, for him it also
encompasses a wide range of other types of resources, any of which, when accruied by actors within the field at hand, can enable them to climb to positions of relative privilege within the field. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97)

Within any given field, different specific entities can be said to engage in the struggles ongoing within that field as bearers of different amounts and combinations of capitals, some yielding greater advantages within that particular field than others. The concepts of field and capital are intrinsically interlinked; just as "a capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field," so too, conversely, the distribution of capital (or capitals) "constitutes the very structure of the field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 101). Capitals function both as weapons and as stakes in the struggle to gain ascendancy within fields. Any field (from a synchronic perspective) is a structure or temporary state of power relations within what is also (from a diachronic perspective) an ongoing struggle for domination waged by the deployment or accumulation of relevant capitals, a struggle for successful monopolization "of the legitimate violence (specific authority) which is characteristic of the field in question". (Bourdieu 1993, 73)

Bourdieu's (1990), perspective highlights the structural tension between occupants of dominant and dominated positions within any social milieu. It requires that any field be conceived of as an arena of contestation among occupants of positions differentially endowed with the resources necessary for gaining and safeguarding an ascendant position within that arena. Indeed, much of the contestation among actors can be said to concern the legitimate valuation that is to be accorded the precise species of capital in which they happen (actually or potentially) to be well-endowed; that is, such conflict is about gaining the capacity to produce a recognition of the legitimacy of this capital distribution among the other contending actors. For instance, the fields inaugurated by the colonial state such as the bureaucracy, the military, judiciary, police, political representation, and university and education system
required specialized kinds of capital. The colonial educational system privileged certain section of Indian indigenous actors.

Within the social space as a whole, the most important contestations over symbolic capital takes place within what Bourdieu (1990) terms the field of power, a relational reframing of what we call as a ruling class. He defines this field of power as a space of contention for ascendancy among dominant actors from all the other fields that constitute the social order (high level bureaucrats, high end bankers, financiers, journalists, scientific figures, jurists, legislators among many others); Since the field concept is meant to be applicable at all scales, from the most expansive to the most circumscribed, each of the more delimited social microcosms, too, can be said to feature something like its own internal field of power. Bourdieu claims that, in analyzing any field, it is important to determine precisely how its constituent actors, differently positioned as they are within the field in respect to the distribution of capital (or capitals) operative therein, perceive themselves, their competitors, and the field as a whole, in all its opportunities and challenges.

Bourdieu emphasizes that the primary field in modern societies is the field of power, which is an arena of struggle among the different power fields (particularly the economic field and the cultural field) for the right to dominate throughout the social order. Bourdieu identifies different subfields within the field of power, such as the artistic field, the administrative field, the university field, the political field, and the economic field. Leaders of particular subfields compete to impose their particular type of capital as the most legitimate claim to authority.

Central to but not synonymous with the field of power is the state, which assumes the key role of regulating the struggle within the field of power. For Bourdieu the state consists not only of bureaucratic agencies, political authorities, routines, and ceremony but also of official classifications that regulate individual and group relations.
"...[t]he political field is one of the privileged sites for the exercise of the power of representation or manifestation that contributes to making what existed in a practical state, tacitly or implicitly, exist fully, that is, in the objectified state, in a form directly visible to all, public, published, official, and thus authorized. (Bourdieu, 1991:235)

Power for Bourdieu also appears in a specific form of capital and in a specific sphere of activity that is commonly associated with politics- the political field and political capital. Political capital refers to a subtype of social capital that is the capacity to mobilize political support. The political field refers to the arena of struggle to capture positions of power within the state using political capital (political parties, political positions, bureaucratic and military positions, media, university and judiciary). The political field is thus structured around competition for control of the state apparatus.

Bourdieu (1984) examines the social construction of objective structures with an emphasis on how people perceive and construct their own social world, but without neglecting how perception and construction is constrained by structures. An important dynamic in this relationship is the ability of individual actors to invent and improvise within the structure of their routines. In this thesis I am using the Bourdieun lens to argue how the caste can be construed as a form of cultural, social and symbolic capital and how these capitals enable the organisation of rule. What was the role of the ‘Marathas’ in using these fields given by colonial practices and how after 1960, did they manage to reimagining and reconfiguring these fields. What were the strategies employed?

I ask how a social imagining is related to the field of power. What were the characteristics of fields and especially the filed of politics/ power during the colonial period? How were these fields constructed and what were the necessary capitals required to operate in these fields? How did agents (indigenous actors) act strategically depending on their social positions to enhance their capital?
According to Bourdieu (1984) the pre-eminent field is the field of power, from which a hierarchy of power relationships serves to structure all other fields. To analyze a field, one must first understand its relationship to the political field and also has to map the objective positions within a field. The nature of the habitus of the agents who occupy particular positions in different fields can thus be mapped. These agents act strategically depending on their habitus in order to enhance their capital. (Swartz, 1997)

I argue that in India there were two phases of construction of these fields i.e. the colonial and the post independence period. In the colonial period some mobile castes were able to create such fields which were coterminous with interests of the colonial authorities. These fields such as caste associations were constructed by using caste identities which were rooted in the classificatory colonial categories i.e. census.

Also colonial authorities reinvented categories such as martial race which based itself on the reconstruction of historical ideas of kingship and kinship. In the post independence period the fields got reconstructed in the context of electoral democracy. Power was now routed in and through the state. The principle of one person one vote now created spaces for the organisation of caste blocs and coalitions. In some States new coalitions emerged which were misrecognised by scholars as caste blocs and caste coalition and clusters.

Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice allows us to overcome this methodological ambiguity. He proposes that social organisation and agency can be construed through the lens of practice rather than rules. He argues that the individuals and actors are placed in fields and the actors employ certain strategies to accumulate certain kinds of capitals. Using this understanding one can contend that this whole process is misrecognised in social science discourse as caste.

His theory of power is anchored in the cultural reproduction of power which operationalises through the logic of practice i.e. through the dialectic
interaction between the habitus and the fields. The habitus is the mental structure through which people deal with the social world. It can be thought of as a set of internalized schemes through which the world is perceived, understood, appreciated, and evaluated. A field is a network of social relations among the objective positions within it. It is not simply a set of interactions or intersubjective ties among individuals. Agents act strategically depending on their habitus in order to enhance their capital. (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990 and Swartz, 1997)

Bourdieu (1977, 1989, and 1990) located power at the centre of the functioning and the structure of habitus, since habitus involves an unconscious calculation of what is possible, impossible, and probable for people in their specific locations in the stratified social order. Symbolic power creates a form of violence that finds expression in everyday classifications, labels, meanings, and categorizations that subtly implement a social as well as symbolic logic of inclusion and exclusion. Symbolic violence also finds expression through body language, comportment, self-presentation, bodily care and adornment. It has a corporal as well as a cognitive dimension. And symbolic capital designates the social authority to impose symbolic meanings and classifications as legitimate that individuals and groups can accumulate through public recognition of their capital holdings and positions occupied in social hierarchies. Symbolic capital is a form of credit and it takes symbolic capital accumulated from previous struggles to exercise symbolic power. (Waquant, 1992)

Two key properties of symbolic power are its naturalization and misrecognition. Bourdieu’s symbolic power does not suggest “consent” but “practical adaptation” to existing hierarchies. The “practical adaptation” occurs pre-reflectively as if it were the “thing to do,” the “natural” response in existing circumstances. The dominated misperceive the real origins and interests of symbolic power when they adopt the dominant view of the dominant and of themselves. They therefore accept definitions of social reality.
that do not correspond to their best interests. Those “misrecognized” definitions go unchallenged as appearing natural and justified. (Bourdieu, 1990)

Bourdieu’s observations that the construction of the state is accompanied by the construction of a kind of common historical transcendental- i.e. common cognitive frameworks, social schemes of perception, symbolic frames of thought, understanding, and a certain kind of reason- which after a long process of incorporation, becomes immanent to all its ‘subjects’. It is the habitus that lends order to customary social behaviour by functioning as “the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices” (Bourdieu 1979:7).

As my research is related to historically and histographically reconstructing the past and examining how the social imaginary ‘Maratha’ emerged and also map its many meanings from the early 19th century to the 1970s. I critically assess the role of the colonial state in this construction. As the construction was a dialectic process of colonial policies that interfaced with native interests, it would be useful to use Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990) theorizations to comprehend how this shaped the habitus of the actors.

In short, habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history. The system of dispositions- a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices and in the bodies of individuals. Habitus generates a “practical sense” for organizing perceptions of and actions in the social world. The dispositions of habitus incorporate a sense of place in the stratified social order, an understanding of inclusion and exclusion in the various social hierarchies. (Bourdieu 1979; 82)

Taken as an entire system of schemes of perception, appreciation, and action, these dispositions constitute what Bourdieu terms the habitus. However, the
habitus must be seen not simply as a historically produced structure that functions to reproduce the social system that generated it, but as a set of schemes both imposed and imposing. Habitus does not only, or even primarily, function at the level of explicit, discursive consciousness. The internal structures become embodied and work in a deeper, practical and often pre-reflexive way.

I argue that the ‘Maratha’ as a caste began to emerge during the colonial period. This was shaped through various discourses, sometimes contradictory. Through the use of signs, symbols, language, memories and other cultural forms, the imaginings of the ‘Maratha’ was inaugurated and naturalised within the habitus. To be a ‘Maratha’ meant displaying certain cultural mannerisms and bodily exhibitions. The colonial rulers in their quest for legitimating their rule introduced certain policies to appease certain sections of society. The martial race concept was one of those. It was through this imagined category that much of the discourses regarding ‘who is a Maratha’ began to be expressed through newsprint, popular public platforms and even in colonial official texts. I trace how the imaginings of kinship and kingship got reinvented (due to colonial policies together with political interests of sections of the indigenous actors)? Practice is “what people do” meaning the actions people take and is produced by the habitus. I argue that the institutions of education and sports enabled the formation of certain identity that allowed the ‘Marathas’ to associate themselves to common symbols, signs and value systems. It also facilitated their entry into state institutions such as the cooperatives, the lower bureaucracy, military and paramilitary services and political parties and institutions.

But how does the habitus get constructed? How does the social imagining of being a ‘Maratha’ find consensus amongst the masses? Is it only the ideology that enables this? To answer this question I invoke Bourdieu’s concept of doxa. Through the theory of the habitus Bourdieu (1977) argues that social agents develop strategies which are adapted to the needs of the social worlds that they
inhabit. These strategies are unconscious and act on the level of a bodily logic. Having naturalised the objective social structure at the cognitive level, the action of the actor is in concordance with the required exigencies of the social field and this leads to a doxic relationship to emerge.

Bourdieu writes:

“Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important and the best concealed is undoubtedly the dialectic of the objective chances and the agents’ aspirations, out of which arises the sense of limits, commonly called the sense of reality, i.e. the correspondence between the objective classes and the internalized classes, social structures and mental structures, which is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to established order.” (Bourdieu 1977: 164)

For Bourdieu, doxa is the assumed levels of reality. Schemes of thought and perception can produce the objectivity that they do only by producing the misrecognition of the limits of the cognition that they make possible, thereby founding immediate adherence, in the doxic mode, to the world of tradition experienced as a ‘natural world’ and taken for granted. The instruments of knowledge of the social world are in this case (objectively) political instruments which contribute to the reproduction of the social world, seen as self-evident and undisputed, of which they are the product and of which they reproduce the structures in a transformed form. It is the construction of the intentional and unintentional, conscious and unconscious, of constructed social relations, which creates seemingly objective norms and rules which claim “this is just the way it is.” “Doxa necessitates a collective amnesia as to the origins of the system. In Bourdieu’s (1977) words,

“(Doxa) exits as a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization...(in which) the natural and social world appears as self-evident. Doxa is the unsaid in the field of cultural possibilities, making it seem as if there are not multiple, but only a single possibility.” (Bourdieu, 1977: 164)
Thus, Bourdieu’s sociology offers conceptual tools for analyzing three types of power: power vested in particular resources (capitals), power concentrated in specific spheres of struggle over forms of capital (fields of power), and power as practical, taken-for-granted acceptance of existing social hierarchies and categories.

To sum up, Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990) sociology of logic of practice and his theorisation on symbolic power sensitizes us to the more subtle and influential forms of power that operates through cultural resources and symbolic classifications that interweave everyday life with prevailing institutional arrangements. It calls for looking at expressions of power that emanate through inter-personal relations and presentations of self as well as organizational structures. It suggests an intimate and complex relationship between symbolic and material factors in the operation of power. He identifies a wide variety of valued resources (capitals) beyond sheer economic interests that function as ways through which actors access the field of politics/power. Bhattacharyya, Jayal, Mohapatra and Pai, (2004:23) point out that the concept of social capital is basically extracted from the North and that it has limitations to address the issues of inequality, class, power and hierarchy in the Indian context and also because of its methodological ambiguity. They argue that as it is a construct of the ‘North’, where societies are individuated, in which public life turns largely on identities that are individually chosen rather than collectively ascribed they ask how this can hold true in the context of Indian democracy. Though Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990) theorization are generally deemed to be Eurocentric i.e. assessed power relationships in Europe and global North. His early works (1977, 1979) examined societal processes and practices amongst the Kabliya of Algeria. It is in this context that I argue that his theorization and conceptual tools have an applicability to examine societal processes in India which has a colonial past.

The concept of social capital has its origins in Sociology, and with its integration into various disciplines, has mutated from its original heuristic and
theoretical objectives. In the process, far too many, definitions have emerged creating ambiguity over its usage. Also as there is no widely held consensus on how to measure social capital, the concept is used rather imaginatively to endorse any societal phenomenon. According to Baum (2000) there are three theoretical models underpinning the concept, one that follows neo-Marxist logic (or a structural analysis of societal phenomenon) the second, a Rational-Choice model and the third, a neo-Liberalist perspective: the first is, typified by Bourdieu, the second by Coleman and the third by Putnam. The neo-Marxist approach places greater emphasis on access to resources and issues of power in society. The rational-choice approach situates itself in the philosophy of utilitarianism that assumes interaction of the actor for purposeful ends. The neo-liberalist perspective presupposes the pre-eminence of the market and diminishing role of the state. It rests on the presumption, that creation of 'civic engagements' ensures development and community life.

While reviewing literature on the usage of social capital as a theoretical tool in India two broad categories can be drawn up. The first (those that use Putnam’s categories of bonding and bridging capital) does not assess the power relations present in societal processes and social phenomenon. Scholars such as Krishna and Uphoff (1999), Krishna (2002, 2003, 2006), Varshney (2001, 2002), Morris (2002), Singh (2003), Sharma (2005) and Kingston (2005) employ the methodology of social capital to assess how social networking can be effected through state institutions. These scholars assume the state to be benign and therefore the examination pertains to how social capital may be operationalised with the support of the state or through state institutions.

The second set of scholars such as Swain (1997, 2000), John and Chathukulam, (2002) Bhattacharya, Jayal, Mohapatra and Pai, (2005), have assessed social capital as social movements. Their work presents a much more critical perspective of the Indian state (inherently capitalist or even neoliberal) and also acknowledges the unequal distribution of power in society and therefore seeks to comprehend organisation of social capital through social
movements or even mobilisations from the margins. This view therefore is critical of the state and hence assumes that radical politics alone can resolve the situation for the marginalized sections of society.

However all these scholars are assessing social capital as a strategy used by those at the margins of the society to contest power and not the way rule is constructed and organized through the use of social capital. Further none of these scholars employ the flexible conceptualization of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, and 1990) to assess these societal and political mobilisations. It is in this context that I contend that Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990) theorization is extremely useful in capturing the complexities of societal phenomenon. With this clarification, I outline my methodology below.

Methodology

In this thesis I trace the movement of the social imagining called ‘Maratha’ from the early 19th century till 1970s. The question is why I chose ‘Marathas’ as a case study? The reason for this choice is- the ‘Marathas’ (misrecognized as Maratha-Kunbi caste cluster) in the social science scholarship is deemed to be a caste or a caste-cluster in the country i.e. one that constitutes 31% of the total population of the State of Maharashtra and according to the 2001 census this means that approximately 30 million individuals constitute this caste/caste cluster. Scholars such as Lele (1990) argue that no other caste/caste cluster of this size exists in any other State of India and also points out that this caste has no comparative caste group that can challenge it to capture power. For instance in Andhra Pradesh the Reddys and the Kammas are two dominant caste groups, the Vokkaligas and the Lingayats in Karnataka, the AJGAR in North India amongst others.

continues to behave as a caste cluster and behaves as a political bloc. My question therefore is how can a population of 30 million be construed as a caste/caste cluster i.e. do all the individuals and jatis follow the principle of endogamy? Is entry into this caste cluster based only on kinship and descent? How has this caste cluster managed to retain its cohesiveness over so many generations? Lele (1982, 1990) argues that it is through hegemony that this caste cluster has remained intact. However he has not been able to demonstrate how hegemony operates i.e. practices. Moreover the analysis by these scholars (Karve, 1953, 1970, Sirsikar, 1970, 1994, Lele, 1982, 1990, R. Deshpande and Palshikar 2008, Palshikar, 1996, 2002, Vora, 1999) is anchored in the opus operatum i.e. post facto rather that in opus operandi. Additionally caste is also akin to class, religion, race, gender, tribe and ethnicity which leads to brings in further ambiguity and vagueness when employing this concept to examine societal mobilizations. I argue in this thesis that it there is recognition of this problem by the scholars such as Frankel and Rao (1989) and Shah (1990) who attempt to contextualize caste. I argue that despite their efforts at contextualization of caste their research methodology, perspective and language is informed by the logic of a colonial episteme and thus it remains embedded in it.

Recent scholarship (Cohn, 1987, Bayly, 1988, Quigley 1995, Declan, 2000, Dirks, 2001) enlightens us on the fact that caste as an oversimplified, standardised, quantifiable and timeless category was a colonial invention. It was during the colonial rule that this category was made an immanent way of comprehending social life in India. This category was unproblematically employed by the early anthropologists and sociologists and then later by the political scientists. As Deshpande (2004 and 2007) has demonstrated that the term ‘Maratha’ had meant several imaginings in the past- from that akin to a territory to that of Kshtriyaness to that of a peasant identity. It therefore follows that the practice in social science discourse of collapsing ‘Marathas’ as a caste needs to be questioned. So how does one overcome this quandary?
What is the theoretical lens and methodological tool that allows us to move away from this positivist approach? What is the language that one can employ in mapping multiple complexities present in comprehending social organisation and phenomenon?

It is in this context that I argue Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1990) theory of practice and his concepts such as species of capital, habitus, fields and doxa provide us with a set of tools to capture these complexities without essentialising them. His theorization is instructive in the way it incorporates a sense of time, space and most importantly allows us to overcome the dichotomy between structure and agency or in this case rules and practice. It is pertinent to mention here that his theorization was primarily employed to capture social organisation and the processes of reproduction of power in Europe and global North. How does one operationalise Bourdieu's conceptualization in the Indian context? What are the concepts that one may employ to question the misrecognition of classifying the dynamic and complex societal phenomenon into a routinised and static category called caste? In this thesis I examine how ‘Maratha’ is a social imaginary which was constructed and reconstructed by certain historical contingent contexts. I explore how the meaning of this imaginary shifted from time to time depending on the colonial state governance practices. In order to record these changes my methodology had to be anchored in interpretative methodologies such as discourse analysis and historiography. In my methodology, I employed the exploratory research design as I wanted to deconstruct colonial historiography. In this light, I had to discern how the field of politics/power shaped the way indigenous actors employed various strategies for survival. The strategies and practices which I explore are kingship (Kshtriyaness and therefore the impinging ideology of rulership), kinship (marital alliances and officialising strategies of the indigenous actors), education, sports (a form of masculinity that was recognized and accepted as a practice to further one’s martial claim), peasant imagining through political mobilisation based on peasant culture (son’s of the
soil). These strategies and practices facilitated the movement of individuals and groups to become an integral part of this imaginary. The ‘Maratha’ imaginary itself was very fluid was enmeshed in the colonial policies. Therefore my thesis also identifies the field of power (colonial state) and later the (State of Maharashtra and the Congress party) and also defines its relationships with other fields. But even before I delve into this analysis I would like to begin with a justification as to why I chose to limit my research universe to a particular geographical space.

In this thesis I limit my research universe to exploring the meanings of ‘Marathas’ to a spatial zone i.e. Bombay Provinces. Why? There are two reasons why I choose Bombay Provinces as the universe of my research. The first reason was that of its historical precedence i.e. Poona was the capital of the Peshwa rule and it continued to be regarded as the center of Brahmin domination until 1960. Regions in around Poona (Pune) became sites of non-Brahmin contestations and mobilizations such as the Satara, Kolhapur, Sangli and Ahmednagar. For instance it was at Satara that the first debate regarding the meaning of ‘Maratha’s’ emerged in the early decades of the 19th century. Similarly the Deccan riots of 1875 were most intense in the territories of Ahmednagar and Poona. What’s more is that it was at Poona that the Satyashodhak movement of Phule was inaugurated in 1873 and it was in and around Poona that the non-Brahmin movement emerged by the late 19th century. It is not surprising that the most intense and dissenting discourses regarding ‘Marathas’ were concentrated in this region. The second reason I chose to delimit the universe and focus on the Bombay Provinces was due to the particular colonial governance practices introduced in this region that to a great extent influenced the ‘Maratha’ imaginary-the introduction of the concept of martial race. The hand book on military recruitment (Bentham, 1908) and other related colonial registers suggest that the most prominent recruitment areas specified were placed within the Bombay Provinces- such as Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur, Ahmednagar and Poona (Pune). The recruitment
drive conducted in these regions was well documented and also finds mention in the public discourses of regional newsprint. The colonial legitimation enabled a large section of the peasantry in the early 20th century to appropriate a martial heritage.

Having now spelt out the reasons for choosing ‘Marathas’ as a case study to question the existing conceptual category (caste) as a way to understand social organisation and mobilisation and also why I chose to limit my research to a spatial zone, I proceed to highlight the details of my fieldwork.

In this thesis I reconstruct and map the social imaginary called ‘Maratha’ through discourses that have been recorded in the colonial registers and also native newsprint. I undertake a discourse analysis of non-Brahmin newspapers such as Rashtraveer, Shivachhatrapati, Chhatrapati, Tarun ‘Maratha’, Garibancha Kaivari, Bhagava Zenda, Shrishivasmarak, Vijayi ‘Maratha’, Deen Mitra, Jagruti, Hunter, Kaivari, and Navyug. What were the public memories associated with the social construct ‘Marathas’—what meanings did it evoke in different points of time in the Deccan Provinces? I ask what were the ideologies being propagated and who were the actors? What was the relationship of these discourses to the field of power in the colonial and post colonial period? What were the imposing historical conditions that enabled/disabled the popularity of these ideologies? How and why did the meaning of this imagining continually shift? What were the strategies that the indigenous actors employed to become part of this imagining? What were the practices and institutions through which these ideologies were operationalised?

This takes me to the next set of questions i.e. what were the strategies of the indigenous actors that enabled them to part of this social imaginary. One of the strategies was of invoking a glorious and a martial past. The first instance of this is observed in Satara in the early decades of the 19th century—by the Maharaja and the direct descendant of Shivaji i.e. Rajaram. He attempted to defy Brahmin hegemony by way of imagining a very small exclusive group of
former aristocrats as belonging to kshtriya descent – terming them as ‘Marathas’. This exclusive idea of a few lineages being ‘Marathas’ was in time expanded to become inclusive by the late 19th century.

The Satyashodhak movement of late 19th century provided the platform for many more sections of the society to become part of the ‘Maratha’ social imaginary. This was especially so when the reigns of the Satyashodhak movement passed on to actors who were self proclaimed ‘Marathas’. A new discourse was inaugurated that was at times restricted the meaning of ‘Marathas’ to a few lineages and at other times opened it up for larger sections. However by the early 20th century ‘Marathas’ as a social imaginary came to include the Kunbi peasant together with some other peasant communities. This was due to the introduction of the colonial policy of martial race that defined ‘Marathas’ as the martial race in the Deccan. The colonial registers, especially the census documents demonstrates the ambiguities of placing individuals and groups within the ‘Maratha’ repertoire. By legitimizing the claims of the Kunbis (which was a peasant group) as ‘Marathas’ the scope of the social imagining widened to include other peasant groups. In order to capture these oscillating meanings my primary sources include colonial registers, discourses in newspapers, pamphlets, diaries, official papers and official communications. I also undertake two case studies of two families located in two villages called ‘Military Apshinge’ (Satara) and the other ‘Sainik Takli’ (Kolhapur) to argue how the Kshtriyaness is associated with martial occupation and how it enables the construction of the social imaginary of ‘Marathas’ as martial. I chose these two villages as they are ‘ideal’ types as the prefix to these village names suggest. A large proportion of the youth enroll for the military and paramilitary services even today. These villages had the distinction of recruiting large numbers from the First World War that continued through the Second World War to post independence period. I undertook an inter-generational examination of these two families to explore how these strategies helped them in accumulating a certain form of cultural and symbolic capital. How did these
capitals enable them to become part of the social imaginary – ‘Marathas’? I also assessed their marital strategies and how this enables them to accumulate more capital. As I have employed Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990) conceptualizations I have taken care to demonstrate how the actors try to officialise their strategies and in doing so the task of the researcher it to locate the hidden interests and meanings of these interactions and strategies. It is for this reason that certain portions of my interviews are presented verbatim as this allows us to comprehend the doxic internalized and naturalised value system of the actor and how she/he views this through the lens of rules rather than strategies.

The martial legacy of these two villages is well documented. ‘Military’ Apshinge even has a short documentary and a war memorial dedicated to its ‘heroes’. Photographs, letters, diaries, narratives, public memories and oral traditions were an integral part of my research. I interviewed 63 resource persons of these two villages many of whom are retired officers and defense personnel located in cities. Among those interviewed some were military historians, journalists and village elders.

Another strategy that I examined was kinship. This strategy is enmeshed in the kingship strategy and it is through marital alliances that an individual, family and group become a part of the social imaginary – ‘Marathas’. Why does a family have a preference in marital alliance? Does it lead to accumulation of a certain form of capital? Why are some ‘Maratha’ families/lineages considered higher and some lower in ranking? Who decides this hierarchy and on which criterion? What is the historical legitimation for such ranking? What are the factors that determine a marital alliance amongst ‘Maratha’ families? Why do the actors officialise their kinship networks? How does one define and identify a family as ‘Maratha’?

In trying to answer these questions, I examine marital and kinship patterns amongst two lineages. These lineages have been chosen from Poona (a branch
that migrated from Ahmednagar) and Satara. I examine three generations of these lineages and try to capture the reasons behind why and how do families judge their social mobility through these alliances. In these cases too the actors have a tendency to officialise their strategies through the overarching framework of rules (caste). But through deeper interrogation one can discern the hidden ‘truth’ beneath the disguise of these rules. Kinship then is really a strategy and is usually misrecognised by the researcher and the respondent as rules. Does the process of migration to an urban area and change of surname (last name) enable a family to disguise its identity? How does the family come to be accepted as ‘Maratha’? What are the strategies that the family or individual resorts to in such a case? What are the capitals required for entry? Why does a family want to be part of the ‘Maratha’ social imagining? What are the benefits that one accrues or what is the potential benefit?

One case study is of a ‘lower’ ‘Maratha’ marrying into a ‘higher’ ‘Maratha’ family and the other is a Kunbi family that has overtime appropriated the martial legacy of the ‘Marathas’. I have tried to map the social mobility of these two lineages overtime. Bourdieu (1977) argues that the actors are well aware of the fields are like seasoned players who know their terrain very well. This is very true in this case too as the actors are vary of the market value of each ‘Maratha’ family in the vicinity and also know how capital can be accrued through certain alliances. In examining and mapping kinship I undertook several interviews with the family members, village elders, local leaders who knew these families and acquaintances of these families.

Two more strategies that facilitate the first two mentioned strategies i.e. kingship and kinship are education and sports. Due to the colonial policy of encouraging civic associations amongst the indigenous actors many educational and political associations emerged in the latter decades of 19th century and early 20th century. In their effort to oversimplify these mobilizations, the colonial state connoted them as caste associations. These were social and political formations that crisscrossed several forms of identity.
One of the primary objectives of these civic associations was to organize specific form of capitals such that it enables individuals to access the colonial fields such as bureaucracy, judiciary, police, military and legislature. I examine two such educational effort by the ‘Marathas’ which was inaugurated in the early 20th century (1921) called the All India Shri Shivaji Maratha Society (AISSMS) and the Shri Shivaji Preparatory Military School (SSPMS) that was established in 1932. The AISSMS had inaugurated another educational forum in Nashik which also became active in this period. But I chose these two educational forums because they are both located in Poona and this city had become the most important center for discourse on non-Brahmin movement from the 1920s onwards. Moreover it was Poona that the peasant mobilisations were being organized.

The AIIMS and the school called Shri Shivaji Maratha School (SSMS) became the vehicle for furthering the social imagining of ‘Marathas’. There was recognition by this time that the field of power/politics (legislative assembly) could only be accessed if one had appropriate numbers (social capital) and the required symbolic and cultural capital. The SSMS became a site for organizing activities that ranged from matrimonial services, to sponsoring elocution contests (highlighting the ‘Maratha’ interests), to organizing peasant rallies, to sponsoring non-Brahmin discourses, to a platform where ‘Maratha’ youth were encouraged to enroll in the military. As compared to SSMS, the military school or SSPMS had very specific objectives- that of ensuring that as many ‘Maratha’ youths enrolled in the military. It was a feeder institution to the King George Indian Military Colleges that were instituted in 1920s

In collecting data on these two educational institutions and forum I examined several documents of the schools together and corroborated this with news articles, pamphlets, interviews of resource persons, past students, retired teachers, photographs, diaries and personal collections.
Talims (gymnasiums) were sites where the social imaginary of the martial identity together with that of peasant mooring was organized. What was the kind of sports that were associated with certain kind of imagining? What was the role of Talims in accruing certain kinds of capital? What was the symbolic value of being associated with Talims? Who were the patrons for such kind of activities?

I examined five talims (three in Poona and two in Kolhapur). I interviewed several resource persons, journalists, academics, bureaucrats, sports persons associated with these talims. One major problem of collecting data regarding talims was that they lacked documentation. Most of the data is based on newspaper reports, some available pamphlets (with individuals) and oral traditions, and narratives.

In the post 1960 period the ‘Marathas’ came to rule the State of Maharashtra. I have examined an urban cooperative bank in Poona as a case study and explored how it enabled the construction of the peasant imagining of ‘Maratha’. Similarly I investigated how ‘Maratha’ as a social imaginary organized requisite cultural, symbolic and social capital for an individual to become a successful leader at the panchayat level. I also examined through a case study how certain cultural imaginings of ‘Maratha’ enabled individuals to find employment in the lower bureaucracy. I collected this data through interviews, state records, bank records and newspaper reports.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I examined how embedded colonial knowledge and categories found its way into the social science discourse. I argue that scholars examining these social processes and changes compressed multiple social complexities into the category called caste because they were limited by the methodological perspectives available at those points of time. By collapsing these social
imaginings and strategies/practices into the oversimplified, timeless and monolithic category it further essentialized caste. Which theorization can enable us to circumvent this problem? I argue that Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1990) theorization of practice and social capital enables us to overcome this problem. Further, his theory provides research with a sense of time and space that aids in capturing multiple complexities without falling into the trap of positivism. His theory allows us to examine the process rather than the end product i.e. opus operandi rather than the opus operatum. Further I argue that his conceptualization of habitus, fields and practice in place of rules allows a social researcher to understand hidden motives and thus enables the research to register the dialectic between structure and agency. Thus I ask can we not see these societal and political formations such as 'Maratha' through the lens of social capital.