

Identity, Dominance and Contestation: Young People's Engagement with Heritage and Culture

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The exclusionary identities plaguing our contemporary times have strong linkages with the heritage and culture of communities. Heritage is a construct that not only records the past but is also created for contemporary social and political needs. Based on ethnographic fieldwork at two publicly contested heritage sites in Maharashtra, India, this paper seeks to understand, young people's interactions with heritage and culture. These two sites are an ancient Buddhist monument combined with a Hindu temple and a museum articulating elitist narratives of Maharashtra's past. We found that young people's heritage conceptions are deeply rooted in inter-connected political identities of belonging to a region and a nation; and regionally popular symbols such as Shivaji and hill forts play a significant role in shaping them. Our fieldwork shows that the heritage represented by some institutions reproduces the broader social dominations and injustice. Worryingly, some of these projections are accepted by young people as their own heritage. This normalizes the partial representation of heritage. Some young people, however, contest some of those dominant projections and hold diverse ideas on heritage. These conceptions provide fertile ground for young people's political engagement with the idea of heritage and are a call for them to participate in the current contest over India's past. Diversity and contestations are hallmarks of heritage and culture in India. In that context, the paper enriches our understandings of those discursive and power laden processes that shape the formation of heritage and culture among youth, not only in the global South but also across the world.

Key words: young people, heritage, political identity, diversity, India

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Heritage and culture are intrinsically linked to each other. Moreover, they play a significant role in how societies and individuals understand their past, present and their own selves.

The contemporary resurgence of national and other socio-cultural identities; and the social tensions therein are also linked with how people understand and construct their heritage and culture. Against this background, this paper aims to understand young people's perceptions about heritage and culture in the Indian context, with a particular focus on inclusiveness as a feature of these perceptions. To achieve this, we document the processes through which young people interact with heritage, and the ways in which this interaction contributes to the formation of their knowledge in this area. The study also aims to analyse narratives of culture and heritage that emerge from two chosen heritage sites, and how these narratives are shaped.

INTRODUCTION

In the Indian context, notions of heritage and culture have been informed by two main factors. One is the lived socio-cultural diversity that simultaneously produces a shared imagination and the co-existence of and conflict over symbols and meanings. The other is the normative dimension of the model of the nation-state adopted by India. Departing from the notion of cultural homogeneity as a precondition for national unity, this normative dimension emphasises the recognition of different cultural identities as key to national unity. Although occasionally breached in practice, this norm, and the resulting spirit of “unity with diversity” (popularly referred to as “unity in diversity”), continues to resonate in how young people perceive culture and heritage. In the past three decades, however, the popularity of Hindu nationalism has challenged the syncretic idea of culture and has upheld a more exclusionary vision of society, culture and heritage. Today's young people are thus caught in the cross-fire between the older normative imagination on the one hand, and the ascendant discourse of sharper identity formation and the marginalisation of minorities and differences on the other. This has put a considerable premium on homogenising the idea of “Indian culture and heritage”.

According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995), heritage is a cultural activity that is constructed by interacting with notions of time and various enabling instruments, such as museums, exhibitions and historic walks. Stuart Hall (1999) has shown how activities and perceptions of heritage are closely linked with power relations in a broader social context. Both these insights, especially the understanding of heritage as being deeply political in nature, inform the findings and arguments laid out in this article. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Hall, and other scholars, have argued that even though heritage is seen as the impartial narration of past, it is essentially a socio-political construct. Against this background, this article contributes to the discourse on heritage and culture by showing the myriad concrete processes whereby heritage is closely linked with broader socio-cultural identities, reproduces a number of social dominations and with contestations of some of these dominations.

DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD SITES

The fieldwork was conducted at two heritage sites in the state of Maharashtra in India. Two interrelated qualitative research methods were employed. One was participant

observation at the two sites. In this, we observed and documented the spatial arrangements of the sites and the spatial patterns of young people's interaction with them. Secondly, we conducted four walking interviews (WIs) and four focus group discussions (FGDs) with the young people. All the young participants had visited one of the two sites at least once. Two WIs were carried out around each site. It was ensured that the young respondents varied in gender, age, ethnicity, class background and had different degrees of attachment with activities related to heritage and culture. The names of the respondents and places cited in the article have been changed to protect their anonymity. Of the sites selected for fieldwork, Site 1 is a museum in one of India's prominent metro cities and Site 2 is one of the ancient caves located in the rural area of Maharashtra. Site 1 displays a one-man collection of objects from everyday life, representing social history. The museum exhibits a variety of artefacts, ranging from beautifully embroidered textiles to sculptures, from antique copper vessels to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century swords. The museum now holds over 20,000 objects, of which 2,500 are on display. The site is one of the prominent tourist spots in the city, and its close proximity to other prominent local heritage sites proves advantageous in attracting visitors.

Site 2 is one of the ancient caves located in the rural area of Maharashtra. They were built between the second century BCE and the second century CE, and between the fifth century CE to the tenth century CE. Today, the cave complex is a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India. The caves house a Buddhist monastery dating back to the second century BCE, while the remaining space is occupied by a temple dedicated to a Hindu deity, who is worshipped most notably by the *Koli* community.¹ The co-existence of monuments belonging to two different traditions potentially leads to competitive claims for the space. According to experts, the caves predate the temple, while the temple authorities mention scriptural sources that state that the temple was established long before the caves.

NATION AND DIVERSITY

For young people, nation seems to be an important basis to understand, appreciate and evaluate their heritage experiences. For some of them, the importance of heritage lies in the fact that it connects individuals with the nation. Thus, for Atul, visiting heritage sites is important because by doing so *people can get a fair idea on how... their ancestors used to be ... it also shows more support to our nation if we can get more people to go to museums, so that people learn more about their culture and it shows that we support our culture* (Atul, male, WI, Site 1, India). Benedict Anderson's (1991: 6) insight that nation is an "imagined community" because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" may help us understand the above-mentioned quote that connects the significance of visiting heritage sites with knowing one's ancestors, supporting "our nation" and "our culture". This, in turn assumes

¹ The *Kolis* belong to one of the lower castes in Maharashtra. Traditionally, they are associated with the economic activity of fishing. They reside mainly in the Mumbai and Konkan regions of the state. The goddess at Site 2 is a family deity of many members of this community.

the existence of a community of nation and seeks to use heritage and culture to strengthen it. For Stuart Woolf (1996: 27–28), “symbolic constructions” such as the “invention and public repetition of past traditions and history through flags and anthems, monuments and school textbooks, religious ceremonies and sports associations, exaltation of king and empire” play a significant role in creating this imagined community of nation. During our fieldwork, another young person said, ... *without visiting these (heritage) places, we will not know what India is actually. For the world, India is like...mixture of religions. It has population. Second most populated country in the world. But if we do not propagate our cultural heritage sites, people will not know what India truly is. What is the essence of India* (Akash, male, WI, Site 2, India). Here, two images of India as being a “mixture of religions” and “population” on the one hand and “what India truly is” and the “essence of India” are juxtaposed and the latter is held superior because it is supposed to be created by propagating heritage sites. Thus, for young people, Woolf’s “symbolic constructions” in the form of heritage and culture go a long way in creating the feeling of nationalism.

The young people look at culture and heritage through the lens of the nation, which for them is a given. Thus, in a couple of walking interviews, the respondents remarked that culture is a “...specific country’s way of living” (Neha, female, WI, Site 2, India) and that every country has a different culture (Meenal, female, WI, Site 1, India). While evaluating institutional and popular practices of heritage, the respondents took the existence of “nation” for granted. Further, their expectations about heritage practices in India have been shaped by their perceptions and experiences of similar ideas in foreign, especially developed, countries. Increased exposure to foreign countries through travel and media may have contributed to this. Through this comparison they underlined that heritage practices in India have to catch up considerably. One respondent said: ...*when we see things in foreign countries, we are in awe that they are such beautiful things! And we forget to...appreciate the things that we have.* (Shreya, female, FG, Site 1, India). Another young person complained that the act of people taking photos had disturbed his experiences in one of the museums in the city. He added that this does not happen outside India, because people there are genuinely interested in museums (Shivam, male, FG, Site 1, India). One of the important features of the nation as an imagined community, according to Anderson, is that it is limited. This is so because by its very definition a nation presupposes other nations. It never imagines communities of an entire human kind (Anderson, *ibid.*). This limitedness played out in young people’s imaginations and evaluations of heritage when they not only assumed the existence of nation, but also sought to compare heritage practices in India with other nations. In doing so, they declared that heritage practices in India were inferior to those in other, especially developed, countries.

The significant role of the nation in imagining heritage and culture may result in the homogenising and flattening of the culture in a society. This may lead to an insistence on “absorbing or neutralizing” the cultural diversity within the so-called broader culture of nation (Graham, Ashworth, Turnbridge, 2000: 12). This becomes an even more serious possibility in India, which is a nation-state with multi-layered socio-cultural diversity. Our fieldwork shows that even though the young people’s perceptions on heritage are attached to the category of nation in various ways, this does not stop them from being keenly aware of the cultural diversity in the country. They articulated this diversity mainly in the form of religion and to some extent the administrative states and

languages. One of them stated: *We should celebrate all the festivals together... Christians celebrate Christmas in which we should participate.* (Jaya, female, FG, Site2, India). A concern was expressed that the recent spree of changing city names might have created fears amongst Muslim minorities² (Atharva, male, FG, Site 1, India). In another FGD, a couple of respondents said that religious diversity and tolerance were part of the everyday lives of ordinary Indians (Snehal, female, FG, Site 2, India; Manisha, female, FG, Site 2, India). Another young person said, *...if you ask any layman mostly they don't have any issue with different kind of cultures and heritage.* (Manisha, female, FG, Site 2, India). A young boy mentioned that people in his area say that since Christmas is not “our” festival, we should desist from celebrating it. He added that this is wrong and local young people are likely to be influenced by these views (Shekhar, male, FG, Site 2, India). Neha terms various religions in India as “semi-cultures” and adds that in the country *every state has its own culture and its own language. And India has so many languages, that fascinates me* (Neha, female, WI, Site 2, India). Another respondent said that states in India are like countries themselves – all of them have their own official emblems, such as an animal, dish or fruit – and that India should be called the United States of India (Atharva, male, FG, Site 1, India).

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: SHIVAJI,³ HILL FORTS⁴ AND FORMAL EDUCATION

Amongst young people, an emotional attachment to Shivaji and his various feats was observed. One respondent maintained that she would like to visit some forts in Maharashtra because they were conquered by ‘Shivaray’, and that Shivaji’s history was instructive for her because he used effective military strategies and conquered many forts (Meenal, female, WI, Site 1, India). Another respondent expressed wonder at the architecture of Shivaji’s forts, considering the period they were built in (Atharva, male, FG, Site 1, India). He continued:

... because I am from Pune and Maharaj was also born here, it was a matter of pride. When I grew up, I had respect of a different kind for Maharaj, that this was a person due to whom present Maharashtra exists. Had he not been there, we do not know what would have been Maharashtra's future... Even now, I get goose bumps talking about him. (Atharva, male, FG, Site 1, India)

In these instances, one can clearly see the link between the idolisation of Shivaji and

2 This tradition of changing the names of public places started in India soon after independence. In the beginning, the goal was to remove names given by colonial rulers. The recent spree, however, is specifically aimed at replacing ‘Muslim’ names with ‘Hindu’ ones (Ahmad, 2018). The broader socio-political process of the assertion of Hindu nationalism and the sidelining of Muslims and other minorities is responsible for this. We discuss this process further in the section below on ‘Reproducing and Internalising Social Dominations and Exclusions as Heritage’.

3 Shivaji was a seventeenth century warrior king from a Marathi speaking area. His symbol has become quite popular in mobilising various sections of society in modern Maharashtra.

4 Hill forts were strategically and socially very important in Shivaji’s political and military achievements. Hereafter they are referred to as forts.

his forts on the one hand and a consciousness of being Maharashtrian on the other. Also notable is the vocabulary of battles and military strategy that is used to create this connection.

This love for Shivaji and forts is linked to national identity, besides the regional one. Thus, some respondents mentioned that because the area they were from has many “forts of Shivaray”, the Indian navy has built one of its camps there (Shekhar, male, FG, Site 2, India; Mihir, male, FG, Site 2, India). A young person equated the Roman Colosseum with forts in Maharashtra for being unique and a matter of pride for people living there (Atharva, male, FG, Site 1, India). So, for this young person, both those heritage sites serve to deepen the identity of being Maharashtrians and Italians. Also note that the identity of belonging to Maharashtra, which is a region and an administrative state in India, is being compared with the identity of belonging to another country through heritage. Thus, it alludes to the identity of being Maharashtrian as being both regional and national simultaneously. This overlap between regional and national identity reminds one of the discourses around Maharashtrian identity that took place in the Marathi speaking areas during colonial times. This is discussed in detail in the latter part of this section. Also, young people employ the language of military and pride to project regional and national identity in which forts constitute an important heritage symbol.

N. C. Johnson, conceptualising the use of place in the construction of heritage, has coined the term “hegemonic landscape” to mean “an imagery of ideal place becoming the heartland of a collective cultural consciousness” (quoted in Graham et al., 2000: 61). The forts in Maharashtra come very close to becoming this ‘hegemonic landscape’ in the minds of young people. In this process, the symbol of forts intersects with other symbols like Shivaji and the military, which feeds into the creation of feelings of pride. All these forces play a significant role in the creation of regional and national consciousness.

Daniel Jasper (2014: 106) has argued that people in the state visit the forts “for leisure activities and relaxation” and to “experience the greatness of Maharashtra”. This dual nature of the forts becomes clear through our fieldwork too. A respondent reported an interesting discussion amongst her friends on whether or not to consume liquor on the forts. In this debate, one side insisted that one should not do this as it would desecrate the place. Others said that having liquor on the fort sites was not bad as such, unless you misbehaved after consuming it. Ultimately, the respondent reported that the former argument was persuasive for the latter side (Ananya, female, FG, Site1, India). In India, abstaining from liquor is considered to be an element of ritual piety and purity, while consuming it is a ritual transgression and a leisure activity. The aforementioned debate shows that forts are places where both these forces exist and where the tension between them plays out, probably because the young people are emotionally attached to the forts in so many profound ways. This emotional attachment that young people have for forts feeds into the forts being important markers of Maharashtrian identity for them, as mentioned above. In this relationship, the former strengthens the latter.

Aleida Assmann (2008: 55) has argued that collective memory plays a very important role in the creation of social and political identities. For her, collective memory is constructed with the help of “memorial signs” such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places and monuments.

In understanding the relationship between regional, national identity on the one hand and collective memory in the form of heritage symbols of Shivaji and the forts on the

other, that the young people sought to establish, C. A. Bayly's formulation on regional patriotism is also useful. Against the received notion that in India, nationalism was the handiwork of colonial modernity, Bayly (2003) argues that it was precolonial regional, territory-based identities in various parts of India that interacted with colonial modernity, giving rise to nationalism in the country. In the specific case of Maharashtra, Bayly shows that it was a combination of forces in the medieval period that resulted in the creation of a "sense of territoriality" amongst the Marathi speaking people. These forces include the Bhakti tradition, the creation of a distinct Marathi language within this tradition, the peculiar nature of the "Kunbi-cum-Maratha caste category" that included people belonging to diverse castes and communities performing agriculture and military functions; and the political consolidation by Shivaji's rule (Bayly, 2003: 23–25).

During the colonial period, historians, social reformers and political leaders in the Marathi speaking region sought to use the history and collective memory of Maratha power, especially the one represented by Shivaji's rule, to construct an interconnected regional and national identity. However, they interpreted the social, cultural and political nature of those forces differently. Prachi Deshpande (2007: 128–138) has shown that at least three strands developed in this debate. According to one represented by scholars and social reformers such as M. G. Ranade and Rajaramshastri Bhagwat, behind the emergence of the political and military power of Marathas lay the cultural force of the Bhakti movement that challenged the inequality of caste and gender in the spiritual and religious sphere, and included in that "a blending of traditional Hinduism and monotheism of Islam" (ibid.: 129). For them, therefore, being Maharashtrian was a syncretic social identity. For another group represented by famous Marathi historian V. K. Rajwade, Maratha power meant, amongst other things, the unity of Hindus across the country, eradication of the so-called Muslim invasion and the protection of cows and Brahmins. Communist leaders and Marxist scholars in the region interpreted Shivaji's rule as being anti-feudal one that aimed "to protect the poor Maratha peasantry from the clutches of big landed chiefs, both Hindu and Muslim" (ibid.: 137). The vision here was to project Shivaji as a popular leader whose image would inspire the mass revolutionary struggle amongst poor peasants. For all these groups, the nature of Maharashtrian identity, even though it belongs to and originated in a region, was essentially national in nature. However, what this regional and national identity meant to them differed. For social reformers and the Hindu nationalist traditions of the scholars mentioned above, the ambitions of Maratha power were to establish its rule across the country despite it having emerged in the Marathi speaking areas. In addition, for the former, the cultural spirit of social inclusiveness made the Maratha power and Maharashtrian identity national in nature. While for the latter, its thrust in organizing Hindus and eradicating Muslim rule made it national since both had a presence across the country. According to Marxist interpretations on the other hand, the class element of Shivaji's rule made it of national relevance against the background of the emergence of social classes across the country during colonial era.

At another level, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a famous nationalist leader and later the nationalist movement generally, used the regionally popular and rooted historical symbol of Shivaji to popularize the nationalist feelings amongst the masses (ibid.: 138–148). Tilak sought to do this by initiating the public celebration of the Shivaji festival that began in the late nineteenth century. The effort was hugely successful in

attaining its objective in the Marathi speaking areas. The early attempts at introducing this festival and Shivaji's symbol in other regions were not so successful though. While in Bengal, the people's response was lukewarm, in Gujarati speaking city of Surat they invited social tension. The latter was due to the fraught relationship that the Maratha hero had with the city, that kept alive the memory of him being "...a freebooter king" (ibid.: 142). In the subsequent period, however, a large amount of literature was produced on Shivaji in different regional languages in India. Through these efforts and the Hindu nationalist organisations, Shivaji's symbol was established across the country as a Hindu icon. The nationalist movement in Marathi speaking areas, from the 1920s onwards, started to use Shivaji's symbol locally in order to spread its message. Thus, historians have noted the popular folk songs urging people to take inspiration from Shivaji to free the country and local revolutionary leaders being likened to Shivaji (ibid.: 146-147). In this process of employing Shivaji's popular symbol in mass politics, one can clearly see a close interplay between regional and national identities at work.

Formal education is an important institutional structure that imparts various key heritage symbols and messages to young people. In one FGD, several young people enthusiastically related a cultural event organised by their school. This programme, according to one of them, was called the "Folk Culture of Maharashtra" and included folk music and dance performances traditionally delivered by caste communities such as the Kolis, Gondhalis and Dombaris (Pooja, female, FG, Site 1, India). These performances presented a specific vision of the state's heritage for young people, which consisted of a romanticised representation of these communities as artistic performers from a bygone era and as the bearers of the "folk culture of the state". This representation, however, sidelines the fact that these communities were accorded lowly positions in the traditional caste structure of Indian society, and the vast majority of these people are still educationally and economically disadvantaged (Bokil, 2002; Bhosale, n.d.). The lively presentation of these cultural programmes, however, would cement the connection between these performances and the Maharashtrian identity in the minds of young students. This would, however, make them oblivious to the complicated nature of heritage and culture within the state.

In the same FGD, young people said that teachers and students in their school actively participated in various religious rituals that are part of the celebrations of the public Ganapati festival, and that the school organises various competitions for students during this festival (Megha, female, FG, Site 1, India). Bal Gangadhar Tilak converted this festival from private festivities in some Marathi speaking households into a public celebration.⁵ His main intention was to involve the masses in the nationalist struggle against colonisers. Given this history and the fact that Tilak has been one of the important icons of the nationalist movement, these school celebrations would go a long way in inculcating an identity of belonging to a nation.

5 Mention of Tilak, however, was conspicuous by its absence in the young people's narratives. This is despite the fact that school history textbooks mention Tilak as one of the important leaders of the nationalist movement and the pioneer of the public Ganapati festival. This absence points to a couple of inter-related aspects of the processes of cultural literacy in young people. One, the history taught in the classrooms seems to be less relevant in the cultural imaginations of young people. And two, the young consider the family, peer group and extracurricular cultural activities taking place in the school to be more relevant forces.

REPRODUCING AND INTERNALISING SOCIAL DOMINATIONS AND EXCLUSIONS AS HERITAGE

Even if heritage is supposed to belong to the entire society and nation, concrete heritage narratives are highly selective, highlighting the heritage of some influential sections and pushing the heritage of others into the background.

The spatial arrangements at the heritage sites show how the heritage is presented to young people, amongst others. The museum site claims to exhibit "... priceless artifacts which mirror the everyday life of India". However, our fieldwork shows that in practice these artefacts include some and exclude others from the diverse heritage and culture of the country. One of the features of these exhibits was objects used by elites in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These included scent bottles, sandalwood collections and rose water sprinklers. There were also sculptures of Hindu gods and goddesses such as Ram, Sita, Krishna and Vishnu located at various places in the museum. The paucity of the representation of other Indian religions in this space makes it deeply majoritarian in nature. Thirdly, the space seems to be very gendered, especially the section showing various utensils. Along with these utensils from the past, the exhibit also displayed pictures of women carrying water, churning butter milk, chopping vegetables and cooking! This presentation of heritage pushes women into the private spheres, thereby sustaining the patriarchal system. By validating elitism, religious majoritarianism and patriarchy through its narratives, the museum contributes to sustaining those unjust social forces.

This depiction of heritage appealed to the young people. At the museum site, a respondent expressed her fascination with the artistry of the exhibited everyday things. She said that our ancestors' use of those good things had enabled us to use various new things today (Tejal, female, FG, Site 1, India). Besides being attracted to the objects used by elites in the past, this young person identified these elites as "our ancestors". This indicates that being attracted to certain exhibits can easily turn into remembering them as "our past", thereby converting the past of the elite into "the past of the entire society". This makes for a concrete instance of the normalisation and internalisation of the dominant and exclusive forms of heritage discussed above.

According to Eric Hobsbawm (2012), a number of modern community-based identities, such as the nation, are of relatively recent origin, although they seek to root themselves in very old, established traditions. In this process, many aspects of these old cultures are changed and a number of new elements – conducive for carrying new identities – are inserted into these traditions. Therefore, Hobsbawm calls them "invented traditions". This can be seen in action through the schools' public Ganapati festival celebrations discussed in the preceding section. These celebrations should be understood in light of the fact that it was solely a religious festival until the late nineteenth century, but since then it has popularised the nationalist consciousness amongst the masses. This context gives those celebrations a strong nationalist meaning. However, this festival has a bitter religious majoritarian angle to it too.

Initially, the celebration of a public Ganapati festival sharpened communal Hindu identity (Cashman, 1975: 78). After independence, the celebration of this festival started to become much less politically explicit. Even so, its continuation and popularity in urban centres meant that public spaces would be occupied by Hindu religious symbols for ten long

days. This not only meant the domination of heritage symbols by the majority religion, but it also sanctified it as normal. Raminder Kaur, during her fieldwork on the public Ganapati festival in Mumbai in the mid-1990s, found that several tableaux organised by local Shiv Sena⁶ leaders projected interconnected messages of regionalist, nationalist, pro-Hindutva and anti-Muslim propaganda (2003: 169–176). For Kaur, these messages signify “... a sacralisation of the tableaux and its contents. Political ambitions seem to be justified by religious sanction, geared to serve the majority community of Hindus” (ibid.: 176). Since the 1980s, a simultaneous process of feeling marginalised and victimised amongst sections of Hindus, the assertion of a Hindu communal identity and marginalisation of religious minorities, especially Muslims, has been underway in India’s public life.⁷ Therefore, there have been many recent instances of Hindu cultural domination and religious minority cultures being pushed into the background. Seen in this larger context, the domination of Hindu religious symbols in the heritage represented at Site 1 is less surprising.

The depiction of women performing household chores in several pictures at site 1 reinforces the patriarchal female gender role of being confined to the domestic sphere, precluding them from playing a major role in public life. Thus, in the imagined community of nation, women

... were neither imagined as nor invited to imagine themselves as part of horizontal brotherhood...rather, their value was specifically attached to... their reproductive roles (as) mothers of the nation (Pratt, 1994: 30).

This gendered heritage imagination reinforces the similar ideas that some young people have about their heritage. During our fieldwork, one of the respondents stated that “Jijau” was one of her favourite historical characters, one reason for that being “...it was her (Jijau’s) good fortune that she gave birth to Shivaji Maharaj.” (Meenal, Female, WI, Site 1, India) This approach celebrates an important historical character, Jijabai, not only for her reproductive role in the domestic sphere but also in relation to a famous historical figure, who happens to be a man.

Had these partial, prejudiced heritage narratives been merely inanimate images with no consequences, one would not have bothered much. However, due to the fact that important institutions such as schools and museums project them, they gain what Stuart Hall (1999: 5) has called “institutional facticity”. This not only ensures that they are shown and acquire legitimacy as heritage symbols of the nation, but that they are also likely to shape young minds very effectively. This means that they go a long way in protecting and sustaining the unjust socio-cultural forces of the elitism, religious majoritarianism and gender that are causing so much trouble in Indian society.

6 A state level political party in Maharashtra. After its establishment in the 1960s, it espoused the sons of the soil ideology. However, since the 1980s, the party has been propagating militant Hindutva ideology. See Lele, 1995 and Palshikar, 2004 for a detailed discussion.

7 For a detailed discussion on Hindu nationalism in this period, see Hansen, 1999 and Jaffrelot, 1996.

CONTESTATIONS AND DIVERSITY IN HERITAGE PERCEPTIONS

Our fieldwork in and around the adjacent cave and temple complex (Site 2) brought out some contending and diverse positions about heritage. One of these contentions lies between the spheres of myth and history. We observed that students were one of the important groups visiting the caves, mainly to “study” its historical, architectural and other aspects. On the other hand, people belonging to the *Koli* community were the main visitors to the temple, and religious rituals were one of the key functions going on in and around the temple. Thus spatially, the caves and the temple seem to be the spheres of history and religion respectively. A young respondent summed this up by saying that the caves are a sphere of culture and the temple is a sphere of religion. He added that, *as a history student I must say that caves are very much of more importance rather than the goddess that are situated here* (sic) (Akash, male, WI, Site 2, India). Giving reasons for this preference of his, and his parents’ preference for the temple over the caves, he continued, *since I have studied history, I know its (caves’) importance. And I have been taught by very experienced teachers. So that is why my perspective have changed towards, looking towards history. That is not what my parents received in their knowledge. For them everything is related to religion.* (sic)

Aleida Assmann’s insights into what is assumed to be a fraught relationship between history and myth are useful in understanding this difference and hierarchy. According to her, contrary to the perception that myths are untrue and that the job of historiography is to expose them, myths are collectively-remembered histories that have acquired symbolic values in a society (2008: 68). History, on the other hand, is considered to be a neutral description of the past. Notwithstanding this notion, history textbooks are involved in creating and sustaining myths that are considered to be necessary in building a national identity (ibid.: 64). This view helps us to understand that, far from being poles apart, history and myth often interact with each other depending upon the context in which they are used. The position held by local young people further complicates this divergence. Even though they differentiated between the temple and the cave as spheres of myth and history respectively, they desisted from putting the two spheres in a hierarchical relation. One young person referred to both the sites as being “wonderful” (Jaya, female, FG, Site 2, India). This perception also consisted of an overlap between the two sites. A respondent, referring to both these sites, said, *...the xxx caves mean goddesses xxx* (Divya, female, FG, Site 2, India). Thus, in addition to the juxtaposition and tension between the temple and the cave, young people’s mental maps also allowed harmony and identity between the two.

Another, related layer of this contest was between two views of attaining knowledge about heritage: the one adopted by the experts and the other operating in the popular sphere. A young student, in an FGD in which the graduate students of archaeology participated, reported that, while climbing the steps leading to the site, she had overheard some people saying that Shivaji Maharaj had built this fort. She called this an “absence of knowledge” (Snehal, female, FG, Site 2, India). Adding a hint of a patronising position, another young person in the same FGD suggested that *we have to remove the story like Shivaji Maharaj built the fort* and added that they need to tell the people the real history in the form of stories that will be interesting for them (Payal, female, FG, Site 2, India). This position suggests that knowledge about the past must meet the rational criteria of

historiography and that expert knowledge and history are superior to popular knowledge and myth respectively. It also implies that knowledge about heritage that is attained through myths needs to be ‘corrected’ through applying methods rooted in historiography. This perspective can be critically understood in the light of Ashis Nandy’s “culture of science”, which involves amongst other things,

...operationalism which reduces reality to the reality accessible to the methods of science, and then reconstructs the ‘whole’ reality-of nature, persons or cultures- by extrapolating from that operational reality. (2010: 116).

This leads to the “authoritarian domination” of science and the “authoritarian submission” of all other methods of knowing and interpreting the world (ibid.: 114). This epistemological power relation between science and non-science seems to have been replicated in the construction of the hierarchy between the two ways of imagining heritage and culture mentioned above. However, this hierarchisation and patronising the “ignorant” does not stop the carriers of the so-called “inferior” perspectives on heritage from carrying and spelling out their practices and approaches. In this connection, the local young people seemed to use mythical beliefs regarding heritage in their everyday lives. They reported that every year before submitting their applications for the tenth and twelfth grade examinations, the students in their school made it a point to pray to the goddess by visiting her temple. This, they added, ensures that the students pass those examinations with flying colours (Shekhar, male, FG, Site 2, India). This shows the rich diversity and contestation in young people’s perceptions about and practices of heritage.

ACCESSING AND PERCEIVING HERITAGE THROUGH MEDIA

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett maintains that, given that heritage involves various ways of re-constructing things that no longer exist, it often results in the creation of “virtualities in the absence of actualities” (ibid.: 377). Instruments such as “historic walks, plaques, historic societies, museums, tours and exhibitions” (ibid.: 376) help to create these virtualities. Young people seem to be adding to these virtualities when they use various media while interacting with heritage.

At Site 2, we observed many young people taking selfies and group photos. This enables them to preserve both the memory of the heritage site as such and their own and their loved ones’ visits to the site. Apart from this memorialisation, young people are also keen to communicate their heritage experiences to friends. In this, taking photos seems convenient to them. One respondent, giving reasons for her wish to take photos at Site 1, said that it would allow her to remember the visit and show various places on the site to her friends (Aparna, female, FG, Site 1, India). Another young person related that he took photos of the heritage sites that he visited and put them on social media, where a conversation about those photos then began. Many people thanked him for posting those images because they could see the site from their homes and became curious about it (Atharva, male, FG, Site 1, India). Thus, the use of media constructs and reconstructs the time and space that would otherwise be required to engage with heritage. In addition, media could go a long way in raising awareness about heritage.

Field Site 1 made use of various media, so that the visitors could not only see the exhibits but could also experience the heritage spectacle. A respondent mentioned that the use of music and light at the site took him to the era of the exhibit and made him 'feel' the emotions in one of the statues (Atharva, male, FG, Site 1, India). The use of media made this young person feel as if he had transcended time and could experience the emotions of one of the heritage exhibits.

Popular Hindi movies also shape young people's ideas about heritage. One young person related that after watching historical films like *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior* (2020), he yearned to visit the places shown in it (Anuj, male, FG, Site 1, India). Here, media not only mediated but also presented an experience of heritage, in turn creating an urge to witness the actual heritage sites. One of our field visits to Site 1 showed that popular Hindi movies also provide vocabulary and reference points for understanding heritage. While looking at exhibits and explaining some of them to his young daughters, a visitor identified an object as being from South India, as it was like something shown in a popular Hindi movie called *Chennai Express* (Field notes, dated 13 August 2019).

Historian of popular Hindi movies Rachel Dwyer (2014: 37–40) has maintained that Hindi movies, more than academic history texts, play a significant role in shaping the historical sensibilities of ordinary Indians. Because these movies present history by imaginatively using images, music, dialogues and major film stars (mostly as larger than life protagonists), they tend to travel seamlessly between the spheres of history and myths. Although these movies depict the historical past, they are also about the nation's present. In this context, these movies present history in a highly selective manner. The recent blockbuster movie *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior*, which a young person mentioned during the study, is a case in point. The film is about the valour of a fight by one of the prominent Generals in Shivaji's army, Tanaji Malusare. Along with the use of special effects and large spectacles that were absent in the General's time, the movie also constructs Shivaji and Tanaji as Hindu leaders fighting Muslims (Parab, 2020). This version of Shivaji is obviously a selection from amongst the many that were constructed by various social movements. Dwyer (ibid.: 38) has written that the transmission of the popular television serials *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*, based on two great epics of the same names, was instrumental in making Hindu nationalism popular in India in the 1980s. *Tanhaji* takes that politics further. Thus, even though popular media is based on "virtualities", it has real and serious (in this case worrisome) implications that could shape the future of the nation.

CONCLUSION

We found that young people hold various complex and interesting perceptions on heritage and culture. For them, nation as a community is given and heritage plays a significant role in making this community possible. Their views about the cultural composition of the nation, especially the Indian one, are complicated though. They recognise and celebrate the socio-cultural diversity in India and expressed concerns over the contemporary assaults on it.

This study highlights the role of collective memories in the form of popular historical symbols such as Shivaji and forts and cultural symbols like Ganapati festival in creating

territory-based identities of region and nation amongst young people. Scholars have maintained that collective memory is a social construct which emerges with the help of various institutions that reiterate symbols, monuments, texts, images, rites, ceremonies etc. to ensure that those memories are not forgotten. One of the institutions doing this task has been the tourism board of the government of Maharashtra whose efforts to establish Shivaji and forts as significant historical and cultural symbols of the state have been documented (Kharat, Palshikar, Deshpande, Gohad, 2019: 93). We found that formal education and popular Hindi films are other institutions that play a significant role in sustaining those social memories amongst young people. Territory based identities of regionalism and nationalism are formed through a complex historical process. For some scholars, regional identities and a concomitant sense of patriotism were already present in pre-modern societies such as the Marathi speaking groups in the pre-British period, and modern nationalism built upon rather than replaced these already existing identities (Bayly, 2003). For others, national identity is entirely a modern phenomenon and nationalism makes use of premodern, traditional identities in order to ensconce itself firmly in the social conscience (Hobsbawm, 2012). We found not only that the above-mentioned popular heritage symbols are closely related to the sustenance of regional and national identities amongst young people, but also that, for them, these two identities often overlap. This later finding can be understood in light of Prachi Deshpande's (2007) argument that in the colonial times, amongst Marathi speaking people, the nature and evolution of the identity of being Maharashtrian was closely connected with their national identity.

Institutions projecting heritage symbols often claim that those signs represent the entire society and depict culture in an impartial manner. However, we found that the heritage representations shown by these institutions reproduce the dominations and power relations existing in the society. Thus, the museum site's articulation of heritage gave pre-eminence to the majoritarian religious symbols and heritage of elites, apart from reinforcing the patriarchal gender roles. Some popular historical Hindi movies that transmit heritage amongst young people represent politically charged heritage symbols for the audience. More worryingly, some of those heritage representations gain legitimacy in the minds of young people as their own and others reinforce already existing power-laden heritage constructs in their minds. This process normalises and routinises the dominant and unjust articulations of heritage.

Not all heritage dominations, however, go uncontested; some of them, as our findings show, are challenged. At Site 2, visitors treated the caves as history and the temple as a field of religion or myth. For some young people studying history and architecture, the historical aspect seems superior to the religious one, as the former represents the secular sphere and the latter a mythical one. The local young people, however, have more diverse perceptions about the relationship between these two sites. Additionally, they make use of the 'religious' aspect of the site for their secular ends without caring about the hierarchies mentioned above. This shows the rich diversity and debate in the spatial arrangements of heritage sites, as well as young people's perceptions about heritage and culture. This contestation by the young people betrays that "young people" itself is a diverse category and that they are acutely political in their interaction with and discourse on heritage and culture.

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