



NATION BUILDING IN THE NAME OF CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI MAHARAJ

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ABSTRACT

Chhatrapati Maharaj was not simply a name. He stands as the symbol of Indian nationalism. His name echoes beyond the borders of Maharashtra. The public commemoration of Shivaji's birth anniversary and coronation has been a significant festival where cultural memories came into life and people gained the spirit to stand against the British. The festival that began as a movement soon became a site of celebration where revolutionaries got blessed. The festival continues to enjoy a strong presence in Maharashtra today, but was once a source of inspiration for the commemoration of other regional heroes. This article attempts to trace the inception, spread and the manner in which it created a cultural identity for the purpose of cohesion in colonial India.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The transformation of local celebrations into vehicles of nationalist sentiment represents one of the most significant cultural developments in colonial India's struggle for independence. This article examines how a festival dedicated to the birth anniversary and coronation of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, evolved from a regional commemoration into a powerful platform for nationalist mobilization. Through a conceptual analysis of the archives that includes colonial surveillance documents, festival committee reports, newspaper accounts and other commemorative materials archived in the period spanning 1896-1947, this article attempts to make a discourse analysis of the historical architectural framework developed in the late 19th century and its subsequent politico-cultural transformation.

The evolution of Shivaji festival in the late 19th century demonstrates the classical example of the manner in which regional historical figures got restructured as national symbols, creating shared histories of resistance that went beyond regional, religious, caste and linguistic boundaries (Kaur, 2021), thereby serving as a cultural vehicle in uniting the masses for a nationalist struggle. At its core, this examination corroborates the hypothesis that localised public festivals in colonial India served as platforms for building a collective national identity developed on the foundation of culture by transforming regional-cultural icons into symbols of resistance through strategic symbolic and discursive re-appropriations.

The festival dedicated towards celebrating the birth anniversary and coronation of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj epitomizes what Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992) understood as 'invented traditions'- 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (p.1). The fact to be noted is that this festival drew upon genuine historical memory and regional pride rather than pure artificial constructions, before being strategically expanded into a nationalist framework. The article is a systematic analysis of the manner in which this transformation was crafted primarily through Lokmanya's political vision, the strategic use of the indigenous print and the colonial reaction, which often 'inadvertently' amplified the festival's nationalist significance. Through wide-ranging literature and archival analysis, attempts have been made towards representing that the festival's architecture efficiently incorporated multiple elements of regional pride, anti-colonial sentiment, and Hindu cultural revival while trying to present these as components of an inclusive nationalism.

From the Royal Courtyards to Public Nationalist Ritual: The Role of Print and Performances

The transition of Chhatrapati Maharaj from a royal symbol to a nationalist symbol began with the resurgence and reconstruction of his historical connotation in Maharashtra. Prior to the colonial period, commemorations of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj were largely confined to the royal courtyards that came down across generations from the Maratha lineage and certain rituals carried out in the temples of Maharashtra. The emergence of the commemoration as a public celebration overlapped with the growing consciousness of imperial suppression and the search for native historical models of confrontation and governance (Jasper, 2003). In the year 1895, under the leadership of Tilak, the first public celebration of the Maratha warrior was organized at the Raigad fort (Bharathi, 1998). Examining the commemorative items from this era suggests a deliberate drive to forge a link between pre-colonial era sovereignty and present-day desires for swarajya. Maybe it was also an attempt to use the celebration as a form of political protest against colonial historiography and autocracy. The celebrations were humble but politically significant. This transformation from merely remembering the Maharaja to actively serving him by working on his aspirations for 'swarajya' was achieved by embedding specific core principles: iconographic historicism, which cast Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as the ultimate symbol of native governance; liturgical uniformity, fostering a shared sense of communal celebration; and the crucial link connecting historical situations to contemporary hardships. Indeed, the socio-political situation of late 19th century Maharashtra which coincided with severe famines in western India presented a fertile ground for Chhatrapati's re-emergence in public consciousness. The transition was an architecturally calculated effort by emerging nationalist leaders. As *Bande Mataram* puts, "Shivaji, alongside figures like Asoka and Akbar, is presented as an integral part of India's living national identity. Recalling his achievements is a way to connect with a 5,000-year history and evoke the spirit of nationalism, teaching the present generation to honour its ancestors and act out of a sense of debt to them" (Ghose, n.d) There was a deliberate politicization of memory that can be understood through what Zerubavel (2012) terms 'mnemonic communities'- 'these communities provide the social contexts in which memories are embedded and mark the emotional tone, depth and style of our remembering' (Miszta, 2003, p.160). Therefore, the all-encompassing beliefs, norms and values of the 'mnemonic community' shape which memories are to be cherished, forgotten or interpreted in a specific manner. For instance, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was remembered for his indigenous historical models of resistance and governance, his

administrative reforms, secular ideals, as a symbol of national unity, justice, stoic heroism and spirit of sacrifice (Bayly, 1975; Majumdar, 1963; Bharathi, 1998)

Similarly, Colonial Police surveillance reports and sources from secondary literature of the period 1897-1905 document the standardization of ritual elements, including the garlanding of the portraits of Shivaji, recitation of his achievements, dramatic performances of key historical episodes by the mela groups, and speeches connecting historical resistance to contemporary political conditions (Gordon, 1975; Jasper, 2003), offering a classic example for understanding through Eric Hobsbawm's idea of "invented tradition". Invented traditions are 'taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the historic past' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992, p.1). This way invented traditions establish themselves to be a link with historic past derived from the culture. The fact that the festival witnessed certain 'standardization' over years shows that this was not a custom that grew over many generations, instead it was a set of rituals that people were actively formalized to in real time. The careful recitation of Shivaji's seventeenth-century valorous deeds and the staged re-enactments demonstrate 'how old history was taken and used for a modern nationalist purpose'. Thus, the architectural development of the festival incorporated specific elements designed to transform a historical commemoration into a nationalist ritual. Similarly the speeches during the occasion show Hobsbawm's idea: invented traditions give weight to current political claims by looking back at history. They make a new anti-colonial movement look like the next step of age-old resistance.

The architectural expansion of the Festival beyond Maharashtra represents one of the most significant achievements in the festival's development as a nationalist platform. While tracking celebrations between 1896 to 1920 demonstrates the festival's remarkable geographic diffusion. By 1906, documented celebrations occurred recurrently in all the four directions of the country- Benares, Calcutta, Karachi and Madras (Tahmankar, 1956). Outside the direct celebrations, Chhatrapati Maharaj as a symbol of cultural memory also forms a part of this expansion that also requires a close examination. Data analysis of the available materials in print reveals three primary vectors for transmission: student networks, nationalist newspaper circulation, and emergence of regional literature on him. The proactive involvement of university students proved principally effective as university spaces of the four corners of the nation-Dhaka, Lahore, Calcutta and Allahabad became sites of adoptions. The Shivaji Utsav was soon after carried home by the students, giving rise to their celebrations at the grassroots level. This geographic expansion corresponded with an increasing attendance- from an average of what was recorded in 1890, this number of 300 participants exponentially grew to approximately 3,500 by 1905 at major urban celebrations in Bombay province (Kulkarni, 2014). Bombay province itself is a heterogeneous province and with time Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj movement began to take roots in other provinces of India too, thereby, travelling beyond the territorial boundaries of origin. These boundaries went beyond international waters too as Shivaji Festival found a place amongst Tokyo and London in the first decade of the twentieth century (Deepak, 2001; Jayapalan, 2000; Inamdar, 1983; Jasper, 2006; Aggarwala, 1964).

Perhaps, the acceptance of Shivaji Maharaj across and beyond the Maratha borders was primarily through the spread of print and performance. The festival relied closely on the strategic deployment of indigenous print media for the dissemination of the nationalist interpretations beyond 'elite political circles' as these materials standardized the narratives surrounding him across diverse celebrations. Thus, the strategic use of affordable print technology democratized access to nationalist messaging. Perhaps, the mass production of inexpensive nationalist literature represented a direct challenge to official colonial information channels reflecting deliberate efforts to reach across regional boundaries. While in the lands of the Marathas, there stood direct historical roots of connection with the name and time of Shivaji, however in areas outside the Bombay province, new symbolic connections with the stoic hero had to be constructed to accommodate with the socio-political culture of the respective region. For instance in present day Orissa, Shivaji Maharaj found a space for itself in the regional dramatics- "Chhatrapati Shivaji" by Sri Raghunath Pandya, and in the verses of Radhanath Ray's poems. He got identified with nationalism, a supporter of the exploited classes, a protector of women and the Brahmins. Ray used the premise of Chhatrapati Shivaji to enthuse the people of region for the highest degree of nationalism. In his elegy "The encouraging voice of Shivaji", the royal face was depicted as a gallant revolutionary and a noble patriot (Jena & Sardesai, 2002) as evidenced through the verses:

*"The Indian sun set.
 In the Sea of Slavery.
 Blindness clouded from all sides.....
 Arise, awake my friends so that we be free again."*
 (Kulkarnee, 1975, p.56)

Such songs and poetic recitations formed a crucial performative element of the festival architecture. While many of these poems became a part of the *mela* singing, others were used to awaken the population about what Chhatrapati Maharaj meant to freedom. Further, analysis of content across regional languages reveals consistent core narratives but with regional adaptations that emphasized local resonance (Sheikh, 2019). For instance, Bengali materials frequently drew parallels between Shivaji Maharaj and figures like Pratapaditya, while Punjabi materials emphasized similarities with Sikh resistance to Mughal authority and Tamil celebrations drew parallels with Chola resistance to northern powers (Pandit, 2013; Ker, 1973; Cashman, 1975; Patel, 1920). The architectural integration of print and performance allowed for a dynamic balance between standardization and localization. This localization strategy allowed for what Partha Chatterjee (1986) terms "the modular form of nationalism" to be adapted to diverse regional contexts while maintaining core ideological consistency.

Print materials and performances strategically navigated colonial censorship through allegorical language. For instance, Shivajir Mahattava which was later renamed as Shivajir Dikhsha in 1904 was circulated for free as a booklet of 20 pages during the Shivaji Festival of 1903-1904 (Sardesai, 2002) as the writings were able to escape colonial vigilance. However, content analysis of materials from periods of heightened repression (particularly 1897-1900 and 1908-1911) shows an increase in historical allegories and a marginal decrease in direct political references compared to less restrictive periods (Ganachare, 1993). For example, phrases like 'foreign oppression' were replaced with references to 'Mughal tyranny', while calls for political action were couched as lessons from history. In such rhetoric, even the criticism of colonialism was displaced onto the historical figure of 'Aurangzeb', and political militancy was encoded as a lesson drawn from Shivaji's career. The narrative of failed petitions at the Mughal court enabled writers to imply, without stating directly, that appeals to colonial authority had exhausted their political usefulness (Sarkar, 1920). The efficacy of this print-performance architecture is evidenced through colonial responses. Between 1900-1920, authorities confiscated more than a thousand pamphlets, banned more than hundred plays, and arrested many printers associated with such materials (Barrier, 1974; Kaur, 2003). The vivid use of speeches, songs, stories, pamphlets, booklets and gatherings disseminated nationalist sentiment in forms that could not be contained as readily as the vernacular press. The integration of print and performance specifically targeted youth audiences, who formed a crucial demographic for nationalist mobilization.

The school and college students took part actively in the festival either as part of melas or as audiences. Competitions including essay writing, poetry recitation, and dramatic performances became standard features of celebrations, with prizes often including books about Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and other historical figures (Jasper, 2003; Gordon, 1975; Samarth, 1975; Cashman, 1975). The colonial administrators were highly apprehensive about these, especially the lectures as imparting of a history of a glorious past and call of the motherland to free her was potentially consequential. The historical education imparted in the evening lectures as well as theatrical performances converted the admiration of the Maratha ruler into a language of nationalism, manufacturing future subjects whose political sympathies lay increasingly with nationalist rather than imperial ideals (Deshpande, 2007). Perhaps, the print-performance architecture represented a significant achievement in mass communication in an era before electronic media. Thus the festival's communication strategy effectively created a nationalist 'media ecosystem' that challenged colonial information monopolies.

Cross-Regional Mobilization and Colonial Reactions: Colonial Scrutiny and Censorship

Colonial authorities recognized the political potential of these early commemorations as the celebration of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj became an occasion for the dissemination of seditious ideas under the guise of historical appreciation. This recognition led to increased surveillance and occasional prosecutions, which analysed data suggests paradoxically increased the festival's popularity and political significance. Regional adaptations of the festival followed distinct patterns while maintaining core elements. Analysis of festival programs from outside Maharashtra between 1905-1925 shows that all contained garlanding of Shivaji's portrait, speeches connecting historical resistance to contemporary politics, distribution of printed materials, and dramatic performances (Cashman, 1975). However, regional adaptations added distinct local elements - Bengali celebrations often included Rabindranath Tagore's compositions including the famous 'Shibaji Utsab', Punjab celebrations incorporated Sikh martial traditions depicting courage and valour, and Tamil celebrations featured drawing of parallels with Chola resistance to northern powers amongst others (Samarth,

1975). This architectural balancing between standardization and localization permitted the festival to preserve coherent nationalist messaging while accommodating regional cultural forms. The diffusion of the Chhatrapati's narrative across political- social and economic boundaries required sophisticated translation networks. Analysis of the regionally produced materials reveals not merely linguistic conversion but cultural adaptation. For instance, Bengali adaptations give emphasis to his administrative reforms, resonating with the region's *bhadralok* interest in governance, while Punjab materials decorated his military policy, appealing to martial traditions (Majumdar, 1963). These interpretations were not centrally synchronized but materialized through informal networks of nationalist activists, representing what Anderson (1983) terms "vernacular nationalism" working through multiple linguistic channels.

Between 1900-1930, the geographic expansion of the Festival produced varied colonial responses. Initial colonial assessments dismissed cross-regional celebrations as artificial impositions, with a 1907 Intelligence Bureau report stating: "These celebrations outside Maharashtra represent contrived attempts by agitators rather than authentic popular sentiment" (Cohn, 1987). However, by end of the first decade of the twentieth century, surveillance assessments acknowledged the festival's effectiveness in fostering nationalist consciousness across regional boundaries. As noted in a confidential memo that the transformation of a regional Maratha festival into an all-India occasion for seditious expression represents a concerning development in nationalist organization (Chirol, 1911).

Colonial responses to these celebrations or enchanting in the name of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj varied in intensity. For instance, in western India, Shivaji's commemoration became sites of inciting people against the colonial rule through the use of analogies and hence, got butchered under the sword of the sedition law. The famous 1897 prosecution of Tilak was a result of politically oriented writing in his newspapers, particularly the reporting of festival speeches at the opening of the Shivaji Festival in Poona and the poem "Shivaji's Utterances" on June 15, 1897. Allegedly in the report there were political messaging like 'Foreigners are dragging out Lakshmi (affluence) violently by the hand (through regressive taxes).' (Noorani, 2005, p.119). The speech delivered at the festival justified the killing of Afzal Khan which the prosecution counsel interpreted as a clear case of justifying political assassination (Donogh, 1911, pp.45-6). Bengal saw massive proscription of print materials. In Bengal from 1902-1906 Deuskar was the chief organizer of the festival in Bengal. On the occasion of 1903, Sakham Ganesh Deuskar's influential work *Deshar Katha* (Story of the Nation) was proscribed in 1910 after selling over 15,000 copies (Goswami, 1998, p.624) along with other major publications. This changing nature of British treatment reflected colonial anxiety about nationalist sentiment transcending regional boundaries.

Tilak's revival of Shivaji Maharaj in the form of a tradition transcended regional boundaries through planned media dissemination. Through standardized reporting formats in *Kesari* and *Mahratta* that could be easily translated and reproduced, newspaper networks smoothened the progress of cross-regional expansion. While *Kesari* published in Marathi, Tilak ensured key articles were reiterated in English for the non- Marathis through his *Mahratta*, enabling his interpretations to reach educated Indians beyond linguistic boundaries. The data analysis of the period between 1896-1905, shows that the circulation of *Mahratta* grew from approximately 800 to 7,500 copies, with its distribution networks going upto Bengal, Punjab, and Madras Presidency (Wolpert, 2019). The deployment of a cross-regional media strategy complemented by Tilak's correspondence with nationalist leaders outside Maharashtra strengthened the dissemination of cultural nationalism in the name of 'Chhatrapati Maharaj'. A systematic analysis of newspaper accounts from Times of India, *Kesari* and *Mahratta* on these celebrations in the period between 1900-1920 highlights that these reports typically included four key themes namely the attendance in numbers (with special emphasis over the presence of non-Hindus or non-brahmins) attendance, reporting of the speeches delivered during the festival at diverse sites by notable leaders, descriptions of displays, and editorial columns linking the celebration to broader nationalist movements. These standardized layouts allowed vernacular as well as regional newspapers to easily accustom and replicate substance from other regions, creating what can be understood as a shared historical consciousness that fused the memory of a warrior king with the idea of a *Dharmarajya* across linguistic boundaries. The following details about the numbers and participation at the Raigad Fort celebration stands as an example for the standardized formats followed each year: celebrations witnessed the participation of numerous sections of the Hindu society which also included several thousand 'illiterate, ill-clad ryots and villagers from the neighbouring talukas, nearly a band of 300 Brahmins from Poona, Ratnagiri, and Mahad, a group of Maharashtrian elites, and the Marathas of all sects'(Vartak, 1999; Jasper, 2003; Cashman, 1975). Similarly was reported about the August 1906 Calcutta celebration in Times of India in which Tilak himself stood as the guest of honour along with Bipin Chandra Pal and Ashwani Kumar Dutta. 'The event was a resounding success drawing thousands of people'. Further the newspaper also reported that

‘enthusiasm for listening to Tilak speak about Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj rivalled that in Pune or Mumbai!’ (Samarth, 1975).

Thus, the effectiveness of cross-regional expansion is evident in colonial assessments. A confidential intelligence assessment from 1908 concluded: “The transformation of Shivaji from a regional figure to an all-India symbol of resistance represents one of the most successful propaganda achievements of the nationalist movement (Metcalf, 2006).

However this, cross-regional expansion faced significant challenges, including opposition from regional cultural organizations suspicious of Maratha-centric narratives. Similar worries were sharpened by old resentments that were a result of Shivaji’s campaigns and raids faced by the Madrasi and Gujarati people whose descendants were now being asked to celebrate Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as a hero for all India. However, the gradual acceptance was acknowledged by *Mahratta* ‘under Pax-Britanica the Bengali in spite of their Mahratta ditch, the Madrasi inspite of Shivaji’s unkind treatment to their ancestors, the Guzerati inspite of being royally looted were prepapred to forget the past and honour the greatest Indian hero of modern times.’ (*Mahratta* January 5, 1896). This was not an agreement but a way to make it seem like one. The resentments listed were still alive at the time of writing. The real way to accommodate was slow and local. Between 1915-1925 shows increasing incorporation of local historical figures alongside Shivaji, creating what can be termed “parallel commemoration” where Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was honoured together with local heroes instead of replacing them. The architectural sophistication of cross-regional mobilization is perhaps best demonstrated by the festival’s adaptation to regional political contexts. In Bengal during the Swadeshi movement (1905-1911), celebrations emphasized economic self-sufficiency and administrative reform. In Punjab following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (1919), celebrations focused on resistance to arbitrary authority. In Madras during the non-Brahmin movement (1920s), celebrations highlighted Shivaji’s non-Brahmin background (Davies, 2020). These adaptations allowed a single historical figure to serve diverse regional political needs while maintaining overarching nationalist messaging. Thus the genius of the nationalist movement lies not in discovering Shivaji, but in transforming him into a figure capable of inspiring Indians across provincial boundaries.

Tilak’s Political Recasting of Shivaji: Reinventing a Regional Maratha Leader into a National Symbol

Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s strategic reimagining of Shivaji Maharaj represents perhaps the most decisive intervention in transforming a regional historical figure into a symbol of national resistance. Comprehensive analysis of Tilak’s writings in *Kesari* (1896-1908) reveals a methodical approach to broadening Shivaji’s appeal beyond Maratha regional identity. Analysis of editorials in *Mahratta* and *Kesari* authored by Tilak on this subject, one can clearly observe constant explicit frame on Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as fighting for “swarajya” (self-rule) rather than merely Maratha dominance. This subtle but significant reframing situated his struggles against Mughal power as a prototype for the broader Indian struggle against the British colonialism, making the historical narrative accessible and relevant to non-Maratha Indians.

The architectural redesign of Shivaji Maharaj’s image under the leadership of Tilak involved the use of three primary mechanisms. First, he emphasized and propagated those aspects of Shivaji Maharaj’s governance that seemed modern, progressive and inclusive by contemporary standards. Second mechanism included the consistent emphasis on his policies on religious tolerance as available through an analysis of the available speeches delivered by Tilak at Shivaji Utsav celebrations between 1896-1908, with qualitative text examination showing the constant use of phrases relating to “protection of all faiths” appearing in a majority of speeches. A typical example comes from his 1896 Shivaji Jayanti speech in Poona where he proclaimed that ‘Shivaji Maharaj protected the weak against the strong and ensured that every community under his rule received justice. This principle, not religious antagonism, guided his campaigns’ (Samarth, 1975; Cashman, 1975).

Second, Tilak deliberately propagated ‘selective parts of history’ while downplaying those aspects of that might underpin purely regional or communal interpretations and portray him as a communal rather than a secular king. Analysis of commemorative materials produced under Tilak’s direct influence that includes pamphlets and newspaper displays the reduction by half in the use of Maratha-specific terminology in the period between 1890-1905, while references to broader concepts like “Indian sovereignty” and “native rule” increased. The justification of the killing of Afzal Khan popularly known as the-‘Afzal Khan episode’ stood as a potentially divisive Hindu-Muslim episode, which Tilak consistently framed as a legitimate act of self-defence against treachery rather than religious conflict. Defending in his *Kesari* of 1897: “Shivaji’s struggle was against tyranny, not against the Muslim faith, as evidenced by the recruitment of multiple Muslim soldiers and rank holders in Shivaji’s army” (Sardesai, 2002).

Third, Tilak architecturally positioned Shivaji Maharaj as an exemplar of practical nationalism rather than abstract idealism. Analysis of editorials published in *Kesari* between 1897-1905 shows Tilak frequently contrasted what he termed ‘armchair politics’ (referring to the moderate approaches of the early Congress) with ‘Shivaji’s path’ of determined action. The architectural brilliance of Tilak’s approach is evident in how he navigated colonial censorship while conveying nationalist messages. After Tilak’s captivity following the 1897 riots, celebration committees across Maharashtra adopted similar coded language. Analysis of speeches and editorials during 1897-1908 shows increasing use of historical allegories with clear contemporary applications—phrases like ‘foreign misrule’ and ‘restoration of native honor’ increased significantly during this period. Thus, through historical parallelism, Tilak created a political vocabulary that could express nationalist sentiment while maintaining plausible deniability before colonial authorities.

The strategic reconceptualization of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj by Lokmanya Tilak faced significant challenges from both colonial authorities and moderate nationalists. While the colonial authorities recognized the prospective threat to law and order and the rule itself these celebrations held. This is evident in the confidential memo of 1902 archived belonging to the Bombay Presidency Police Department: “Under the facade of historical commemoration, these celebrations promote accurately the sort of seditious sentiment we have sought to suppress through the press regulations” (Barrier, 1974). On the other hand the moderate nationalists, particularly those associated with the early Indian National Congress, originally observed Tilak’s approach as dangerously provoking and potentially discordant. Similarly Gokhale, in a 1898 private correspondence expressed his concern that the glorification of military heroes, however justified, may provide ammunition to those who characterize the movement as reactionary rather than progressive (Wolpert, 2017).

Regardless of these challenges, Lokmanya’s architectural recasting of Shivaji Maharaj demonstrates remarkably effectual. Analysis of nationalist discourse in the period of 1900-1920 confirms a far-reaching increase in references being made to Chhatrapati Maharaj outside Maharashtra, with Odiya, Bengali, Punjabi, and Hindi publications increasingly citing him as a ‘pan-Indian’ symbol of resistance. So much was Tilak’s effective communication strategy successful that even Aurobindo Ghose who barely saw eye to eye with him on many issues had to admit in his editorials for *Bande Mataram*, for instance in an article of 1905 admits that Chhatrapati Maharaj was a shining example for all of India on how successful agitation could override foreign rule (Ghose, n.d). Further, Colonial reaction to Tilak’s efforts in the name of Shivaji Maharaj inadvertently highlighted the affair on a larger scale. According to the collected data spanning from the year 1897 to 1910, the Raj banned most of Tilak’s newspaper articles, confiscated books trying to create feelings of disaffection against the Raj and banned public meetings associated with celebration of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Indeed, the new Press Act of 1910 famously sought to suppress “historical analogies likely to cause disaffection” (Cohn, 1987). The irony of course is that in cracking down on such speech in the name of preserving law and order, the Raj made the festival a more potent vehicle for nationalism. Tilak knew better than anyone that Indian nationalism needed historical anchors – shared symbols that could transcend regional, religious and linguistic differences. Through emphasis, narration, and distribution he turned a 17th century Maratha king into the blueprint for Indian nationalism in the 19th- 20th century. If anything, Tilak didn’t just restore Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to Maharashtra; he gave him to India.

CONCLUSION

The strategic architectural transition of celebrating a ruler who was acclaimed by a group of people from regional royal celebrations to a sophisticated platform for nationalist mobilization itself stands as an investigative topic of research. This research was never about dwelling into the historical facts about Shivaji Maharaj, rather uncovering the sophisticated cultural strategies that were used by the leaders and the masses in the colonial times with an objective of uniting the masses. Through careful analysis of multiple archival sources like colonial reports, newspaper articles, pamphlets and other commemorative materials, this article has traced the deliberated construction or invention of a cultural tradition apparently designed to unite the Hindus but gradually transcended regional, religious and linguistic boundaries. The collected data supports the hypothesis that the localized public festivals served as platforms for fostering a shared cultural-national identity by transforming religious- regional icons into symbols of resistance. While in today’s time often commemoration gets standardised to declaring public holidays, however in colonial times festivals were attempts to unite the people through careful architectural designs which included the selective reinterpretation of history, standardization of ritual practices, tactful utilization of the print media and performance, and the localization of the selective historical figure across diverse regional contexts.

A name directly associated with Shivaji Maharaj has been that of Lokmanya Tilak, who through his *Mahratta* and *Kesari* along with public celebrations politically recasted Shivaji Maharaj. He specifically emphasized on

those aspects of Shivaji's career that reverberated across linguistic, regional and religious boundaries while systematically omitting those parts of history that held the potential to reinforce communal or regional separation. The culmination of print media along with performance drew a newer public space where the literate and illiterate divides, the segregation on lines of gender and caste dissolved as the readers and audience got engulfed into the nationalist sentiments being disseminated through the pages and stage. Through such shared commemorative experiences that was a result of an integration of the print and performance culture created what can be termed as "multimedia" approach in the nationalist communication. The cross regional expansion was expanded not only by the circulation of the print and stage plays at different theatres but also by the network of school and university students, challenging the colonial clutches without direct confrontation.

The continuity of the festival even after the end of colonialism, significantly highlights the relevance it continues to hold in the traditions of the nations. However, the name and the festival itself have undergone both reformations as well as ruptures moving away from its original colonial era architecture. As Indian states emerge to patronize Shivaji Maharaj and the festival, the meaning of the King and his commemoration has transformed from what it was interpreted as an anti-colonial platform into a vehicle for nation-building, political rhetorics and state legitimization. Today "Uniting in the name of Shivaji" has got replaced by "who owns Shivaji Maharaj"! and in which form. Politically guided ideological frameworks like the cultural nationalist, regional, and secular nationalist have generated multiple, often incongruous elucidation of the royal legacy. Though, transformed, yet the festival's continued relevance today affirms the architectural success of colonial-era nationalists in creating a commemorative tradition that can meet shifting political demands while preserving its historical significance. This analysis helps expand theoretical understandings of nationalism as a cultural endeavour that depends on shared symbols, stories, and commemorative activities. As Anderson (1983) noted, nationalism involves the formation of "imagined communities" that go beyond direct personal experience. The architectural transformation of Chhatrapati Maharaj illustrates how local cultural practices can be strategically reshaped to foster imagined communities by constructing shared historical narratives and commemorative experiences.

This article also addresses the misinterpretation by simplistic distinctions between "traditional" and "modern" forms of political mobilization. The architects of the festival skillfully combined traditional cultural formulations (processions, devotional practices, dramatic performances) with the standardized strategies (newspaper networks, pamphlet distribution, standardized messaging). This hybrid approach ensured the dissemination of the nationalist messaging beyond class, caste, illiterate- literate, regional and religious boundaries. Perhaps the continuing confrontations revolving around Shivaji Maharaj and his legacy illustrate the continuing influence of commemorative practices in determining political discourses. Commemorations do not simply echo existing political distinctions but aggressively represent them by providing symbolic possessions for competing visions of national identity. In this sense, the architecture of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj persists to configure political discourse long after the colonial context that informed its original design has disappeared.

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