

# THE Saddle AND THE State

A SPECTACLE OF PRICE AND POWER IN THE ELITE POLO GROUNDS OF JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

# Literature SUMMARY

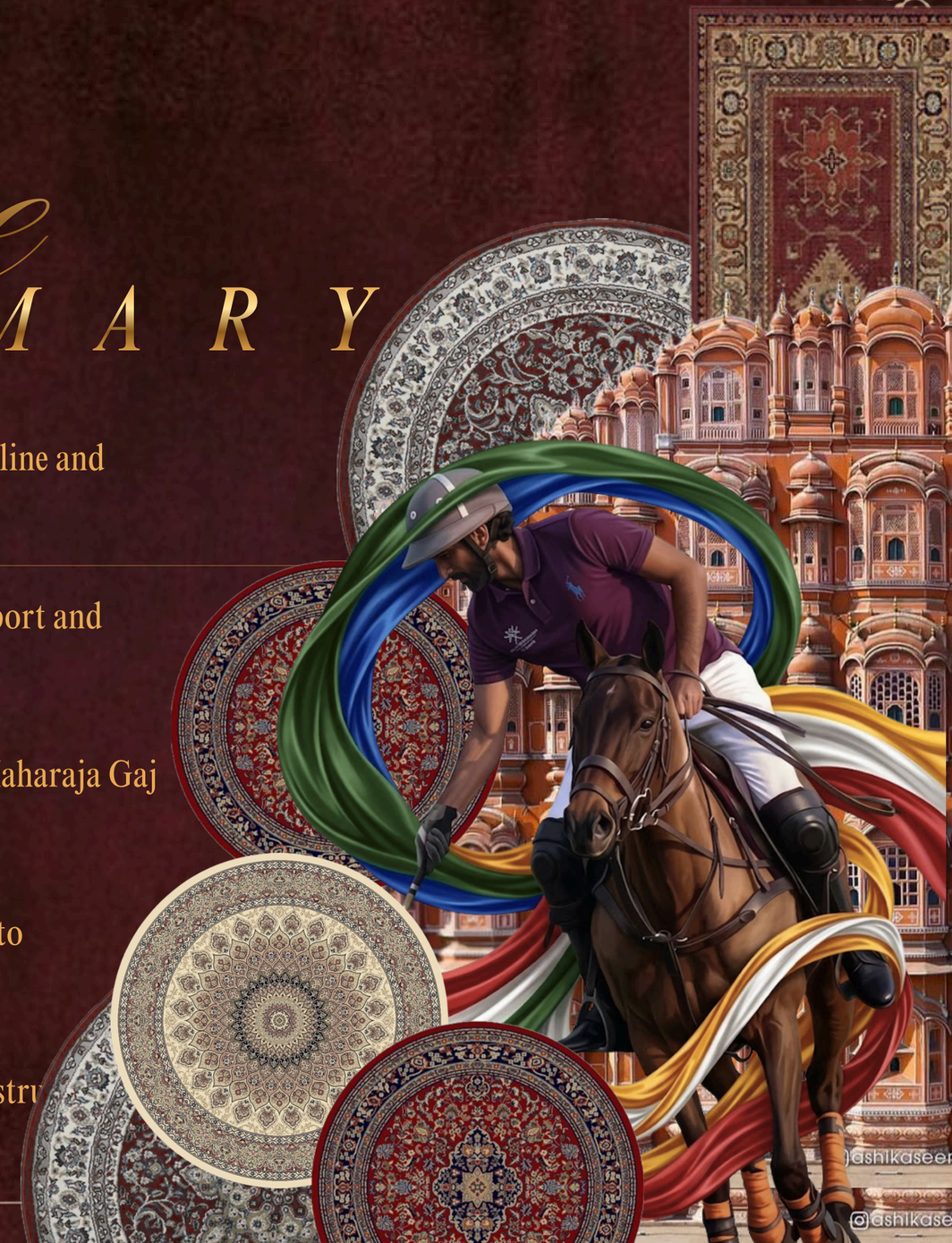
- *Elsaesser & McDevitt:* Argues that the sport was a vehicle for "imperial values," specifically discipline and hierarchy, during the British Raj. *(Elsaesser, 2022; McDevitt, 2004)*.

- *Sir P by Dhananjaya Singh:* Identifies Sir Pratap Singh as the pivotal figure who formalised the sport and utilised it for international diplomacy. *(Singh, D. ,2006)*

- *Jhala:* Highlights the shift from political power to cultural entrepreneurship, where royals like Maharaja Gaj Singh and the Jaipur family used polo to maintain relevance post-independence. (*Jhala, 2008)*

- Coste-Manière: Notes how modern international brands now exploit this "aristocratic meaning" to communicate high-end luxury and exclusivity. (*Coste-Maniere et al., 2021)*

- *Tiwari:* Asserts that while sports like cricket have been democratised across India, polo remains a stru outlier, maintaining its exclusive barriers. (Tiwari, 2014)



# Literature GAPS

- *Historical literature* **-Elsaesser** *and McDevitt*
- *Doesn't examine how legacy is used as cultural capital today*
- *Local sources beforehand were limited; therefore, it was something our research focused on*
- *Tiwari notes inaccessibility but doesn't examine why that exclusivity exists so specifically in Jaipur*
- *No existing work brings together heritage, elitism, and soft power under a single analytical framework*



# Research QUESTIONS

THESE GAPS LED US DIRECTLY TO TWO QUESTIONS:

*To what extent does polo function as a diplomatic and promotional asset for Jaipur?*

*How do prohibitive economics and royal patronage work together to preserve polo as an elite sport and tool of soft power?*





# Methodology USED

*Mixed-Methods Approach: Combined secondary literature review with firsthand fieldwork during Jaipur's polo season (February).*

*Stakeholder Interviews: Semi-structured, open-ended discussions with players, breeders, sponsors, organizers, and local businesses.*



*Data Triangulation: Integrated findings with archival records and media reports to analyze cost structures, royal patronage patterns, and heritage branding.*

*Ethical Standards: Secured informed consent from all participants; offered anonymity; no individuals under 18 involved.*

*Ethnographic Observations: Conducted at key venues, including the Rajasthan Polo Club.*

# Findings

## C H 3

*Led to 'Jaipurisation' of Polo, which refers to how Jaipur's royal family reshaped an imported sport into a symbol of Rajasthani aristocracy and cultural prestige.*



*Jaipur Polo became a global brand, leading India to win the 1957 World Cup and 9 consecutive Polo Crown.*





*Specifically in Jaipur, Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II formalised grounds in the Rambagh Estate.*

*This heritage is still sustained through memorial cups, ceremonial rituals, etc. Heritage, hence, was made rather than inherited.*

# Findings

## CH 4

## POLO AS A HIGH CAPITAL FIELD

*Cultural capital*

- *Equestrian culture and aristocratic traditions*

*Inflows:*

- *Rajasthan Tourism, luxury hotels, and Corporates (Shree Cement, KGK Group, Royal Foundation (PDKF) , Institutional Controllers (RPC)*

*Economic Capital*

- *Expensive upkeep of equipment and multiple horses, and*
- *Hence, Polo remains economically exclusive due to*

*Social capital :*

- *Knowing the right people*
- *Usually comes from generational networks*

*Assymetrical Flow*

- *Elite-centric flow: Money comes from and circulates within elites, with minimal trickle-down to workers or the local economy.*
- *Value over profit: Returns are non-linear, prioritising prestige, visibility, and networks over financial gain.*







# Findings

CH 4

*Rajasthan Polo Club*

- *No entry fee, but highly selective memberships*
- *Foregoes direct revenue*
- *Cements polo as a cultural spectacle rather than a commercial enterprise*



*Seasonal model (Sep - March)*

- *Creates economic spikes for luxury hospitality and peripheral services*
- *Off-season contractions*

# Findings

## CH 5

## STRUCTURALLY PRODUCED ELITISM IN JAIPUR

*Memberships, patronage networks, tournament structures emphasise the criticality of social networks in entering the sport*

*Economic barriers are the first filter, but institutions sustain them*




*Efforts of Revival:*
*RPC riding club, women's polo fixtures, proposed arena-polo formats*
*Riding school fees from 14K to 50K per month*
*Women's polo expands gender visibility and remains within elite structure*
*Broadcasting + league plans enhance spectatorship, not participation*

*Myth of Revival:*
*Efforts extend sport's cultural legitimacy without dismantling structural exclusion*

# Findings CH 6

## Polo as a Vehicle of Royal Soft Power:

- In post-colonial India, the royal family uses polo as a platform for networking and informal diplomacy through elite social and sporting gatherings.

## Paradox of soft power:

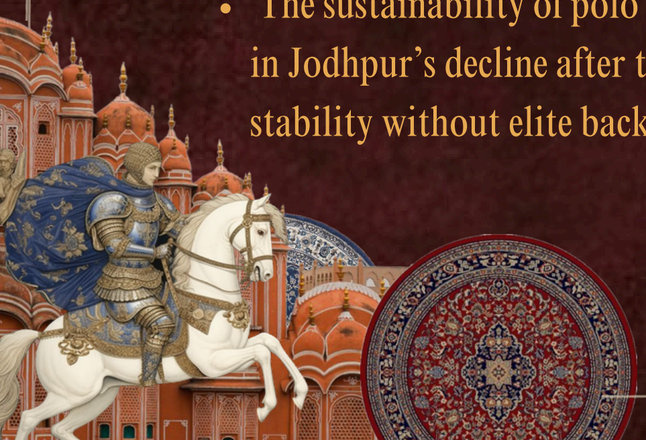
- While Jaipur polo projects inclusivity and generates limited local spillovers (e.g., transport, food, artisans), its core economic and social benefits remain concentrated within an elite, reinforcing exclusivity.

## Digital Visibility and Narrative Reinforcement:

- Through H.H. Jaipur's digital presence and ambassadorships alongside control over institutions and narratives, the royal family sustains relevance while reinforcing its authority over polo's legacy and prestige.

## Dependence on Royal Patronage:

- The sustainability of polo in cities like Jodhpur and Jaipur is heavily dependent on royal involvement, as seen in Jodhpur's decline after the Maharaja's withdrawal, suggesting the sport lacks independent institutional stability without elite backing.



# Findings

CH 6

*POLO IN JAIPUR SURVIVES BECAUSE:*

- *Elitism preserves value*
- *Heritage provides legitimacy*
- *Royal soft power converts both into cultural and economic capital*
- *Symbolically, sport belongs to the people of Jaipur*
- *Structurally, belongs to a very narrow circle of elite*
- *Game rooted in tradition and passion*

*BUT IN ESSENCE, IT IS A CAREFULLY BALANCED SYSTEM*

- *The sport seeks survival*
- *While the royal family seeks cultural relevance*
- *Mutual dependence keeps the saddle with the state*



# Limitations IN RESEARCH

- *Minimal secondary literature on royal polo in Jaipur*
- *Lack of quantitative studies and financial reluctance leading to an ethnographic research*
- *Generalizability may not apply as Jaipur-specific findings were conducted*



# Future Scope IN RESEARCH

*Deeper study of His Highness of Jaipur's digital presence as cultural soft power*

*Further exploration of labour economics and heritage hierarchies in the field*

*Comparative research across polo capitals like Jodhpur, Kolkata and Hyderabad, Delhi and Manipur*



# The team

PROF ABHISHEK SOMANI
(Faculty Mentor)




Thank You

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