



Depiction of Rural Life in Marathi Literature: Changing Forms and Social Commentary

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Abstract- Rural life has long been an aspect of Marathi literature that has not been considered as setting, but as a social world that is in motion, with caste, labour, gender, ecology, market forces and the state coming into conflict. This paper discusses how the image of rural Maharashtra is altered as the genre of Marathi writing itself alters its form, as the image of the rural school of short fiction give way to Dalit autobiographical testimony and along with the changes in the form of agrarian distress, migration, media convergence. The paper utilises a qualitative, historically informed textual analysis of a purposeful corpus of representative works (novella/novel, short story, autobiography, poetry, and essay) to identify four major representational turns, which are (1) rural life as moral-cosmic order and everyday ethics; (2) rural life as community system (village institutions, custom, scarcity) as described through realist means and marked by regional speech; (3) rural life as crisis ecology, which is characterized by debt, precarity, feminised labour, seasonal migration, and policy Findings are given in form of thematic matrices and frequency-type mappings (tables), and contextual graphs based on the indicators of Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of India shedding light on the changing rural labour participation, particularly in women- a vital background to understanding rural work, dignity, and survival in the literature. The paper contends that form is important: every genre has its various abilities of social critique, be it satire and irony, documentary realism and testimonial urgency. All these changing representations make up a long-term cultural record of rural change and challenged modernity.

Keywords- Marathi literature, rural representation, Gramin Sahitya, Dalit autobiography, agrarian crisis, caste, gender, realism, social commentary

I. Introduction

The rural life plays a central role in the Marathi imagination since modern history of Maharashtra as colonial revenue regimes, anti-caste movements, cooperative politics, Green Revolution inequity, drought cycles, and agrarian distress today have reorganised village society and maintained stable hierarchies. The representation in literature turns out to be an account of continuity and discontinuity. However, in Marathi writing, rural is never simply a matter of place: it can be a moral community, a topography of labour and want, a place of caste violence, an ecology in crisis or it can be a haunting memory of the migrant city.

The paper poses the question: How has the rural life been represented in the literature of Marathi over the ages and how have the transformation of literary forms altered the type of social commentary; which rural representation could facilitate. This question is



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important because of three reasons. To start with, rural representation is a method of interpreting Marathi modernity: the village life provides a base where the discussion of caste, dignity of labour, gendered work and development occurs. Secondly, the shifting of form short story cycles; realist novella; autobiographical testimony; experimental modernist narration; and the contemporary hybrid media alter what may be said and how it may be justified as truth. Third, the representation of rural life provides an analogical prism to Indian-language literatures more generally: the peculiar anti-caste culture of the Indian public sphere and its strong tradition of life writing are particularly visible in Marathi.

The form and society relationship is exemplified by a single iconic image. Bangarwadi introduces the village as a phenomenon seen by a young teacher, who has entered the world of a microcosm of social life, where educating, work, gender discipline, and informal power are the daily negotiating elements of everyday life. A publisher synopsis preempts the characterization of village characters in the way they perform their work, confess, experience physical pressure, and moralize. This narration of the village contrasts with the Dalit autobiographies in which the village is not described as a vivid community apparatus but as a system of exclusion and violence, and in which voice is transformed into a political fact (Rege, 2006; Zelliott, 1992). In this way, the same countryside may produce diverse truths basing on genre and the perspective.

In the paper, the discussion goes as follows. The literature review brings together the academic literature of the history of literary works in Marathi, rural realism, caste and Dalit studies, and representation theories. The methodology entails the selection of corpus and thematic coding. Findings are displayed in thematic trends over time, backed by the use of tables and contextual labour graphs. It has been argued that Marathi rural representation should be conceptualized as an array of form-based social commentaries instead of a chronological development of the village of the past to the crisis of the present.

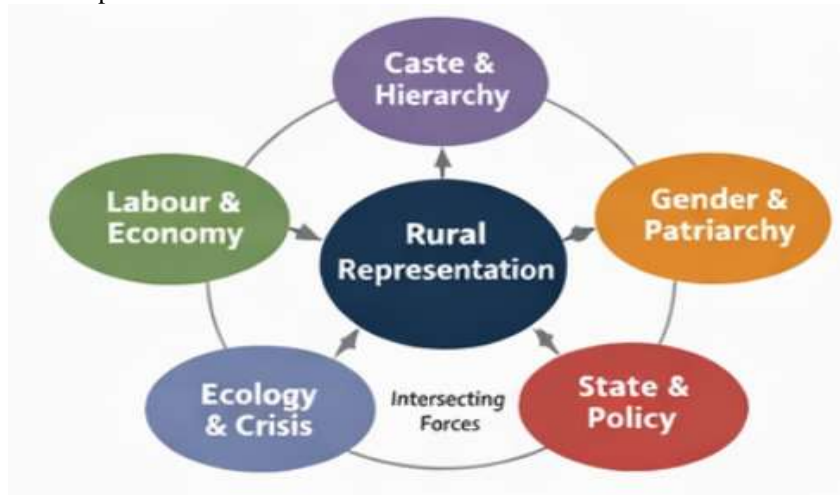


Figure 1. Conceptual overview: Rural life as a dynamic social world in Marathi literature

II. Literature Review



ISSN: 2584-2455

The academic representation of the subject of rural representation in Marathi is generally the result of four overlapping discourses, (a) Marathi literary history and modernity; (b) rural realism and regional speech; (c) Dalit literature and autobiography as counter-archive; and (d) agrarian change, migration, gendered labour, and interdisciplinary history of agrarian change indirectly re-frames the way we read the term rural in writing.

as rural-modernity Marathi modernity and cultural archive.

The village is very often used as a privileged location of the histories of Marathi literature in which language, class, caste, and moral economies can be seen. In the survey accounts of post-Independence writing there are indications that village presentation may be becoming conventional, and that also critical writers maintained rural social observation as an aesthetic issue of life. This is important since the act of depicting rural is not purely descriptive, but it carries normative presumption of community, order, and change. On the cultural studies perspective, the rural can be thought of as the so-called charged symbolic space that is idealised, demonised or historicised by which the modern society narrates itself (Williams, 1973).

Anti-caste criticism and oral traditions of the region further inflict rural representation in Marathi. Moral vocabularies of work, hunger, devotion and injustice are given in folkloric forms, powada, ovi and saint-poet lineages, typically reinvigorated in contemporary writing in the form of quotation, parody or counter-memory. And it is this lengthy cultural memory which is significant when more advanced genres such as the realist short story or autobiography challenge the moral authority of a village by predicting humiliation and structural exclusion.

Rural realism, Rural speech and the rural school.

A second group dwells upon the school of the countryside, and the art of describing the common institutions of a village, the rural school. The conscious use of local dialects and speech rhythms to express the local social knowledge has become one of the markers of this tradition. One of the publishers profiles of Shankar Patil clearly stresses his use of rural social unrest, and the application of Kolhapuri and border-region dialects in the stories. Sociolinguistically speaking, these kinds of linguistic selections can not simply add flavour; they point to power dynamics, boundaries of intimacy, humour, insult registers as well as the moral policing within village talk.

Rural realist mode usually utilizes a figure of observer (teacher, clerk, outsider, returning student) to enact conflicts between bureaucratic modernity and village values. The role of teacher in Bangarwadi, makes it possible to enter into the labour practices and informal power on a documentary-like basis, without being too close to the matter to exercise irony. Publication and bibliographic history publication The Sahitya Akademi materials in print give editions and dates of publication. English translation history After that, the history of English translation of rural Marathi realism reveals how rural (meaning village) realism was imported to a broader readership: The Village Had No Walls was a translation of the Marathi term, Bangarwadi, which was originally published by Asia Publishing House, translated by Ram Deshmukh.



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Dalit autobiography and structure of oppression in the village.

A third dialogue redefines rural presentation with the Dalit studies. The Marathi Dalit writing (poetry, short story, autobiography) is commonly addressed as political-cultural breakage since it negates the aesthetic conventions according to which the oppressed had to present themselves as a backdrop figure, a type, or a moral lesson. Rather, Dalit literature claims lived experience as the epistemological scholar (Dangle, 1992; Limbale, 2004; Rege, 2006; Zelliott, 1992).

In this perspective the village is not a moral community that works as one; it is a zone of graded inequality in which space (wada vs. maharwada), access to water, the relative position of children at school and allotment of labour are written off in terms of caste power. The rural is made an apparatus that generates humiliation and not merely a poverty. Notably, Dalit autobiography reverses the rules of representation: it replaces the omniscient narration with the testimonial voice, and tends to intermix the documentary detail, memory pieces and direct address, thus transforming literature into the social evidence and counter-public pedagogy.

Gendered labour, crisis representation, and agrarian change.

Lastly, the interdisciplinary agrarian transformation and gendered labour works contribute to the contextualisation of the contemporary rural discourses. The landscape of rural Maharashtra in the post 1990 period is characterized by heightened exposure to the market, climate changes, debts, seasonal migration as well as feminisation of agricultural and informal labour. The literary imagery is more and more precariously presupposed than village institutions: drought, water politics, contract labour, the migration of the sugar belt and, most importantly, the psychic cost of aspiration.

To establish this background, recent labour-force signals demonstrate that women participation in the labour market in the rural areas has changed considerably, which is a significant background to read the way texts embody the idea of women work, respectability and survival. Indicatively, female LFPR in rural settings who are currently in their weekly status of PLFS increases in the past survey years until 202324. These changes are not mechanically the cause of literary change, but they transform the lived experience of which literature documents: who labours and how women labour can become visible, what dignity and exploitation can be narratively plausible.

III. Methodology

Research design

It is a qualitative research study based on historical-comparative textual analysis and thematic coding with an addition of contextual socio-economic indicators (PLFS labour data) to place literary themes within the context of rural transformation.

The selection of corpus was purposive (sampling).

The corpus is purposely chosen to reflect (1) various literary genres; (2) various historical periods; and (3) various social positions (dominant-caste rural realism, marginal/outsider focalisation, Dalit life writing, and contemporary crisis narratives).

Core anchor texts include:



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Bangarwadi, Kosala (rural-urban movement and return), Fakira (labour, marginality, folk energy) are some of the rural realist novella/novel.

- Autobiographical writing of life: Baluta, Upara, Jina Amucha, Aaydan (village as caste/gender structure).
- Anthology of Dalit reference point: Poisoned Bread.
- Rural distress/migration poetry and prose written after 1990 (some anthologies and criticism given in references)
- Metadata of publication and translation histories become subject to reception history (e.g. Bangarwadi bibliographic listing and English translation record).

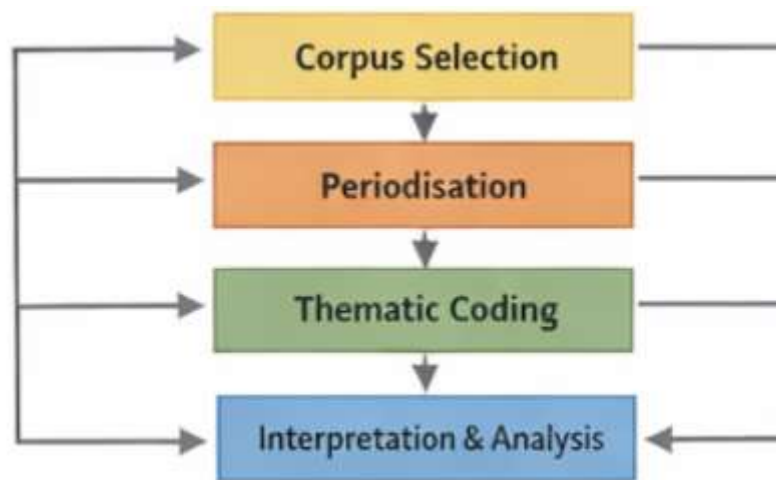


Figure 2. Research design flowchart (historical-comparative textual analysis)

Analytical scheme and coding.

The analysis of the texts is carried out based on a combination of

- The theory of representation (what it means to build the rural as knowable),
- Sociology of reading (reading, understanding culture, readership, subculture), and
- Caste-gender criticism (standpoint, voice, counter-archive).
- A codebook was created whose categories are recurrent in depiction of rural regions (labour, caste space, water/ecology, migration, institutions, speech registers, violence, humour/satire, aspirations/education). The level of codes was used on the scene, the changes in the narrative voice, and the metaphors.





| | Pre-1950 | 1950-1980 | 1980-2000 | Post-2000 |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| | Moral-Cosmic Rural | Institutional Realism | Dalit Counter-Archive | Crisis Ecology Rural |
| | Caste Realism | Caste Realism | Outsider View | Crisis Narratives |
| | Moneylender | Renny Hedism | Outsider View |  |
| |   |   |   |   |

Figure 3. Corpus map: Forms, periods, and standpoints covered in the purposive sample

Data of figures and contextual graphs.

Socio-economic graphical representations take published PLFS indicators (MoSPI). Tables of rural and urban female LFPR (CWS) series 201718 to 202324 are copied out of the official PLFS annual report/press note tables. These charts are not provided as causal evidence but rather as the background on the understanding of the literature.

VI. Result

Periodisation of rural depiction and dominant forms

| Labour | Caste Space | Gender Control | Institutions | Ecology | Migration | Voice |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|-----------|------------------------|
| • Saere bhate • Srere Chitel | • Nterpretons: • Roralburiong | • Prial dstituhing; • Light (Dombostans) | • Drestitutions, • Resmatler. | • Marmarine glansities • Rast Batlo themration | | • Ruida • Stasting |
| • Exidonsing • Fonolians | • Lnnasirutions • Seearde spatey | • Rezurberlay, • Realition eohitay | • Ainerat • Bedp dectior. | • Mepration denrigg • Damange ogications | | • Riut • Sweating |
| • Koery Bhats. • Fonol Soory | • Caste stande • Action policy. | • Gnital balace • Cubisarion | • Espentions • Gcolgan piacs | • Conventiat go bias • Meteprigs conoitents | | • Dalit • Stetaring |
| • Spere-zige • Recidnting | • Umber badars, • Pionhe gouples | • Gennion-tencep • Gove chabbatls | • Riian respther • Maite rections. | • Gunthdoarde chous • Rutshatue gnolraions | | • Dalit • Cholage |

Figure 4. Periodisation timeline of rural depiction in Marathi literature



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Table 1 summarises the study's periodisation: each phase is defined by dominant forms and recurring social commentaries.

| Phase | Approx. period | Dominant forms | Rural life appears as... | Dominant social commentary |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Ethical–cosmic rural | pre-modern to early modern reception in print | abhang/ovi/powada, folklore, didactic prose | moral community, work and devotion, famine/scarcity as ethical test | everyday ethics, critique of hypocrisy, labour dignity, moral satire |
| Institutional rural realism | mid-20th century | realist novella/short story | village system (custom, scarcity, authority, school, land) | critique of tradition vs reform; micro-politics of power |
| Counter-archive rural | 1960s–1990s (and beyond) | Dalit poetry, autobiography, testimonial prose | caste space, humiliation, violence, survival economies | structural critique; voice as evidence; rejection of romantic village |
| Crisis ecology rural | 1990s–present | hybrid realism, reportage-inflected fiction, migration narratives | precarity ecology (debt, drought, migration, feminised work) | critique of market/state; affect of aspiration and loss |
| Phase | Approx. period | Dominant forms | Rural life appears as... | Dominant social commentary |
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The rural realist turn: the systems of communities, labour, and everyday power. Mid-century rustic realism frequently uses the village as a social machine whose components, patil, kulkarni, moneylender, teacher, priest, police, cooperative leader,



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etc. are mediators of the sharing-out of respect and life. Bangarwadi is a good example of a realist technique: micro-scenes of everyday life (schooling, farm work, domestic quarrels) are piled up until they form a portrait of structural constraint, without the author having to preach about it. Even brief publisher descriptions predetermine labour intensity and moral negotiation: when the image of a woman replacing the absence of a bullock with a plough yoke on her neck, the gendered labour, a lack of it, and its persistence has been encompassed within a single symbolic image. Bodies at work therefore make the rural readable.

The tradition of realism in this school relies much on speech, the village is described in terms of idiom, proverb, insult, teasing, confession. This is the reason why the use of regional language becomes a significant means of representation. The character of Shankar Patil points out the way in which his rural narratives utilize particular dialect areas and how they depict social struggle in the village life. Dialectically, it signals who is part of it, who is allowed to make jokes, who is allowed to accuse others, who is required to remain silent; it is hierarchically and socially encoded. Rural realism turns thus not merely into a description of fields and huts but more accurately into a description of the communicative infrastructures of the village.

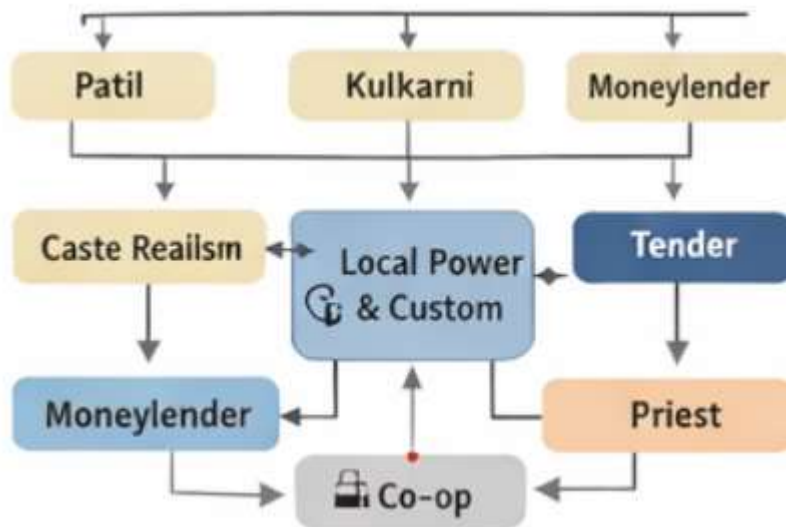


Figure 5. Village “system” schematic in rural realism

The turn of the counter-archive: village as caste space and the politics of voice.

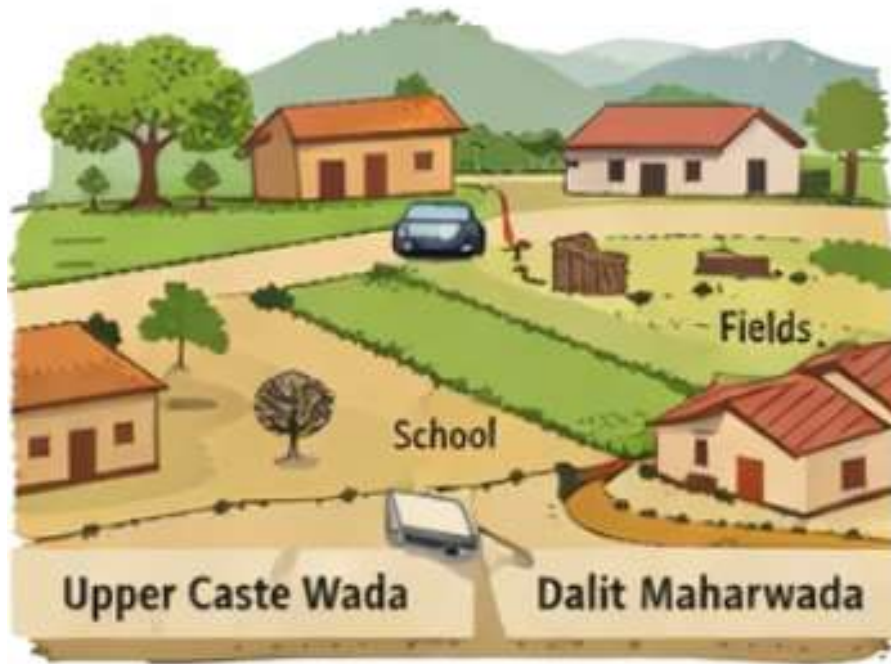
Dalit life writing challenges the previous rural realist gaze in two important manners; standpoint and form. The situational changes of observer-outsider (teacher, clerk, sympathetic narrator) into the embodied subject who has experienced caste restrictions, frequently are told in a documentary density. The form changes to third-person realism to autobiography and testimonial modes that directly address the reader, impose claims of truth, and place memories on the foreground, which prevailing aesthetic tendencies tend to place in the background as ugly or too political.



ISSN: 2584-2455

This twist transforms the rural detail. Where the realist village accounts might be lingering on tradition and seasonality, the Dalit autobiographies are lingering on spatial division (which lane, which well), ritualised humiliation (how one has to speak), and the economic violence of unpaid labour. This village is a Chessboard of Concessions. Social commentary is not an option; it is the storying machine, since the storying is already a refusal of the silencing.

Figure 6. Caste-space map of the village (counter-archive perspective)



Crisis ecological turn: precarity, migration, and feminised work.

The depictions of the rural life after 1990 have more and more characteristics of instability: a place that people have to move out of to live, a place that remains alive by sending out bodies (seasonal work, sugarcane cutting, construction). In the modern country plots of a rural nature, debt, state programs, cotton under stress, and psychological burden of aspiration (education, urban employment, consumer existence) tend to mix. In this case, the rural is not a stable system but a risk landscape.

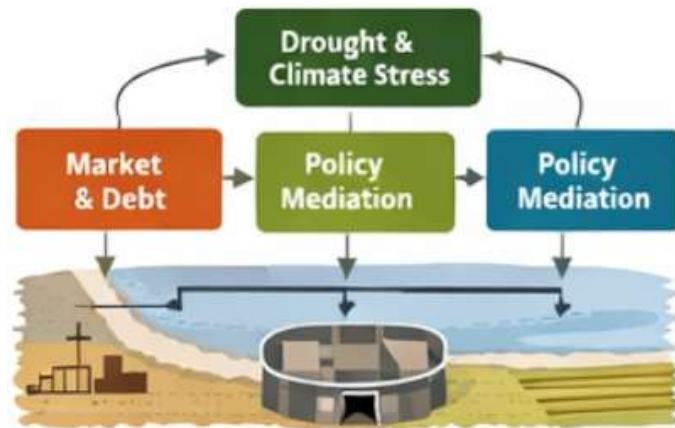
To put this into perspective, the recent labour indicators indicate significant shifts in the participation levels, notably in the case of women which is a key prism through which to read new images of work, respectability, and agency. According to PLFS tables, in recent survey years, female LFPR (CWS) increased in rural India, and it will reach its highest point in 202324. These changes can be both economically necessary and changing social norms of female work. These changes are recorded in literature



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with increased intensity of workloads, increased movement or emerging conflicts concerning honour and surveillance.

Figure 7. Crisis ecology pathway model (post-1990 rural transformation)



Thematic result matrix: what changes, what persists

Table 2 presents the thematic codebook used to compare rural depictions across forms.

| Code family | What it captures | Typical textual indicators |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Labour & subsistence | work rhythms, hunger, wage relations | harvesting scenes, unpaid labour, debt talk |
| Caste space & purity | segregation, access, humiliation | water/well scenes, seating, speech policing |
| Gendered work & control | feminised labour, respectability, violence | bodily strain, domestic burden, honour talk |
| Institutions | school, panchayat, police, cooperative | outsider encounters, paperwork, discipline |
| Ecology & water | drought, soil, crop failure, animals | scarcity metaphors, seasonal breakdown |
| Migration & aspiration | movement to town/city, education | journey frames, return narratives |



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| Code family | What it captures | Typical textual indicators |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Voice & address | who speaks, who is silenced | direct address, testimony, satire, irony |

Across periods, labour persists as the most stable representational anchor, but its meaning shifts. In moral–cosmic rural registers, labour is ethical and devotional; in realism, labour is social structure; in Dalit life writing, labour is exploitation and stigma; in crisis narratives, labour becomes precarious, fragmented, and mobile.

Table 3 maps key genres to typical “social commentary capacities”—what each form tends to do best.

| Form | Strength for rural depiction | Typical social commentary effect |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Folk/saint-poet registers | shared moral language, oral authority | critique of hypocrisy; ethics of labour |
| Realist short story/novella | institutional micro-detail, community system | exposes custom as constraint; irony |
| Autobiography/testimony | evidentiary power, standpoint authority | structural critique; counter-archive |
| Satire/modernist narration | alienation, contradiction, fragmentation | critique of aspiration and pseudo-modernity |
| Reportage-hybrid contemporary prose | immediacy of crisis, policy entanglement | critique of market/state; ethics of witnessing |

V. Discussion & Conclusion

Why form matters for rural representation

One key observation of this paper is that the most drastic depiction of Marathi rural is evident when there is a change of form. It is not just that the village is re-described; it is re-known. Realist narration creates a village that you can study, a system of norms, work and authority, and frequently by the accumulation of scene. Autobiography constructs a village, which has to be believed in- a form of domination which has to be narrated as evidenced. The satire and modernist methods create a village you have to question- place where aspiration and development rhetoric come in conflict with the ever-present hierarchy.



This also re-defines arguments about romanticising the village. The issue of romanticisation is not only a thematic one, but a formal one as well. Hierarchy can be naturalised very easily in a form which favours scenic harmony and types of community. The kind of form that definitively anticipates humiliation and spatial segregation is unable to do so. Rural representation is, therefore, an object of struggle in ethical terms: who is entitled to establish the truth about rural?

Rural realism as ethnography-and its boundaries.

Mid-century countryside realism can seem like ethnography: it takes care over the moral economy of the village, the village gossip, informal power and survival tactics. Bangarwadi made enough of a journey to produce histories of translations, including a written version in English (*The Village Had No Walls*) and showed how the realism of the rural Marathi could be seen as a human-social text outside the Marathi context. However, this morally realistic ethnography may have its boundaries: it may present lower-caste characters without turning untouchability into the main focus or it may transform misery into local colour. This is not to reject realism but is a specification of what is visible in realism or what is structurally unclear.

Dalit life writing as village counter-public sociology.

Dalit autobiography and poetry have another role to play, they are a counter-public sociology. They repaint the village as an infrastructure of stratified inequality space, water, labour, school, temple, and speech. In this way they question the very concept of literary taste, claiming that the common village is already an out-of-control place, and that aesthetic aloofness can be collusion. The outcome is that it has redefined the notion of rural life: not rural authenticity but social struggle.

The new rural and crisis ecology texts.

Modern rural discourses are moving towards representing the village as not the antithesis of the city, but rather in a common survival economy: the rural exports labour to the city; the city exports debt and aspiration. The rural is a place where global market prices, climatic stress and state plans are experienced as a domestic disaster. Here, background indicators, the increased participation of women in the labour force (PLFS) can be used to explain why women are depicted in the foreground more recently, not as a helper but as a worker whose labour is integral to the household going through uncertainty. Literature in this case is a witness and a critique: it documents the relations of policies and markets in village life in terms of delays, failures, paperwork, harassment, and shame.

VI. Conclusion

The description of the rural life in the Marathi literature should be understood as developing catalogue of social commentary influenced by the changes in genres and political positions. The rural is also referred to as ethical community, institutional system, caste structure and crisis ecology. Every representational twist is not a straight substitution of the previous images but a reiteration of what the truth of the rural is and who can say it. This study can be expanded in future studies by (a) inclusion of larger digital collections of Marathi short stories and periodicals; (b) linguistic studies of dialect and insult regimes; (c) including comparative analysis of modernities of rural



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voices in Hindi, Kannada, and Tamil; and (d) consideration of new mediators (YouTube katha readings, podcasts, web magazines) of rural voice..

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