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ANNABHAU SATHE AS A CHRONICLER OF SUBALTERN HISTORY IN POST-INDEPENDENCE MAHARASHTRA

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Subaltern History, Annabhau Sathe, Post-Independence Maharashtra, Dalit History, People's History, Caste and Class, Literary Sources as History.</i>	<p>Mainstream historiography in India has traditionally privileged elite political leadership, institutional developments, and dominant social groups, often marginalizing the lived experiences of oppressed communities. In the context of post-Independence Maharashtra, the histories of Dalits, landless laborers, nomadic tribes, and the urban working poor have largely remained outside formal historical narratives. This paper argues that the literary corpus of Annabhau Sathe functions as an alternative archive that documents subaltern history from within, rather than about, marginalized communities.</p> <p>Drawing upon Sathe's novels, short stories, and folk compositions, the study situates his writings within the broader socio-political transformations of post-1947 Maharashtra, including urbanization, labor mobilization, caste assertion, and the formation of linguistic states. Sathe's work is examined not merely as creative literature but as a historically grounded testimony of everyday life, resistance, and survival among subaltern groups. His narratives foreground themes of caste oppression, class exploitation, migration, and cultural assertion, offering insights into social realities often absent from official records.</p> <p>The paper employs a subaltern historiographical framework to analyze how Sathe reclaims agency for marginalized subjects and challenges dominant historical representations. Influenced by Marxist thought and progressive cultural movements, Sathe articulates a historical consciousness rooted in labor, dignity, and collective struggle. By integrating oral traditions, folk forms, and lived experience, his writings blur the boundaries between literature and history, thereby expanding the methodological scope of</p>



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1. INTRODUCTION

The writing of history in postcolonial India has long been dominated by political elites, institutional narratives, and macro-level transformations. While nationalist historiography focused on the freedom struggle and state formation, and later Marxist interpretations emphasized class relations and modes of production, both approaches often inadequately represented the lived realities of marginalized communities. Dalits, landless laborers, nomadic tribes, and the urban poor frequently appeared only as passive recipients of historical change rather than as active agents shaping their own destinies. This exclusion has generated a significant gap in historical understanding, particularly at the regional level.

In post-Independence Maharashtra, this gap becomes especially visible. The period witnessed rapid social and political transitions, including urbanization, industrial labor mobilization, agrarian restructuring, and the linguistic reorganization of states. Despite these changes, the everyday struggles of oppressed communities—rooted in caste discrimination, economic exploitation, migration, and cultural marginalization—remained largely absent from official records and dominant historical narratives. Conventional sources such as government reports, legislative debates, and elite memoirs rarely captured the voices of those living at the margins of society. Against this background, the literary writings of Annabhau Sathe acquire historical significance. Although primarily recognized as a Dalit writer and social reformer, Sathe's works offer a rich and textured account of subaltern life in post-Independence Maharashtra. His novels, short stories, and folk compositions emerge from lived experience and collective memory, documenting social realities that formal historiography often overlooks. Sathe did not merely represent marginalized communities; he wrote from within them, transforming personal and collective suffering into historical testimony. This paper argues that Annabhau Sathe should be understood as a chronicler of subaltern history rather than only as a literary figure. His writings function as alternative historical archives that record the everyday lives, resistance, cultural practices, and aspirations of oppressed groups. By foregrounding caste, class, labor, and migration, Sathe provides a bottom-up perspective on post-Independence Maharashtra, thereby challenging elite-centered historical narratives.

The objectives of this study are threefold: first, to situate Annabhau Sathe within the socio-historical context of post-Independence Maharashtra; second, to analyze his literary works as sources of subaltern history; and third, to assess his contribution to expanding the methodological boundaries of historiography. By doing so, the paper seeks to demonstrate the value of literary texts as legitimate historical sources and to highlight the necessity of incorporating subaltern voices into the writing of regional and national histories.



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2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SUBALTERN HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The concept of the “subaltern” originates from Antonio Gramsci’s writings, where it refers to social groups excluded from hegemonic power structures. In historical studies, the term has come to denote communities marginalized by class, caste, gender, ethnicity, or colonial domination. Subaltern history seeks to recover the experiences, consciousness, and agency of these groups, challenging narratives that privilege elites and institutions over ordinary people.

In the Indian context, subaltern historiography gained prominence as a critique of both colonial and nationalist histories. Colonial historians often portrayed Indian society as static and backward, while nationalist historians emphasized elite leadership and political milestones. Although Marxist historians broadened the scope by analyzing class relations, their focus frequently remained on organized labor and economic structures, leaving caste-based oppression and cultural marginalization insufficiently explored. Subaltern history emerged as an intervention that questioned these limitations and called for histories written “from below.”

A key methodological feature of subaltern historiography is its openness to non-traditional sources. Oral narratives, folklore, songs, autobiographies, and literary texts are treated as valid historical materials, particularly when official archives are silent or biased. This approach is especially relevant for Dalit and marginalized histories, where exclusion from literacy, administration, and institutional power has resulted in archival absence. Literature, therefore, becomes a crucial medium through which subaltern experiences are preserved and transmitted.

Within this framework, Annabhau Sathe’s writings assume historiographical importance. His use of folk forms such as powadas, his emphasis on oral culture, and his focus on everyday life align closely with subaltern methodological concerns. Sathe’s narratives document not only oppression but also resistance, dignity, and collective assertion. They reveal how marginalized communities understood their own conditions and responded to structural inequalities.

Furthermore, subaltern history emphasizes agency rather than victimhood. Sathe’s characters are not passive sufferers; they are workers, rebels, migrants, and cultural producers who negotiate power in complex ways. By portraying their struggles and aspirations, Sathe challenges representations that reduce marginalized groups to objects of pity or reform. His work thus contributes to a more dynamic and inclusive understanding of history.

This study adopts a subaltern historiographical framework to analyze Annabhau Sathe’s writings as historical texts. It does not claim that literature replaces archival history, but rather that it complements and enriches it. Through this approach, the paper seeks to demonstrate how Sathe’s literary corpus expands the scope of historical inquiry and enables a more nuanced reconstruction of post-Independence Maharashtra from the perspective of its most marginalized inhabitants.

3. SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF POST-INDEPENDENCE MAHARASHTRA

The period following Indian independence marked a phase of profound transformation in Maharashtra’s social, political, and economic landscape. The dismantling of colonial administration did not immediately translate into social equality or economic justice for



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marginalized communities. While constitutional provisions promised equality and social reform, entrenched caste hierarchies and uneven economic development continued to shape everyday life. The persistence of untouchability, landlessness, and labor exploitation remained defining features of the postcolonial transition.

Urbanization and industrial growth, particularly in cities such as Mumbai and Pune, generated new forms of labor migration. Rural populations, especially Dalits and nomadic communities, were compelled to migrate in search of employment, often entering informal and precarious labor markets. These structural shifts intensified class divisions while simultaneously intersecting with caste-based discrimination. For many marginalized groups, independence did not represent liberation but a reconfiguration of oppression. The formation of linguistic Maharashtra in 1960 further reshaped regional identity and political discourse. While the movement emphasized cultural unity and linguistic pride, it did not adequately address the internal inequalities within Maharashtrian society. Dalit and subaltern communities remained peripheral to dominant narratives of regional progress. It is within this socio-historical context that Annabhau Sathe's writings emerge as crucial testimonies of marginalized experience.

4. LIFE EXPERIENCE AS HISTORICAL LOCATION

Annabhau Sathe's life trajectory closely mirrored the experiences of the communities he represented. Born into a socially marginalized caste and shaped by poverty, migration, and labor, his personal history provided him with intimate knowledge of subaltern existence. His movement from rural Maharashtra to urban industrial spaces exposed him to the harsh realities of exploitation, insecurity, and social exclusion. Unlike elite intellectuals who observed marginality from a distance, Sathe wrote from within lived experience. His engagement with labor movements and progressive cultural organizations sharpened his political consciousness and reinforced his commitment to social justice. This positionality allowed him to articulate historical realities that remained invisible within official archives. Sathe's life itself functions as a historical document, embodying the intersection of caste, class, and migration in post-Independence Maharashtra. His experiences informed his narrative voice, enabling him to chronicle history not as abstract process but as lived struggle.

5. LITERARY WORKS AS ALTERNATIVE HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

Sathe's novels, short stories, and folk compositions constitute an alternative archive of subaltern history. His writings document everyday realities such as hunger, homelessness, labor exploitation, and social humiliation, thereby preserving aspects of social life rarely recorded in administrative sources. These narratives provide granular insights into the material conditions of marginalized communities. Importantly, Sathe employed folk forms and oral traditions, which have historically served as modes of collective memory among oppressed groups. Through powadas and ballads, he embedded historical consciousness within cultural expression. This fusion of literature and history challenges conventional distinctions between creative and historical writing.



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By foregrounding marginalized voices, Sathe's literary corpus reconstructs history from below. His texts reveal how subaltern communities interpreted social change, navigated power relations, and asserted dignity amid adversity.

6. THEMES OF RESISTANCE AND ASSERTION

A defining feature of Sathe's work is the emphasis on resistance rather than victimhood. His characters confront caste oppression, challenge economic exploitation, and assert their humanity in hostile social environments. Resistance in his narratives is both overt and subtle, ranging from organized labor struggles to everyday acts of defiance. Sathe's portrayal of collective action underscores the importance of solidarity among marginalized groups. Labor unions, community bonds, and shared cultural practices emerge as tools of survival and resistance. Through these depictions, Sathe documents the emergence of subaltern political consciousness in post-Independence Maharashtra. This focus on agency aligns closely with subaltern historiography, which seeks to recover the active role of marginalized groups in shaping historical processes.

7. EVERYDAY LIFE AND SOCIAL HISTORY

Sathe's contribution to social history lies in his detailed portrayal of everyday life. His writings capture routines of labor, domestic struggles, gendered experiences, and cultural practices. Women in his narratives occupy complex positions as workers, caregivers, and agents of resistance, highlighting the intersection of gender with caste and class. Food scarcity, housing insecurity, and migration recur as central themes, reflecting structural inequalities. These everyday experiences provide valuable insights into the social fabric of post-Independence Maharashtra, complementing macro-level historical analyses. By documenting quotidian realities, Sathe enriches historical understanding and underscores the importance of micro-histories in reconstructing the past.

8. MARXIST INFLUENCE AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Sathe's engagement with Marxist ideology informed his understanding of class struggle and labor exploitation. His writings reflect a historical consciousness rooted in material conditions and economic relations. However, unlike orthodox Marxist interpretations, Sathe integrates caste as a central analytical category. This synthesis of class and caste distinguishes Sathe's historical vision. He recognizes that economic exploitation in India is inseparable from social hierarchy, and his narratives reflect this intersectionality. As a result, his work offers a more nuanced understanding of subaltern oppression and resistance.

9. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE WITHIN MAHARASHTRIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

When compared with mainstream historical narratives of Maharashtra, Sathe's writings reveal significant omissions in elite-centered histories. While conventional accounts emphasize political leadership and institutional development, Sathe foregrounds marginalized lives and struggles. His perspective contrasts sharply with cultural representations that romanticize rural life or industrial progress without acknowledging underlying inequalities. By centering subaltern experiences, Sathe



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challenges dominant historiographical frameworks and calls for a more inclusive historical practice.

10. RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY HISTORIOGRAPHY

Annabhau Sathe's work remains highly relevant to contemporary historiographical debates. In an era increasingly attentive to marginalize voices, his writings offer methodological insights into using literary texts as historical sources. They also contribute to ongoing discussions on Dalit history, regional history, and people's history.

Recognizing Sathe as a chronicler of subaltern history enables historians to rethink postcolonial narratives and to address archival silences. His work underscores the ethical imperative of inclusive historiography.

11. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that Annabhau Sathe occupies a critical position as a chronicler of subaltern history in post-Independence Maharashtra. Through his literary corpus, he documented the lived experiences, struggles, and aspirations of marginalized communities, offering an alternative historical archive grounded in everyday life.

By integrating subaltern historiography with literary analysis, the study demonstrates the value of non-traditional sources in reconstructing the past. Sathe's contribution extends beyond literature into the realm of historical methodology, challenging historians to broaden their sources and perspectives.

Ultimately, recognizing Annabhau Sathe as a historian of the oppressed enriches our understanding of post-Independence Maharashtra and affirms the necessity of writing history from below.

12. AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

13. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

14. PLAGIARISM POLICY

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

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