Remaking Marathi: The Literary Field, Language History, and V. L. Bhave's *Maharashtra Saraswat*

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Abstract

This chapter critically examines *Maharashtra Saraswat* (1894) by Vinayak Lakshman Bhave, the first comprehensive history of Marathi literature. Several regional languages across the subcontinent – glossed as *deshī*, or *deshbhāṣhā* - were located in history via literary histories or historical linguistics over the later nineteenth century. Such pioneering narratives were crucial for assembling the literary field within particular languages, and establishing terms of debate over genre, register, and categories of analysis. They were culminations of efforts by colonial and first-generation western-educated Indian writers to engage with language as a historical category, and narrativize centuries of textuality in orality and manuscript as it unevenly entered print and the colonial public sphere. In this chapter, I revisit the making of Bhave's pioneering history and narrativization of the Marathi literary corpus for literary debates and analysis over the twentieth century, and the making of Marathi literary modernism. I argue that Bhave's engagement with the idea of literariness through the category *Saraswat* enabled an expansive, chronological archiving of Marathi literature. In addition, his framing of Marathi's evolutionary history, and the overarching themes of authenticity and rootedness in particular, are key to understanding the endurance of these concerns in the contemporary Marathi literary and political sphere.

"Nothing in this is what you might call mine," declared Vinayak Lakshman Bhave (1871-1926) in his introduction to the first edition of *Mahārāṣhṭra Sāraswat* (1898; henceforth *MS*), his magisterial history of Marathi literature. "I have reassembled a plate by collecting the leftovers of all the great saints and attempted a brief history of Marathi literature from its very beginning." In the introduction to the second edition, Bhave added a riverine metaphor, offering not a detailed study, but a tour of temples along the banks of a particular Saraswati River, with a glance at the moss and blossoms from bushes around them, and perhaps a taste of nectar from this flow of knowledge (*jnānarasataraṅgiṇī*). Saraswati, here, referred both to the goddess of knowledge and the mythical river; *sāraswat* invokes both knowledge as well as eloquence. By the time the book's fourth edition appeared posthumously (Tulpule), Bhave's magnum opus was lauded as much for its coverage of Marathi literature as for its lively narrative and evident love for its subject.[2] Bhave's metaphors illustrate his idiomatic

[2] Bhave first published his history serially in the journal *Granthamālā* between 1898-1899, later collecting it together in book form. A second edition appeared in 1919, and a third, revised edition was later published in two parts—the first in 1924 and the second shortly after Bhave's death, in 1928. S. G. Tulpule issued the fourth edition with an afterword in 1954, and a further revised afterword in 1963. A sixth edition appeared in 1982 in two parts, with the first comprising Bhave's original text and the second Tulpule's.

prose, but they also point to a contradiction in his massive project. His self-effacing description downplays the importance of his authorial position and his chronological account in crystallizing the modern category of Marathi literature. By examining key themes in Bhave's pioneering history, this chapter seeks to provide a critical genealogy for important debates within 20th-century Marathi literary modernism. Bhave's framing of Marathi's evolutionary history, and his analysis of its literary corpus through the themes of authenticity and rootedness in particular, it suggests, are key to understanding the endurance of these concerns in the contemporary Marathi literary and political sphere.

Language Standardization and Historiography

The 19th century witnessed the modernization of many regional Indian languages, also known as the "vernaculars." The colonial state standardized these languages for use in a new Anglo-vernacular colonial schooling system and bureaucracy, where the regional language was used in the lower levels and English in the upper ones. Through new frameworks of comparative philology and historical linguistics, regional languages also emerged as objects of historical study. Western and Indian scholars traced the origins of various regional languages by placing them within the Indo-European or Dravidian language families, using philological and etymological evidence (Trautmann; Mantena; Mitchell). In the case of Marathi, colonial officials as well as a new, western-educated urban elite in Bombay and Pune (comprising mostly men from so-called upper-caste Brahman and Prabhu backgrounds) standardized rules of grammar, idiom and orthography as they prepared printed textbooks, grammars, dictionaries, and anthologies from the 1820s onwards for use in the new colonial schools (Naregal; Chavan). English provided a template for Marathi's future development, while the classical languages Sanskrit and Prakrit formed the framework for debating its origins. While some scholars argued that Marathi had evolved linearly from Sanskrit via Prakrit, others argued that it had evolved as a natural spoken language only from Prakrit, separately from the grammatically refined literary Sanskrit. This linguistic history, particularly the tension between the Prakritic and Sanskritic approaches, also permeated modern Marathi literary historiography (Deshpande, *Scripts*).

Apart from primers and translations from English on a range of "useful subjects," early printed Marathi texts included anthologies of pre-colonial Marathi poetry. The most popular anthology was *Navanīt* (1854), prepared for use in government schools. Others were privately published, in serial format, such as *Sarvasangraha* (1860-1868?), *Kāvyetihāsasangraha* (1878-1888), and *Kāvyasangraha* (1890-early 1900s). Most editors published texts as they became available to them, with as much prefatory biographical information about the poets as they could provide (Ajgaonkar; Pangarkar). The suffix *sangraha,* or collection, underscores the archival impulse behind these initiatives, which were efforts to gather together as many manuscripts as possible, from poetry to correspondence to taxation records, for circulation in the new print sphere. This impulse was part of a larger archival effort among nationalists from the 1860s onwards to gather sources for a modern history of western India, particularly the history of the 17th-century independent Maratha state in the region. This modern Marathi historiography enthusiastically sought to prove, by publishing as much archival evidence as possible, that this Maratha state was not one of

marauders, as colonialist historians had deemed it, but geo-culturally rooted and patriotic. Historical and archival research thus became a crucial nationalist activity. At the same time, historical figures and events also became an arena for articulating caste-based social conflict in regional society, particularly as non-Brahmans challenged a narrow Brahman elite's claims to leadership and their disproportionate dominance in the emergent colonial public sphere (Deshpande, *Creative*).

The manuscript archive of Marathi poetry entering print was also harnessed to these larger debates about Maratha history, as historians sought evidence in it for Maratha patriotism as well as social conflict. Some historians upheld that the Varkari "saint-poets," from the 13th-century Dnyaneshwar to the 17th-century Tukaram, with their emphasis on devotion and social inclusiveness, had established the moral foundations for the future Maratha state (Ranade). Others, like the leading historian V. K. Rajwade, influentially argued that the saint-poets' spiritual otherworldliness had in fact lulled people into accepting political subjugation (More 19). The Brahman/ non-Brahman debates informed these interpretations too: Rajwade valorized the 17th-century Brahman poet Ramdas over Shudra poets like Tukaram, arguing that it was the former's advocacy of an active, everyday, Brahminical religiosity that provided the moral spirit for the Maratha political struggle. Anthologists increasingly bemoaned the lack of a proper history of Marathi literature but there was a consensus among editors of pre-colonial manuscripts, whether poetry or historical documents, that it was first important to publish as much material as possible for a larger Maratha history (Ajgaonkar 3-4). As we shall see, Bhave both participated in this process and went beyond it in the early 20th century.

A Messy Bifurcation of History and Literature

These archival efforts were also interpellated with debates over the differences between history and literature. History and literature were treated as distinct disciplines in colonial textbooks, syllabi, and classrooms: the former as a positivist excavation of facts, and the latter as the realm of creative imagination. However, qualitative definitions of literature and history were also being debated in the Marathi public sphere. Exploring the slippage between two terms used for literature in Marathi – *vāngmaya* and *sāhitya* – Kedar Kulkarni has shown how poetic anthologies like *Navanīt* transformed an expansive "literary commons," in which oral-performative forms and the immediacy of improvisation took primacy (*vāngmaya*), into a modern, objectified category of literature (*sāhitya*), in which texts were fixed, tied more firmly to authors, and could travel via print. (Kulkarni)

Scholars differed over which genres of poetry took primacy in this *sāhitya*. Early anthologists like Parshurampant Godbole held up heavily refined, early modern Sanskritic poetry in Marathi (*panḍitī kāvya*) by select Brahman poets as the epitome of literariness. Influential essayists like Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, however, drew on both Romantic as well as Sanskrit theories of poetics and privileged the 18th- and early-19th-century heroic ballads (*powāḍās*) and erotic *lāvaṇīs* (*tant kāvya*) as more spontaneous expressions of literariness (Kulkarni 55-64). Vishnushastri Chiplunkar's programmatic essays in the journal *Nibandhamālā* in the 1870s also emphasized history not simply as a factual narrative, but as a genre of literature that encompassed poetry and philosophy. Positivist historians like Rajwade

collected prose *bakhar* chronicles and *powāḍās*, but deemed them unreliable as sources for a modern history, as they mixed mythic stories and fanciful descriptions with factual details. Chiplunkar, too, wanted a truthful history but was unsure whether a dry factual record could evoke the emotive truths of the past better than the *bakhars* or *powāḍās* (Chiplunkar 60-90). Bhave's own scholarly work, and *MS* in particular, was an important part of this messy bifurcation of history and literature and the debates over literariness.

Narrativizing the Marathi Archive

Bhave was initiated early in life into a love for Marathi poetry and manuscripts by Balaji Janardan Modak, his school principal and pioneering publisher of older literature. He ran a salt-making business for years, using its profits to collect old texts, and turning to the study of literature full-time only after retirement. In 1893, Bhave established the Marathi Granthasangrahalaya library and manuscript archive at Thane to house his collection of manuscripts. From 1903 to 1908 he published many of these in the monthly journal *Mahārāṣhṭrakavi*. He was also keenly involved in the Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad (MSP) and the Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal (BISM), two prominent institutions devoted to the development of Marathi literature and Maratha history respectively (Potdar and Navare 192-193). At the MSP, he catalogued all known Marathi literary texts up to 1818, the year of the British colonial takeover of western India. Bhave also published three volumes of historical documents in the series *Marāṭhī Daptar* (1917-1928) and wrote several historical essays, including a three-volume biography of Napoleon (1917) (Dhere 162-168). His editorial approach in *Mahārāṣhṭrakavi* was in keeping with the archival bent in literary publishing; he prioritized an unfolding chronology over an in-depth analysis of meter, genre, or subject.

With this archival experience, Bhave began narrativizing such a chronology serially, with a brief analysis of individual poets, between March, 1898 and May, 1899, in *Granthamālā*, and later published it in book form as *MS*. A second edition appeared in 1919, and a significantly expanded and revised third edition was later published in two parts, the first in 1924 and the second posthumously, in 1928. Reading the original and revised editions of *MS* together enables us to examine the evolution of Bhave's thinking about the Marathi language, its history, and the essence of literariness, or *sāraswat*. In the pages that follow, I have used the original edition by Bhave and the fourth, more easily available, edition edited by S. G. Tulpule for references to the revised edition.

Bhave opened the text by reflecting on Marathi's linguistic origins. As noted above, there was great debate among linguists from the 1860s onwards about whether Marathi was descended from Sanskrit via Prakrit, or just from Prakrit, independent of any Sanskrit connection. Bhave's position was initially exploratory: while reflecting that Marathi must be another form of Prakrit called Maharashtri, he also speculated that Maharashtra's peninsular location in the subcontinent, and the large number of *deshī* or local words in it whose etymologies could be traced neither to Sanskrit nor to Prakrit, also pointed to Marathi's possible Dravidian antecedents (Bhave 1-2). In the revised edition, however, he drew on debates among historical linguists and grammarians in the preceding decades and took a firmer position: the Dravidian speculations gave way to a more fixed and elaborate family tree that established Marathi's origins from Prakrit, independently of Sanskrit. His position

on the question of an original text and author of Marathi literature similarly evolved over time (Tulpule 1-25). One of the primary concerns of early literary histories was identifying the first author or text in a given language, since it provided a handy starting point in what was otherwise a blurry landscape of linguistic change (Pollock, *Literary*). Bhave initially identified Mukundaraj's *Vivekasindhu* as Marathi's first author, dating the text to 1188CE on the basis of an ambiguous colophon and references to names of places and kings in the text (Bhave 24-28). In the revised edition, however, he drew on inscriptions from the 10th century onwards that Indologists and epigraphists had recently uncovered in recognizable Marathi to highlight a phase of Marathi orality and literization (committing to writing) prior to its literarization (deployment for literary compositions) (Pollock *Language*, 23-25). His theory of literarization was a thoughtful, gradualist one, highlighting the necessary foundation of an immediate oral and popular literature based on experience and imagination, before a language community could develop *granthakartritva*, or the ability to produce written texts. In other words, instead of emphasizing the importance of an originary text as the starting point for a literary history, Bhave decentered the very idea of an originary text, exploring instead the importance of existing popular genres rooted in a language community for the emergence of complex written literature (Tulpule 26-37; Novetzke 86-88).

After publishing the first edition of *MS*, Bhave's continued search for manuscripts brought to light a major corpus of the Mahanubhavas, a heterodox and reclusive religious sect focused on Krishna devotion that generated several religious works in Marathi prose and poetry, but which were often written in a variety of ciphers to ensure that they circulated exclusively within the group's followers and institutions (*maṭhas*). Bhave coaxed out manuscripts from the *maṭha* leaders with diplomacy and persistence, working with them to transcribe the ciphers in which the texts were written. In his revised edition of *MS*, he also attempted to correct several prejudicial opinions that existed about the reclusive Mahanubhavas. Bhave's scholarship also brought to light what scholars now agree is the earliest known text of Marathi literature, the *Līḷacharitra* (1278) by Chakradhar, the founder of the Mahanubhava tradition (Tulpule 63-129). Bhave was thus instrumental in enlarging the sphere and volume of texts available for a Marathi literary history and outlining its discursive contours.

Authenticity and Literariness

Bhave provided short, pithy observations on several individual poets' oeuvres and styles in *MS*. He repeatedly prioritized simplicity and liveliness (*sphūrti*) over ornamentation and clever turns of phrase. Of all the medieval poets, he argued that Tukaram represented the best example of this style. Tukaram's compositions, in Bhave's view, had a uniquely arresting beauty and simplicity not replicated in any other writer:

> Making a deep impression on the mind with advice in simple and easy words, causing tumult in people's minds about mental problems like anger and jealousy, or generating revulsion about a disagreeable thing by condeming it, was something that [Tukaram] achieved with great felicity in his abhangas. He has also provided plenty of examples and similes in his poems. But nowhere was this a case of talking too much and saying very

> little (*bolaṇe pāṭibhar āṇi artha chimūṭbhar*); indeed, he was able to say in five words what five sentences could not have expressed. He articulated everyday things and matters that flummoxed reputed Vedanta scholars, in very simple language. (Bhave 47)

Simplicity, thus, was key to Bhave's formulations of authenticity and literariness. However, this simple and true expression did not mean unvarnished or spontaneous speech; this was not unmediated folk (*jānapada*) language captured in poetry. This was a literary spareness and pithiness that was not only able to reach out to high and low, but "also gradually [made] 'folk' (*jānapada*) speech more refined (*sojwaḷ*)." (Bhave 48) In other words, Bhave defined literariness in terms of a cultivated simplicity and straightforwardness. This ideal spareness becomes clearer when we see Bhave's discussion of the prolific 18th-century poet Moropant, who was well-known for his heavily ornate Sanskritized poetry full of long compounds and arcane metres:

> There are two opposing views on Moropant's poetry. One argues that his language is pure, mature… and even though he indulges in a lot of wordplay and figures of speech, he doesn't sacrifice comprehensibility in favour of metre and rhyme…. The Brahman poets from Jnaneshwar… to… Moropant unlocked the riches of Sanskrit and made them available in Prakrit for everyone. For this we must not only admire their skill and cleverness but also praise them with gratitude. The other view is that Moropant was not a real poet at all… but more like a bull carrying sacks of sugar, with no clarity (*prasād*) or liveliness (*sphūrti*) to be found. Nobody becomes a poet by using heavy Sanskrit words or lengthy rhyming sequences. Poetry requires some qualities of naturalness and spontaneity (*swābhāvika gūṇa*), which were entirely missing in Moropant. (Bhave 80-84)

For his part, Bhave admired Moropant's technical skill in form and meter, yet admitted that his poetry was an acquired taste. Too much effort, in other words, could also undermine literariness, making poetry all show and little substance; yet absolutely spontaneous folk speech also needed some cultivation in order to count as literature. The ideal level of literary simplicity, for Bhave, was somewhere in the middle.

We can sense a tension here between rootedness and authenticity on one hand and cultivation on the other, in terms of defining literariness. Bhave approvingly described the early modern heroic *powāḍās* and erotic *lāvaṇī* songs in Marathi—collectively known as *shāhirī* poetry, as it was composed by *shāhirs* or bards and sung at festivals and gatherings by wandering performers called *gondhaḷīs*—as *nivvaḷ deshī chhanda*, or purely rooted forms that emerged from local events and experience and recounted local heroics to those who understood them:

> Village folk at the foothills of the Sahyadri [mountains of Maharashtra] would never be drawn to a *powāḍā* about Tamerlane's swashbuckling or how Lord Roberts vanquished the Afridis. It is obvious that this part of our poetics was born at the same time as Maratha power itself…. The emergence of a new poetics meant its compositions would also take shape in very new metres. *Powāḍās* and *lāvaṇīs* are purely rooted forms and their

> authorship must also be assigned to purely rooted people. A spontaneous poetic energy rather than intellectualism is a necessary quality of their composers and that is the cause of the popularity of these forms among people of all ages. (Bhave 94)

Bhave did not define the term *sāraswat* in the first edition of his history; its appearance in the title of his survey of Marathi literature suggests that he used it with an expansive definition of literature in mind. In the revised edition, he defined the term at the start of the chapter on *shāhiri* poetry, as "whatever gladdened the heart and attracted the mind" within *vāngmaya* (Tulpule 710). Any expressive form that gave pleasure, including *shāhirī* poetry and women's work songs, in his view, had a thread of *sāraswat* running through it. At the same time, Bhave sought to rescue the erotic *lāvaṇīs* from labels of courtly decadence or cultural decline, seeking to establish *shāhirī* poetry as a whole as evidence of pure pleasure—as expressions of a confident yet rooted national culture. These were, in other words, the true songs of an independent Maharashtra. Bhave, therefore, struggled to establish as wide as possible a definition of literariness that would allow him to integrate a wide variety of genres and social contexts into his overarching literary history, while also seeking to distill an authentic form and idiom that was rooted in, and captured, for him, the essence of Marathi regional identity.

Establishing a Modern Idiomatic Prose Idiom

This struggle is also apparent in Bhave's treatment of the significant corpus of early modern Marathi prose historical genres such *bakhars, kaifiyats*, etc. These forms grew out of medieval narrative testimonies of events in legal disputes or intelligence reports into more elaborate biographical narratives or reflections on momentous battles. Their narrative style was a heady mix of indirect speech and bursts of direct speech, proverbs, and colorful descriptions of war and valor. One of the hallmarks of the language of *bakhar* narratives, in addition to these techniques of direct speech and breathless descriptions, was the mixing of Perso-Arabic vocabulary with earthy Marathi proverbs and mythical references. Bhave found this style attractive and powerful for its directness and earthiness and quoted long passages from multiple *bakhars* in his revised edition (Tulpule 790-794).

Bhave's own prose in his essays and in his biography of Napoleon was direct, light, and laced with humorous proverbs—and thus clearly modeled on this style. Several commentators have remarked on the *assal bāṇā* or authentic idiom in his own prose (Tulpule, Prefatory matter 14). Consider a passage from his essay *Afzalkhānāchā Vadh*, on the David-and-Goliath-like encounter of the young Shivaji with the Bijapur general Afzal Khan:

> Afzalkhan was bulky and strongly built. Was intelligent and inscrutable (*pātāḷyantrī*) and courageous….[Yet] Shivaji was beginning to feel like a burning in his eyes [*doḷyāt phārach salu lāglā hotā*], and so he felt again and again that he should really rouse up the Bijapur court and use all its strength to uproot this thorn called Shivaji (*shivājīchā kāṭā*) and to implement this he went himself to Bijapur. The court liked what Afzal had to say, but no one was ready to take it upon himself to bring it about. Because Shivaji was not one among ordinary men. He was brave and clever besides

> (*shūr āṇi hikmatī*). He had taken many down the path of defeat and often seen the back of fleeing armies that had boasted about their power (*mī mī mhaṇaṇāryā sainyānchyā kaik veḷā pāṭhī pāhilyā hotyā*). Like a sudden thunderstorm that sent villagers and animals helter-skelter and left a trail of destruction in its wake, so did Shivaji appear suddenly with his men and attack and scatter his enemies, never to be caught if pursued…. In the end the job fell upon Afzalkhan himself, who agreed to take it on. (Dhere 53)

Bhave, thus, successfully captured the energy and pace of bakhar narratives by adapting a spoken Marathi register that was idiomatic, conversational, and, above all, unpretentious—the latter being associated with a reliance on Sanskritized vocabulary and register.

One of the consequences of locating modern Indian languages in history by placing them within the Indo-European or Dravidian language families was an emphasis on the purity of their descent through etymology; loan words and other influences from Persian and Arabic in particular came to be seen as accretions and corruptions in these languages, to be weeded out and replaced with Sanskritized neologisms in the modernization process—a movement that the Hindu nationalist leader V. D. Savarkar led with great enthusiasm from the 1920s onwards (Savarkar 1981[1958]). Bhave, too, argued that the medieval Sultanates that introduced Persian were a malign foreign force in the region. While the influx of Persian vocabulary into Marathi made the latter stronger, he argued that it also made Marathi more *ugra*: extreme, sharp, unsubtle (Bhave 30-32). Thus, despite his appreciation of the liveliness of bakhar-style prose and his ability to adapt it in his own writing, Bhave did not view this corpus of Persianate texts as integral literary components of Marathi's *sāraswat*. Instead, he treated it as an archive of language usage, and as evidence of the widespread use of Marathi across different parts of the country under Maratha power in the 18th century: "These short narratives, letters, grants, etc… are very useful to scholars who wish to learn about the handwriting styles, phraseology, and contemporaneous Marathi grammar" (Bhave 75-76; Tulpule 781-782). His own Marathi idiom was just as lively as bakhar prose, but it was also less Persianized. It contributed, ultimately, to the marginalization of Persian and Persianate influences from the discourse of Marathi literary history.

The Amateur Scholar and the Vernacular Sphere

Bhave was conscious about his indifferent education, his lack of training as a grammarian or linguist, and his profession as a trader. It is one of the reasons he self-deprecatingly described himself as an aggregator rather than a literary critic or scholar. In a lengthy preface to the revised edition of *MS*, Bhave reflected on this background as he detailed the obstacles he had encountered in the process of writing it, including the editorial and proofreading help he had got from friends and the bouquets and brickbats he had received from critics:

> I learned [some basic lessons] in Marathi and then, thanks to some connections, went straight into the English fourth standard. This separation from Marathi continued till a hasty rapprochement at matriculation and then a permanent goodbye. So how could I

> know about syntax and orthography!… Plus I was involved in very different businesses. My hereditary business was farming, but as a child I was focused on keeping birds and animals as pets. In college I studied classical subjects and then became a salt trader and a businessman! So was everything topsy turvy. But a love of reading and addictive personality got me trapped in *kāvyetihās* (lit. poetry and history) and trapped I did remain." (Tulpule 9)

Bhave also railed against unnamed "Pune scholars" who had promised him help with research and publication but failed to deliver. "Pune scholars" here also served as shorthand for the scholasticism and conservatism associated with Sanskrit-oriented and Brahmanical intellectual and political life in the city of Pune (Tulpule 7-9). Bhave's overall stance of personal love for literature over academic achievement—and indeed, his privileging of simplicity and directness in literary practice, whether spontaneous or cultivated—were both part of his search for an authentic essence in contrast to this practiced refinement. His own approach to literary history and criticism exemplifes a persistent strand within Marathi modernity that bore a deep suspicion toward superficial scholasticism and toward the kind of social conservatism that would stifle such an authentic essence.

Bhave's text, however, is also indicative of the limits of urban, upper-caste reformism and disdain for conservatism, and the potential of community identities based on regional vernaculars like Marathi against Sanskrit for embracing and advancing a radical, socially inclusive politics. To return to his discussion of Tukaram, Bhave argued in the original edition that Tukaram's "blessed voice" attracted people from all castes, and Muslim poets such as Shekh Mohammed too. It was Tukaram who popularized the cult of the deity Vithoba at Pandharpur (the site of the Varkari pilgrimage) and rendered it superior to the traditional place of Hindu pilgrimage, Kashi:

> The discrimination visible in Kashi is nowhere to be seen in Pandhari. God [there] belongs only to the Brahmans and hence appears limited. Not so at Pandhari, where God belongs to everyone and there are no group differences (*panktibhed*). Pandharpur's inclusivity, thus, allowed for the true blood and language of the Marathas to flourish. (Bhave 47-48)

Here, I suggest, Pandharpur and Kashi were metonyms for Marathi and Sanskrit. They underscored Bhave's Prakritic argument about Marathi's origins and his modern imagination of the *deshbhāṣhā*—the regional vernacular—as the true and self-evident locus of a popular, inclusive linguistic identity. In *MS*'s revised edition, interestingly, Bhave reiterated this literary appreciation of Tukaram and his ability to attract people of different groups to the devotional cult of Pandharpur, but added significant caveats. Despite its rejection of hierarchy before the divine, he pointed out, the Varkari tradition, including Tukaram, remained caste-aware, and did not dissolve caste:

> It is believed that the *bhaktīmārgī* devotees of Vitthal do not practice caste, but that is untrue. They do practice caste. In fact, they emphasize the practice of caste. The devotee of Vitthal, the Varkari, does not forget *chāturvarṇya* [the caste system]. He does not have

> the means to erase it. At best he softens the edges of caste discrimination. He accepts the necessity of caste in everyday life and society; he simply doesn't think it is that important before the feet of God. The people of the Bhagavat dharma allowed everyone, even Muslims, the freedom to worship their deity, and… eased the spiritual path for simple minded and ignorant people. At this time simple folk were turning to the egalitarianism in Islam. Some accepted Muslims as gurus and began weakening Hinduism under their influence. The saints thus enabled many people otherwise swayed by Muslim pirs and religious teachers to stay within the Hindu fold. The chief contribution of the great men and saint-poets is that they made such half-baked people aware of Hindu culture without letting chaturvarnya drive a wedge in Hindu society." (Tulpule 377-379)

Bhave thus disciplined Tukaram's radical egalitarianism into an overarching story of the Maratha state and the Marathi/dominant Hindu community. Recent scholarship has shown how the framing of the regional vernacular as the natural language of the people was in reality a hegemonic move by regional caste elites for consolidating elite, urban dialects as the "standard language" and upper-caste social power at the regional levels (Chavan; Bhattacharya; Misra), culminating in the linguistic states of independent India. Bhave's investment in Marathi as the basis for such a natural identity in western India led him to narrativize diverse genres, themes, patrons, audiences, and characteristics of literariness into a literary history, displaying both the potential, and the limits, of the modern linguistic vernacular as the basis for modern democratic literary and social imaginations.

Conclusion

In their anthology of reflections on modernism from across the globe, Alys Moody and Stephen Ross argue that global literary modernism must be understood not in terms of a particular position or literary style, but as multiple interventions and debates in an expressive domain that grappled with the phenomenon and challenge of modernity at large. Among the ten theses they draw up as a common set of features of global literary modernism, number six is the engagement with tradition, at the moment of a sharp rupture with the past. Nowhere was this more urgent than in the formerly colonized world, where the experience of rupture sits alongside an "equally strong commitment to recast, invent, or sustain their own cultural heritage in the face of modernity's demand for transformation" (Moody and Ross 12). Kedar Kulkarni's recent examination of Romanticism's global genealogies argues that discourses on literary modernism or theoretical reflections on literature in the colonized world, and their impact on theory emanating from the west, have figured infrequently in scholarship on modernism. His point underscores another of Moody and Ross's theses, namely that "modernism has always been global, and this global disposition is inextricable from the radically unequal power relations that characterize modernity itself" (Moody and Ross 14; Kulkarni 43-80). In this chapter, I have sought to probe the "uneven politics of language" Moody and Ross flag, not by considering the hierarchies of translation between English and local languages, but by probing the crystallization of the emergent "regional vernacular" and its discursive strategies, through literary and linguistic histories, as a viable vehicle for identity and politics in colonial India. As scholars of colonialism have shown, a wide range of

knowledge practices were critical to the shaping of many of the modern categories subjected to classification and study, from language to caste to religious community. Part of this story is about how monolingual knowledge practices of philology, literary history, anthologization, and canon-creation were critical to the very creation of the "archive" of particular languages, and thereby to the crystallization of their "literatures" and their "essential forms." Although not about modern literary practice itself, V. L. Bhave's path-breaking literary history about the period before modernity in western India contributed to Marathi modernism by identifying the contours of Marathi—and of literariness in the first place.

Such pivotal histories as Bhave's, I have argued, allow us to perceive a critical genealogy of the categories and contradictions that came to govern literary modernism and literary criticism in various modern Indian languages over the 20th century. Tukaram was influential even in his own time and immediately after, memorialized in the Varkari tradition itself as its apogee. A later poet, Bahinabai, famously described the Varkari tradition in an architectural metaphor of an enduring sacred structure: Jnaneswhar laid the foundations of the temple, Namdev was the servant who expanded its environs, Eknath built the columns, and Tukaram was its pinnacle. As noted above, Tukaram was harnessed to wider historical debates over Maratha history and between Brahmans and non-Brahmans at the turn of the 20th century, but modern religious reform movements in western India such as the Prarthana Samaj drew inspiration from his poetry for its biting critique of social difference and ritualized religiosity and its celebration of a personal, sincere connection with the divine. As Anjali Nerlekar has exhaustively shown, Tukaram has also loomed large in the creative universe of diverse, mid-20th century Marathi modernist writers, from B. S. Mardhekar to Arun Kolatkar and Dilip Chitre, as an inspiration for everything from an earthy idiom and language play to the articulation of bhakti, a deep humanist philosophy, and a searing critique of caste difference and blind tradition. Although each poet has engaged with his oeuvre in distinct ways, to these modernists, Tukaram represents a tradition that they have been able to connect with, even as they have charted new literary terrains in their own period (Nerlekar 114-119). The tensions in Bhave's pioneering text—his particular framing of literariness in *MS* with Tukaram's poetry at its center—as well as its anxieties and occlusions, provide us a genealogy of this modernist harnessing of Tukaram.

In a lecture on "The Quality and Value of Marathi Literature in the Market of Maharashtra," most likely delivered sometime in the later 1920s, shortly before his death, Bhave attempted a different approach to literariness. Revisiting the two categories of *vāngmaya* and *sāraswat*, he argued:

> *Vāngmaya* is all that which is spoken or written. *Sāraswat* is that composition in a language which is capable of producing an aesthetic response (*rasotpādan*; *rasa-utpādan*), and all that can attract the minds of people. Books on mathematics up to differential calculus and texts like [the ancient treatise] *Lilāvati* are attractive to mathematicians… and books of omens and almanacs might bring waves of joy to astrologers. But we can't call these the *sāraswat* of a language. Just because a railway time-table is useful and satisfying to passengers, it is not quite *sāraswat*. I am aware that my definition… in my book *MS* and in today's essay is different. But without probing this in detail, I have decided to go with this definition for my purposes today.

> Once you define *sāraswat* this way, it is necessary to define *vāngmaya* too, because *sāraswat* is folded into *vāngmaya*. What I mean is, once you visualise the inner domain of *sāraswat*, all that remains outside is *vāngmaya*. (Dhere 138)

Found among his unpublished papers well after his death, this lecture was posthumously published in 1973 in a collection of essays titled *Vārasā* (Dhere). In the lecture as a whole, Bhave attempted to determine the broader "value" of Marathi literature in a global literary marketplace and found himself disappointed on all counts. He was dismayed at the proportion of translations in Marathi book production, while there was precious little that had been deemed worthy of translation from Marathi into other languages, especially English. He was aware that this discourse of quality and value and unequal linguistic transaction was refracted via colonial lenses, and that official arbiters of taste and quality were

> those who have been roaring like lions on borrowed power, astride thrones set up by foreigners, with all the rest of us two-legged people bowing to them as if they were somehow exceptional men. They set out to enthusiastically produce books with pencils handed out by the [colonial] government. This is no doubt laudable, but the books that they produce are not that great. Not one has produced a book that has grabbed the attention of people outside their circle, or translated into another language. These are not a lion's roars; they are the yaps of puppies…. The moment of colonial transition, when modern literary production began in Marathi, the very people who disdained it were in charge of this birthing. They did not believe that *rasotpādan* was possible in Marathi. No true love for Marathi. Most colonial Marathi literature is commercially oriented (*dhandevāik*). (Dhere 142)

Bhave struggled, therefore, to reconcile *sāraswat* as literariness—the inherent quality of which was not commercial or use-value but the capability of generating an aesthetic response—with *sāraswat* as a literary corpus with transactional appeal in an ideally horizontal multilingual literary field. His lament displays both a sharp awareness of the power of literary creation, as well as the realities—shaped by colonial language hierarchies—of the modern global literary marketplace. His wider approach to language and literature, therefore, was to identify, to the extent possible, the contours of authentic literary practice, away from what he viewed as pretensions or power.

In the later 20th century, the novelist and critic Bhalchandra Nemade spearheaded the *deshīvād* movement in Marathi, outlining a programme of literary practice and criticism to determine the true cultural rootedness of literary works. As Philip Engblom has rightly noted, there was considerable slippage in the deployment of the term *deshī* in this movement, from exploring the shades of the vernacular or local in literary expression, to a nativist prescription to determine the rootedness of particular literary texts. Although framed as a return to roots, *deshīvād* too was a modernist engagement with tradition that emerged in Marathi literature in the decade of creative ferment after the linguistic unification of Maharashtra in 1960, known as the *sāṭhottarī* era. Its ambivalent formulation of the *desh* (local/region) and *deshbhāṣhā* (vernacular/regional language) into *deshīvād* or nativism also produced sharp responses and engagements with the idea of *marāṭhīpaṇ*, or Marathiness, in Marathi literary expression in

the works of multiple postcolonial poets and writers, from Dilip Chitre to Kusumagraj (Engblom; Nerlekar). Bhave's historical, Prakrit-derived formulation of Marathi, his pioneering narrativization of its literary corpus, and his foregrounding of the themes of authenticity and rootedness, I have suggested in this chapter, is critical to understanding these critical shifts.

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