



FROM TEXT TO SCREEN: GENDER AND REPRESENTATION IN MARATHI LITERARY ADAPTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between literature and cinema has long served as a dynamic site for the negotiation of social identities, cultural values, and ideological frameworks. Marathi cinema, deeply rooted in the literary traditions of Maharashtra, frequently adapts novels, plays, autobiographies, and short stories into visual narratives. This paper examines the representation of gender in Marathi literary adaptations and investigates how cinematic reinterpretations reshape female identity, masculinity, sexuality, and social power. Through the analysis of selected films such as Natrang (2010), Jogwa (2009), Katyar Kaljat Ghusali (2015), and Sairat (2016), alongside their literary and theatrical origins, the paper explores the transformation of gendered narratives from text to screen. The study employs feminist film theory, adaptation theory, and cultural studies to argue that Marathi cinematic adaptations both challenge and reinforce patriarchal structures. While some films create spaces for marginalized voices and subaltern identities, others dilute literary radicalism through commercial cinematic aesthetics. The paper concludes that Marathi literary adaptations function as significant cultural texts reflecting the evolving discourse on gender, caste, and representation in contemporary Maharashtra.

Keywords: Marathi cinema, literary adaptation, gender representation, feminism, subalternity, Marathi literature, adaptation studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Adaptation from literature to cinema has emerged as one of the most important interdisciplinary areas within literary and cultural studies. Cinema not only visualizes literary imagination but also reconstructs the ideological foundations embedded within texts. Marathi cinema, with its strong connection to theatre and literature, offers a fertile ground for studying the politics of representation, particularly gender representation.

Marathi literary traditions have historically engaged with social reform, caste critique, women's oppression, and cultural identity. Writers such as Vijay Tendulkar, Shanta Shelke, Gauri Deshpande, Baburao Bagul, and Anna Bhau Sathe explored the intersections of caste, class, and gender in powerful ways. When these literary narratives are adapted into cinema, they undergo transformations shaped by audience expectations, visual aesthetics, commercial pressures, and contemporary socio-political contexts.

This paper investigates how Marathi literary adaptations represent women, masculinity, and marginalized gender identities. It asks whether cinema preserves the progressive impulses of Marathi literature or reshapes them within dominant patriarchal frameworks. Through textual and visual analysis, the paper seeks to understand how gendered bodies and identities are negotiated in adaptation processes.

Literature Review

Scholars in adaptation studies such as Linda Hutcheon argue that adaptation is not merely reproduction but reinterpretation. According to Hutcheon, adaptations are "repetitions without replication," meaning that cinematic texts inevitably alter literary meanings.

Feminist film theorists like Laura Mulvey discuss how cinema often constructs women through the "male gaze," positioning female characters as objects of visual pleasure rather than autonomous subjects. In the context of Indian cinema, scholars such as Shohini Ghosh and Sharmistha Gooptu have emphasized how regional cinemas negotiate gender differently from mainstream Bollywood.

Marathi cinema has received scholarly attention for its realistic storytelling and social engagement. Films like *Fandry*, *Sairat*, and *Court* have been analyzed for their caste politics and subaltern perspectives. However, limited research specifically addresses gender representation in Marathi literary adaptations. Existing studies often focus either on literary texts or cinematic narratives separately rather than comparatively.

This paper attempts to bridge that gap by combining adaptation theory with feminist criticism and Marathi cultural studies.

Theoretical Framework

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The study is based on three major theoretical approaches:

1. Adaptation Theory

Linda Hutcheon's theory emphasizes adaptation as reinterpretation rather than fidelity to the original text. This framework helps analyze how Marathi films transform literary gender narratives.

2. Feminist Film Theory

Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze provides insight into how cinematic representation shapes female identity and spectatorship.

3. Subaltern and Cultural Studies

The ideas of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Stuart Hall help understand how marginalized identities, particularly women from lower castes and rural backgrounds, are represented or silenced.

Gender Representation in Marathi Literary Adaptations

Women and Patriarchal Structures

Many Marathi literary adaptations portray women trapped within oppressive social systems. In *Jogwa* (2009), adapted from socio-cultural narratives surrounding the Jogtin tradition, women's bodies become sites of religious exploitation and patriarchal control. The film exposes how ritual practices institutionalize gender oppression under the guise of spirituality.

Similarly, *Natrang* portrays gender performativity through the protagonist Gunvantrao, who adopts feminine performance identities in Tamasha theatre. While the film foregrounds masculinity and performance, it simultaneously exposes societal anxieties surrounding femininity and male embodiment.

Female characters in Marathi adaptations often symbolize sacrifice, endurance, and social morality. However, contemporary Marathi cinema increasingly disrupts these stereotypes by presenting women as agents of resistance rather than passive victims.

Gender, Sexuality, and Desire

Marathi literary adaptations frequently negotiate tensions between tradition and modernity. Films such as *Sairat* challenge conventional representations of romantic desire by situating love within caste violence and patriarchal surveillance.

Archie, the female protagonist in *Sairat*, subverts traditional cinematic femininity. Unlike stereotypical submissive heroines, she demonstrates agency, sexual autonomy, and emotional assertiveness. However, the tragic ending reflects the persistence of caste patriarchy that ultimately punishes transgressive desire.

Similarly, *Katyar Kaljat Ghusali*, adapted from Purushottam Darvhekar's play, presents masculinity through artistic rivalry and cultural prestige. Though primarily centered on male characters, the film indirectly reveals how women remain peripheral within narratives dominated by male genius and authority.

Subaltern Women and Representation

Marathi literature has long foregrounded marginalized communities, especially Dalits and rural laboring classes. Adaptations inspired by Dalit literature often depict women at the intersection of caste and gender oppression.

Films influenced by the works of Baburao Bagul and Anna Bhau Sathe reveal how caste hierarchies shape female vulnerability. Women in these narratives face social exclusion, economic exploitation, and sexual violence. Yet they also embody resilience and survival.

The cinematic adaptation process sometimes softens the radical political voice of literary texts to appeal to broader audiences. Consequently, subaltern women's anger and resistance may become aestheticized rather than politically transformative.

Cinematic Techniques and Gender Construction

Cinema constructs gender not only through narrative but also through visual language. Camera angles, lighting, costume, music, and editing contribute to the formation of gender identities.

In Marathi adaptations:

- Women are frequently framed within domestic spaces, symbolizing confinement.
- Rural landscapes often reinforce notions of tradition and purity.
- Songs and performance sequences shape gendered spectatorship.
- Costume design reflects tensions between modernity and cultural conservatism.

However, contemporary directors increasingly employ realist aesthetics to challenge glamorous and objectifying portrayals of women. Naturalistic cinematography in films like

Fandry and *Sairat* creates emotionally grounded representations that resist conventional melodrama.

Adaptation and Ideological Transformation

Adaptation involves ideological negotiation. Literary texts often contain nuanced interiority and social critique that cinema may simplify. Commercial considerations, censorship, and audience reception influence how gender is represented onscreen.

For example:

- Literary ambiguity may become moral certainty in film.
- Radical feminist themes may be softened.
- Female sexuality may be visually sensationalized.
- Patriarchal endings may be added to restore social order.

Nevertheless, Marathi cinema has also emerged as a progressive space where issues of caste, gender violence, and social inequality receive serious attention.

CONCLUSION

Marathi literary adaptations represent a complex intersection of literature, cinema, gender, and culture. These films do more than translate written narratives into visual form; they reinterpret ideological meanings according to changing historical and social contexts.

The study demonstrates that Marathi cinematic adaptations both reproduce and challenge patriarchal structures. While traditional gender roles continue to shape many narratives, contemporary Marathi cinema increasingly foregrounds female agency, subaltern voices, and critiques of caste patriarchy.

Adaptation thus becomes a cultural process through which gender identities are continuously negotiated. Marathi cinema, rooted in rich literary traditions, remains an important medium for exploring evolving questions of representation, identity, and social justice.

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