
IDEOLOGIES AND SPACES OF CULTURAL RESISTANCE IN
MAHARASHTRA: PERFORMANCE AND CASTE-CLASS POLITICS SINCE
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ABSTRACT

The three prominent voices of cultural resistance in Maharashtra analysed in the thesis cover nearly a century, but display significant continuities vis-à-vis the insights that emerge from their work.

The chapter titled *Interpreting a Shahir* examines the predominant position of shahirs in the scene of cultural resistance via a close scrutiny of the life and work of Annabhau Sathe. It shows that shahirs are organic intellectuals in the Gramscian mould who reinterpret traditions and emancipatory ideologies to fashion a philosophy of praxis ‘keyed to human emancipation and equality’ (Rao 2020a, 45) in their time and place. The chapter titled *Interrogating the Collective* examines the role and scope of artistic collectives in cultural resistance via the examples of Avahan Natya Manch and Kabir Kala Manch. It shows that such collectives occasion the materialisation of a microcosmic counter-hegemonic community premised on radical egalitarianism and fraternity, where members work together acknowledging and enhancing each other’s skills, strengths and differences and mature into fine artists. The chapter titled *Collective Art Production*, which elaborates on the process followed by Avahan and KKM to create new songs and plays, shows that both troupes underplayed individual talent and produced new work *collectively*, which unleashed immense creativity and resulted in songs and plays whose popularity and appeal exceeded their time and space. The chapter titled *Performance, Spirituality and the Solidarity of the Shaken*, which examines the predominant role of performance in cultural resistance via a close reading of KKM’s jalsa, shows that performance accomplishes the realisation of a critical, collective consciousness encompassing the performers *and* the audience that strikes at the roots of Brahmanic-capitalist hegemony.

From the discussion and findings in these chapters, it appears that cultural resistance constitutes and, in turn, also creates a counterpublic whose ideas and practices differ sharply from the official middle class public sphere as well as from the Ambedkarite counterpublic. Shahirs and kalapathaks seem to play a preeminent role in forging this counterpublic comprised of various subaltern caste-classes, whereas their efforts to combine strands from Marx(ism) and Ambedkar(ism) in order to elaborate a political model conducive to human freedom in the here and now provide the public its contrarian, radical character.