

# Narratives of Agrarian Life and Cultural Memory in Prakash Paryekar's *Puran*

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**Abstract :** Prakash Paryekar's Konkani novel *Puran* presents a vivid picture of rural life shaped by traditional agrarian practices and shared cultural values. This paper explores how the novel records and preserves cultural memory through its portrayal of farming, community life, and the intimate relationship between people and the land. The study seeks to understand how agrarian labour in *Puran* is not merely an economic activity but a way of sustaining collective identity and inherited knowledge. Using close textual analysis and drawing on perspectives from cultural studies and ecocriticism, the paper examines the narrative treatment of puran cultivation, village customs, and everyday rural experiences. By writing about a Konkani novel in English, this paper also aims to bring regional literature into wider critical discussions and highlight its relevance within Indian literary studies.

**IndexTerms - Konkani literature, agrarian life, cultural memory, rural narrative, ecocriticism**

## INTRODUCTION

Konkani literature has long served as a vital medium for expressing the lived realities, cultural practices, and collective memories of Goan society. Among its significant contributions is Prakash Paryekar's novel *Puran*, which foregrounds agrarian life as the centre of rural existence. Set against the backdrop of a Goan village, the novel draws attention to traditional farming practices, particularly *puran* cultivation, and the intricate social relationships sustained through them. Rather than presenting rural life through nostalgia alone, *Puran* offers a grounded representation of everyday labour, community cooperation, and the ethical bond between humans and the land. The novel thus assumes importance not only as a regional narrative but also as a literary record of cultural practices that are gradually disappearing under the pressures of modernization.

Prakash Paryekar is a prominent voice in contemporary Konkani literature, known for his engagement with rural themes, folk traditions, and socio-cultural transformations in Goa. His academic background and sustained involvement with Konkani language and culture lend depth and authenticity to his literary work. *Puran* reflects Paryekar's commitment to documenting indigenous knowledge systems and village life with sensitivity and realism.

The present paper aims to examine *Puran* as a narrative of agrarian life and cultural memory. It argues that the novel uses agricultural practices and communal experiences to preserve and transmit cultural values, positioning agrarian labour as central to identity formation and social continuity within rural Konkani society. The inhabitants of Sattari Taluka traditionally practiced a form of cultivation known as *Puran*, carried out on the fertile banks of the Mhadei River, where seasonal rhythms and riverine ecology shaped agricultural life. On both banks of the Mhadei River, the local people cultivated these fields. During the months of December and January, everyone's footsteps would turn toward the river path. Then, until the month of May, the riverbank would seem as though a festival were in progress.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly engagement with Konkani literature has largely focused on questions of language, identity, and cultural assertion. Critics have frequently discussed the historical marginalization of Konkani and its struggle for literary recognition, especially in the context of Goa's colonial past and multilingual environment. Studies in this area have emphasized how Konkani writing functions as an expression of regional consciousness and cultural survival, foregrounding everyday life, folk traditions, and community values. Within Konkani fiction, rural life has received considerable critical attention, particularly in relation to social change and economic disruption. Novels such as Pundalik Naik's *Acchev* have been widely analysed for their portrayal of agrarian communities affected by mining and modernization. Such studies highlight the erosion of traditional livelihoods and the resulting transformation of village structures. Similarly, critical discussions on other Konkani writers have examined themes of displacement, caste relations, and the tension between tradition and development. While this body of scholarship is significant, it tends to approach rural life primarily as a site of conflict or decline.

Relatively little attention has been paid to how agrarian practices themselves function as repositories of cultural memory in Konkani fiction. Works like Prakash Paryekar's *Puran*, which centre on traditional farming practices and collective rural experience, remain under explored in academic discourse. Existing criticism rarely examines agriculture as a narrative framework through which knowledge, values, and ecological awareness are transmitted across generations.

The present study addresses this gap by reading *Puran* as a narrative that foregrounds agrarian labour not merely as background setting but as a meaningful cultural practice. By focusing on farming as a lived and remembered experience, this paper seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of rural narratives in Konkani literature.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study approaches Prakash Paryekar's *Puran* through an interdisciplinary framework that draws primarily on cultural studies and ecocriticism. These perspectives allow for a nuanced reading of the novel as a text rooted in lived rural experience, where land, labour, and community are central to cultural meaning.

Cultural studies provide a useful lens to examine how everyday practices, particularly agrarian labour, shape collective identity and social memory. Rather than treating culture as a static inheritance, this approach understands it as something produced and sustained through daily activities, shared knowledge, and communal relationships. In *Puran*, farming is not simply an economic necessity but a cultural practice that binds individuals to each other and to the land. By focusing on rituals, work patterns, and interpersonal dynamics within the village, the novel foregrounds how cultural values are embedded in ordinary rural life.

Ecocriticism further informs this reading by emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds. The novel presents nature not as a passive backdrop but as an active presence that influences human behaviour and ethical choices. Traditional farming methods depicted in *Puran* reflect a mode of coexistence with the environment, grounded in local knowledge and seasonal rhythms. Through this lens, the text can be read as articulating an ecological consciousness that resists extractive and exploitative models of development.

Together, these theoretical perspectives enable a reading of *Puran* that highlights agrarian life as a site of cultural continuity, ecological awareness, and narrative memory within Konkani literature.

### Agrarian Life as Identity and Cultural Memory

Prakash Paryekar's *Puran* offers a sustained and intimate portrayal of agrarian life in rural Goa, foregrounding land, labour, and seasonal rhythms as the foundations of community identity. Agriculture in the novel is not treated as a mere backdrop for human action; rather, agrarian existence occupies the centre of social relations, cultural memory, and ethical values. Through detailed narrative descriptions and symbolic deployment of land, *Puran* constructs a rural world in which human life remains inseparable from the soil that sustains it.

This novel aims to tell the story of *Pansule* village. In olden days during monsoon season, agricultural life in village, revolved around major form of cultivation that is known as *Kumer* farming in which millet was cultivated and later roughly between December-May, they worked in *Puran* farming, where rice was grown. These agricultural practices were deeply collective as member of each household participated in the work. These farming practices frequently involved cooperation between neighboring families. At time labour extended beyond the household and became collective activity undertaken by the village as a whole.

Raglo's emotional attachment to the calf is revealed through his everyday act of bringing grass while he returned from *Puran* carrying bundles of grass to feed the calf. This act reflected the care, responsibility, and intimate bond between rural households and their cattle.

Another revealing aspect of rural life in *Puran* is the mutual dependence that exists among villagers, often expressed through informal exchanges connected to agriculture and cattle care. When Buli allows Raglo to cultivate his *puran*, he asks in return for four bundles of dried rice straw for his oxen. This exchange is significant as Buli demonstrates not only the practical nature of rural exchange, but also his concern for the care of his oxen whose labour formed an essential part of village agriculture.

The care and management of hens by the woman Bayule illustrates how village households depended on small-scale animal rearing as a supplementary source of income and survival. This highlights the crucial role of animals in sustaining rural livelihoods, particularly within domestic sphere. Through regular nurturing, protection, and breeding of hens, she is able to generate earning by selling both hens and cocks.

At the same time, it reveals that such practices require constant attention, labor, and emotional investment. The detailed description of feeding, protecting, and managing the hens suggests that animals were not merely economic assets, but an integral part of the household ecosystem. In a context where agricultural income is uncertain or insufficient, these small but steady resources of livelihood become essential for sustaining the family.

Thus, it demonstrates that rural survival is closely tied to the natural and domestic environment. People rely not only on land and crops, but also on animals and their immediate surroundings, and that forms the basis of rural survival.

**The Mhadei river, sand extraction, ecology, and rural frustration.**

## **Tradition and Change: Memory under Threat in *Puran***

In *Puran*, Prakash Paryekar situates agrarian life at a moment of transition, where inherited rural traditions confront the pressures of modernization and economic change. Rather than portraying transformation as sudden rupture, the novel depicts change as gradual and accumulative, altering values, aspirations, and social structures over time. Through this narrative approach, *Puran* foregrounds the vulnerability of cultural memory embedded in land-based life.

Modernization enters the rural world of the novel through shifting economic priorities and changing attitudes toward agriculture. Farming, once central to identity and communal belonging, increasingly appears unviable. This reevaluation of agrarian labour reflects a broader cultural shift in which productivity and monetary gain displace inherited relationships with land. As agriculture loses its cultural centrality, the knowledge systems and ethical values associated with it begin to erode.

The novel presents a powerful critique of sand extraction by showing how such activities disturb the natural course of the river and endanger surrounding agricultural land. Once the riverbed is altered through extraction, the river begins to flow according to a changed and unstable path. It is within this context that Raglo's puran is washed away, making the loss of his field not merely an act of nature, but a consequence of ecological disruption caused by human intervention. The villagers and farmers are aware of this danger and attempt to voice their concerns, yet those responsible for extraction refuse to listen.

The novel also highlights how changing economic priorities begin to alter the relationship between villagers and agrarian labor. Ghanba allows Dattam to extract sand from his puran because otherwise he would have had to put in considerable labor to clear the sand for cultivation. For Datta, however, selling sand becomes more profitable than farming, and he eventually stops cultivating his own puran altogether. This reflects how economic convenience and monetary gain begin to replace traditional agricultural labor. The introduction of mechanized sand extraction, particularly through the use of a JCB machine, makes a significant turning point in the transformation of Punsale village. What was once a limited and labor-intensive activity suddenly becomes a large-scale and highly profitable enterprise. Through mechanization, Datta is able to extract quantities of sand that he had never previously imagined, revealing how technology expands not only the scale of extraction but also the scope of economic ambition.

The novel also foregrounds the impact of state-led development projects on rural life, particularly through the construction of a bandharo (barrage) on a Mhadei river. The arrival of survey teams and heavy machinery mark the beginning of a transformation imposed from outside the village, while the project is framed as a sign of development, its consequences for the local community are deeply disruptive, as construction progresses, large stretches of puran land are gradually submerged under water.

This transformation is not limited to the submergence of fields alone. The narrative repeatedly describes how the massive trees on Gade devno are uprooted using machines, their deep roots torn out of the earth with mechanical force. Trees that had stood for generations are cut, dragged and cleared away to make spaces for the project. And this act of clearing signifies more than physical removal; it represents the destruction of an ecological landscape that sustained both human and non-human life. For villagers, the process results in a profound sense of loss and helplessness. The paddy fields, along with the surrounding trees and environment, are not merely economic resources but the carriers of memory, identity, and continuity. Although villagers attempt to question and resist their changes, their concerns are dismissed and they are instead offered promises of compensation.

In the novel, land functions less as a commodity and more as a lived inheritance that shapes both individual and collective identity. Legal ownership or economic value remains secondary to the moral responsibility of cultivation. Characters relate to land through memory, labour, and continuity rather than through profit or exchange. Fields are not inert spaces but bear the imprint of ancestral presence, marked by the labour of earlier generations. Such representations position land within a framework of belonging, where cultivation becomes a means of sustaining identity across time.

The emotional investment in land is particularly visible in moments of threat, loss, or neglect. Detachment from agricultural labour is portrayed as a form of cultural erosion, suggesting that alienation from land results in a fractured sense of self. By resisting modern narratives that treat land as disposable property, Paryekar articulates a rural epistemology in which land and identity remain mutually constitutive. Beyond its material function, agrarian space also operates symbolically as a repository of memory. Fields, pathways, and cultivated landscapes are repeatedly associated with stories of the past, transforming physical geography into a narrative archive. Through this symbolic layering, everyday agricultural labour becomes an act of remembrance and cultural preservation.

The narrative structure of *Puran* closely follows the agricultural calendar, reflecting the cyclical nature of rural life. Sowing, nurturing, and harvesting function not merely as economic activities but as temporal markers that organise social interaction and emotional experience. Time in the novel is measured less through clocks or calendars than through the readiness of the soil and the arrival of rain. This seasonal rhythm governs work, rest, celebration, and communal engagement, reinforcing the centrality of agriculture to village life.

Descriptions of sowing foreground anticipation and collective effort, while harvesting scenes convey both physical exhaustion and shared fulfilment. These moments underscore the communal dimension of agrarian labour, where survival depends upon

coordinated action. The repetition of seasons reinforces cultural continuity, resisting linear notions of progress in favour of renewal and recurrence. Agriculture thus emerges as a way of life that sustains not only economic survival but also social cohesion.

A defining feature of agrarian existence in *Puran* is its dependence on natural forces beyond human control. Rainfall, soil fertility, and seasonal uncertainty render human effort perpetually vulnerable. The villagers' relationship with nature is marked by patience, observation, and acceptance rather than domination. Nature is neither idealised nor hostile; it is presented as a powerful presence demanding respect and adaptation. Through these depictions, *Puran* foregrounds an agrarian worldview rooted in coexistence, positioning rural life as a living archive of cultural memory in the face of social and economic change.

The untimely arrival of rain serves as a pivotal moment in Raglo's narrative, intensifying both the material and emotional stakes of his struggle. Having invested sustained physical labor, time, and hope into cultivating his field, Raglo is confronted with a sudden environmental disruption that renders his efforts futile. This loss is not merely economic but deeply psychological; the washed-away field symbolizes the collapse of his expectations and the fragility of agrarian livelihoods that are dependent on unpredictable natural forces. The emotional turmoil he experiences can be understood as a convergence of despair, helplessness, and disillusionment. His inability to control or mitigate the damage reinforces a sense of vulnerability, while the erasure of his hard work evokes grief akin to personal loss. Thus, the premature rain operates not only as a natural incident but also as a narrative device that foregrounds Raglo's inner conflict, illustrating how external uncertainties profoundly shape the emotional landscape of marginalized rural lives.

Against this backdrop, *Puran* emerges as a literary record of a vanishing agrarian world. The novel's detailed attention to everyday practices—sowing, harvesting, seasonal rituals, and communal labour—serves as an act of preservation. These descriptions transform ordinary rural experiences into cultural memory, safeguarding them against historical erasure. Importantly, the novel avoids romanticizing the past; it acknowledges hardship and inequality while asserting the cultural value of agrarian life.

Memory in *Puran* thus functions as a form of cultural resistance. By narrating rural experience with precision and empathy, the novel challenges dominant narratives that marginalize agrarian cultures in the name of progress. The act of remembering becomes a way of affirming rural identity amid social and economic transformation. Through this narrative strategy, *Puran* demonstrates how literature can preserve threatened life-worlds by inscribing them into cultural consciousness.

In documenting the tensions between tradition and change, *Puran* highlights the fragile position of agrarian memory in modern society. The novel bears witness to transformation while retaining the textures of a rural culture under threat, affirming literature's role as an archive of lived experience.

In *Puran*, agrarian life is not presented merely as a background setting but emerges as the central organising force of the narrative. Paryekar places farming practices at the heart of village existence, showing how agricultural labour structures time, relationships, and social responsibilities. The act of cultivating *puran* fields is depicted as a collective endeavour, requiring cooperation, shared knowledge, and mutual dependence. Through detailed descriptions of seasonal cycles, tools, and work routines, the novel records a way of life shaped by intimate familiarity with the land. These passages reveal how labour becomes a form of cultural expression, passed down through generations and sustained through communal participation.

The novel also foregrounds the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Nature in *Puran* is neither romanticised nor distant; it is portrayed as a living presence that demands respect and careful negotiation. The rhythms of cultivation depend on rainfall, soil conditions, and seasonal changes, reminding the reader of the limits within which human activity must operate. This ecological sensitivity reflects traditional modes of farming that prioritise sustainability over immediate profit. In this sense, *Puran* aligns with broader ecocritical concerns, offering a literary response to modern forms of development that often marginalise indigenous ecological knowledge.

Through its focus on farming as lived experience, *Puran* contributes to a broader literary tradition that values regional narratives as vital records of social and cultural history. The novel demonstrates how literature can function as an archive of everyday knowledge, preserving ways of life that risk being erased from dominant historical and developmental discourses.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined Prakash Paryekar's *Puran* as a narrative deeply rooted in agrarian life and cultural memory. Through its detailed portrayal of traditional farming practices and village relationships, the novel foregrounds agriculture as more than a means of livelihood; it emerges as a cultural practice through which knowledge, values, and collective identity are sustained. The close reading of the text reveals how everyday rural labour becomes a site where memory is preserved and social bonds are reinforced, offering an alternative understanding of rural life that moves beyond narratives of decline or nostalgia.

By engaging with cultural studies and eco-critical perspectives, the study highlights the ethical relationship between human beings and the natural environment represented in *Puran*. The novel's emphasis on ecological balance and communal responsibility reflects indigenous modes of living that challenge dominant models of development and progress. In this respect, *Puran* contributes to broader literary discussions on sustainability, environmental awareness, and the cultural significance of agrarian practices.

The paper has successfully extended the scope of Indian literary studies by bringing a Konkani novel into English-language critical discourse. In doing so, it underscores the importance of regional literatures in understanding India's diverse cultural and social

realities. *Puran* thus stands as an important text that enriches discussions of rural narratives, cultural memory, and ecological consciousness within contemporary literary scholarship.

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