



Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni
On
Contemporary Marathi Theatre

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Recorded on 17th. April, 1988

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Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

Today the subject is contemporary Marathi theatre. I have brought some photographs here and I shall be referring to those photographs from time to time. First I gave you background of Bal Gandharva yesterday. I must provide you with the background of contemporary Marathi theatre. By contemporary Marathi theatre I mean theatre of past 35 years or 40 years. We first think of the date, the year 1943. We, Marathi people believe that Marathi theatre founded in 1843. Now I describe to you, Bal Gandharva's declining years. But Bal Gandharva's declining years, which started from the year 1935-37, went on through the war and so on. There was also declining years of Marathi theatre. Marathi theatre profession was going through great years of stress. Now people have tried to analyze this and found out why. You can compare it with the Bengali theatre, what was happening to Bengali theatre. Did something similar happened to Bengali theatre in the late 30s and early 40s? You can ask yourself that question. Well, the one reason can be given is the advent of cinema. There were first of course silent films, but we had the talkies from 1929 onwards and people could see the cinema and the cinema they found was far more exciting. I told you about Bal Gandharva's adventure to cinema, those adventures came to nothing. Bal Gandharva acted in barely two films. But the audience at least they appeared to leave theatre of a drama and go to cinema. Even today I wonder, I don't know what cinema tickets rates are, but ticket rates of plays are certainly higher I think and of course today we have got the added diversion – television. People can see films at their homes. Those who can afford can see films on VCR. So these are all forces which probably act against theatre. But as you know today theatre still survives. I don't know how and why it survives. Probably those who work in theatres they know how and why one survives. You have institutions like Anamika, you have institutions like Padatik, you have institutions like Bohurupee, and in Bombay and Pune we have institutions like Vijaya Mehta's institution or Vijaya Mehta's productions rather and we have Jabbar Patel's Theatre Academy in Pune. How is it that they survive and how is it that their plays survive. Now I don't have any answer to this. How is it that instead of going to cinema people go to the theatre? I can't answer this question. I have not interviewed people, I have not interviewed audience. It is a mystery to me. We go back to year 1943. In 1943, certain Marathi stage enthusiasts decided that they should celebrate the centenary of Marathi theatre and centenary of the Marathi theatre was celebrated in Sangli and in Bombay and in Pune, and centenary of Marathi theatre gave us impetus to the revival of



Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

the Marathi theatre. For example, Bal Gandharva was still living in those days, Ganpat Rao Bodas was still living. All these actors were recruited for special performances. The old musicals were revived and people very gladly went to see these old actors. I myself have seen, not Bal Gandharva, but Ganpat Rao Bodas in old age and he was a very effective actor. Even his legs were very weak, he could not stand, he had some trouble but still his roles very very emphatic and one could see a lot of naturalistic acting in those roles. There was a person called Dr. Bhalerao who was associated with the institutions called 'Mumbai Marathi Natya Sangha' and Dr. Bhalerao continued these yearly festivals. He was not content with the 1943 festival, the centenary festival, but continued through these festivals. And here we come to the first phase of contemporary theatre and that comprises adaptations of English plays or even American plays. These adaptations were mainly done by three people. We had a famous writer Vai Shirwadkar or we call Taty Saheb Shirwadkar. We have photographs of Taty Saheb Shirwadkar. He is talking to me. I could not get other photograph. So I had to put myself in the photograph also. I had to put Shirwadkar with myself. We are of course very close friends. So I have a moral right to be in a photograph with him but he is a great dramatist. Shirwadkar translated a number of plays. I would say there was no ideological base to the selection of foreign playwrights. They selected any and every playwright. They were not sure which playwright to select and I can tell you why they had no ideological base because it was the starting point. When people are starting something, they are not very sure of an ideology. When they pass about 5 or 10 years, that they come to an ideology and Mr. Shirwadkar had not heard of Stanislavsky, he had not heard of what Bertold Brecht. So there was no question of any ideology. Later on people came to hear of Brecht and Stanislavsky and there was some sort of ideological exploration. Shirwadkar translated Oscar Wilde's 'An Ideal Husband' and Shirwadkar translated plays later but I will come to translations later. There was another playwright called Anant Kanekar. Kanekar translated play of Oliver Goldsmith, James Barry, John Galsworthy and some of the plays were great successes and most prolific translator or adaptor was Madhav Manohar. There was a playwright called Madhav Manohar who is still active as a drama critic. Madhav Manohar translated plays of J. B. Priestley, Somerset Maugham and other playwrights and they were produced by various companies and they were produced during this first phase. I would call it Sahitya Sangh phase. I should talk here about Shirwadkar. I have provided an article on Shirwadkar to the magazine of Natya Shodh Sansthan but I should say very briefly about Shirwadkar because Shirwadkar is this year is Sangeet Natak Academy Award winner and he should



have come to Calcutta to receive award. But he had received his award in absence here. Now, he is a veteran playwright and among his translations, not chronologically, forget that we were talking about 1940's, we will move forward because we are talking about Shirwadkar. Shirwadkar translated two of Shakespeare plays – one is 'Macbeth' and other is 'Othello'. 'Macbeth' was produced for Mumbai Sahitya Sangh directed for Sahitya Sangh by British director Herbert Marshall. Herbert Marshall created an Elizabethan Theatre, Elizabethan stage rather, and on the Elizabethan stage, he produced Macbeth. I have a photograph here of Durga Khote and Nana Saheb Pathak in a play called 'Bhau Bandaki'. I referred to the play yesterday and the actors played the role of Macbeth and lady Macbeth and this quite appropriate because role in 'Bhau Bandaki' of Peshwa Raghoba Dada, not Peshwa, he became Peshwa later – Raghoba Dada and Anandi Bai, they are exactly like Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. So it is appropriate that they themselves were cast like that. Unfortunately this production did not come off because even the brightest directors don't think of everything. You know he put Elizabethan stage on the stage proper and he had a big apron stage and because the apron stage was in the open air, these people could not project their voices in spite of the mikes. In the open air, everything is very difficult, so they could not project their voices and that is why they made no effect. So that is why and unfortunately with such great actors that production of Macbeth, Shirwadkar's Macbeth failed. Later on Shirwadkar translated 'Othello' and 'Othello' is a superior translation. When I use the word 'translation', I may be very absent minded by using the word 'adaptation'. But in Shirwadkar's case, especially in the play of 'Othello', they are both translation and adaption. For example, in translation 'Othello' is called 'Othello' but in adaptation it is called by some other name and so on. Later on Shirwadkar translated another play called 'Jean Anouilh' and that is Beckett. Fortunately, did not turn Beckett into an adaptation. It was turned into an adaptation much later and it received a very bad production. But the original translation of Beckett was very well produced, very well directed. There is a photograph here of an actor called Satish Dubhashi. It is a Marathi version of 'Dashachakra' directed by Sombhu Mitra. Sombhu Mitra came to Bombay. I did credit not only to Sombhu Mitra that he directed those actors because all the actors were new but it does credit to the actors also that they took direction from Sombhu Mitra. Sombhu Mitra was a very big man. He is such a big man that it is difficult for those two sides to accommodate each other. But they accommodated each other this was a very fine production and Satish Dubhashi acted the role which Sombhu Mitra acts in 'Dashachakra'. Unfortunately Satish Dubhashi died some years back. Satish Dubhashi acted in Beckett. He acted the role of Henry the second. If you are familiar with the play Beckett, you know that the king Henry the second is a

much more enjoyable role than the role of Beckett. If you have seen the Richard Burton's film, Richard Burton played Beckett and Peter O'tool plays Henry the second. But Richard is a very fine actor or rather was a fine actor and therefore he could make the role of Beckett very interesting and Henry the second played by Peter O'tool. Peter O'tool lives every inch of the role. That role was done by Satish Dubhashi. Anyway, the translation was done by Shirwadkar. Now this was not an adaptation. It was a translation and therefore actors were dressed in the European dress, women were dressed in the European dress. They were not dressed in Indian dress or Maharashtrian dress. I will come to Shirwadkar little later because first I want to tell you about experimental theater in Marathi. In fact, I have divided my talk into two broad sections. The experimental theatre and the mainstream theatre, because everybody comes to Calcutta, but Calcutta people don't have any idea about our mainstream theatre. They always look at Jabbar Patel and Vijaya Mehta and they think there Marathi theatre ends – begins and ends, but we have a very varied mainstream theatre. Unfortunately, when mainstream theatre comes here, it is very bad production. So there also you get very perverse idea of the mainstream theatre. To go back to experimental theatre. It started in early 50s and first great figure in experimental theatre is Vijay Tendulkar. Vijaya Tendulkar started with lot of one act plays and he gradually moved on to full length plays. I shall talk in detail only about some of his plays and not about all his plays. But first let me divide his plays into two types. When he started he wrote plays full of humanity and there was a lot of autobiographical element in it. There is a play called 'Madhalya Bhinti'. There is a lot of autobiography in it. You see, a portrait of a father who could be Vijaya Tendulkar's father who was a poor man. He was a proof reader in an ordinary press and used to bring proofs to the house to correct them and probably his son used to help him. Vijaya Tendulkar – we can say very openly now, he is not even a matriculate, we were in the same school. He might have been a senior to me. He attended the school only for one year where I was there for more years. We were never there for the same time but he always talked about. He did not appear probably for his matriculation examination. But anyway that doesn't matter now. I am emphasizing this only to suggest that he came from a very poor family. And you get a reflection of this poor family in a play like 'Madhalya Bhinti', you know what Madhalya – in between and Bhinti – what is evolved. Then came the epoch making play 'Shantata, Court Chalu Aahe'. You are all familiar with 'Shantata, Court Chalu Aahe'. It is produced here by Bohurupee with Tripti Mitra in the main role. Our friend Mr. Joshi had to translate it in Bengali. The production should be quite famous I think. 'Shantata, Court Chalu Aahe' is quite well known. It came in 'Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay Award'. That changed

his career completely. He became very famous overnight. Then he started a



'Gidhade'

double career in plays and films. He wrote so many scripts for films. We would not go into that. That is not our subject. I shall then come to three of his plays which are very characteristic of him. First play is 'Gidhade' and second play is 'Sakharam Binder'. The third play is 'Ghasiram Kotwal'. In 'Gidhade' Tendulkar tries to shock the middle class audience. You know all of you go to a play you are seeing an established play, an established playwright and

Vijay Tendulkar says these people buy tickets, go to play and have nice lunch and they forget about what is happening to all of us they forget. I will make them remember, I will? Them, I will attack them. So he went to attack the sensibility of the bourgeois audience with 'Gidhade'. 'Gidhade' is a very very peculiar play. It has a family which is only perverse. Most of family is perverse and there is lot of violence in the play and there are some sensational episodes. And it has got a very peculiar gloomy feeling and this was all acted and produced by Dr. Shriram Lagoo in a very outstanding production – Gidhade. But 'Gidhade' was totally unlike any Indian play which had operated till that time. It was designed to shock people. Then came 'Sakharam Binder'. You know

'Sakharam Binder' is very famous play. Sakharam has no wife. But he has many women in his life and we can call them wives. There is first one is Laxmi who is traditional woman, who is devoted to him. There is Champa. Champa is rather flirtish and then Sakharam is torn between the conflicts between these two women. And then he murders Champa. 'Sakharam Binder' is projected not as a traditional villain. Tendulkar wants you to understand him – always there is an attempt on the playwright's part for you to understand Sakharam Binder. But Sakharam Binder is also full of sex and violence and Tendulkar went right to the boundary, ultimate boundary of projecting sex. Now that the sex there is full of perversion. But still he had to present it in an artistic manner. So therefore amongst both 'Sakharam Binder' became a very controversial play. Lastly we have 'Ghasiram Kotwal'. You know 'Ghasiram Kotwal' - the conflict between Nana Fadnavis and



'Ghasiram Kotwal'

Production: Theatre Academy,Pune

Ghasiram Kotwal who is his own creation. Nana Fadnavis was a? He goes around with lot of women and that was what Nana Fadnavis was in real life. So people said why have you portray Nana Fadnavis like this? Why are you not portraying Nana Fadnavis the statesman? There is no answer to that. Tendulkar has come out with lots of statement. In one of the statements Tendulkar say this is not a historical play. If it is not a historical play, if you don't call a historical play, you don't have to explain. But I look at the play from a very different point of view. Tendulkar has created totally new form in this play. It is a form full of song, dance and drama and then again the music here is very eclectic. I use the word eclectic. It is brought from all the sources. Bhaskar Chandabharkar has composed the music. Bhaskar Chandabharkar who wrote the music for 'Khandahar' – who is quite well known. He composed the music for 'Ghasiram Kotwal'. There is a scene where even the Brahmins sit down and Brahmins sing a Quawali. There is something very peculiar. That is also supposed to shock you but that is also eclectic and within the total form of the play this becomes possible. Tendulkar has written a number of other plays. 'Kanyadan' is now being staged by Padatik. 'Kanyadan' is a straight forward play. Kanyadan shows you the conflict between a dalit youth and a gentleman who is rather bourgeois in spite of being socialistic and so on. I don't know anything about Bengali production. But there is how it comes out in Marathi production. Where Shriram Lagoo plays the role that Shyamanand Jalan had played and Sadashiv Amrapurkar, one of the famous actors, he plays the role of the dalit youth. You don't see the production any longer because it has finished its run.

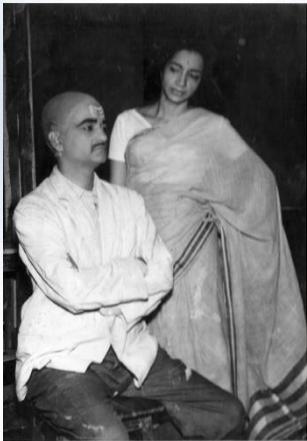


Chintamani Tryambak Khanolkar

Then we come to Tendulkar. Then I will deal with some experimental playwrights – very few. I don't want to load you with information. I don't want to load you with names. One of the eminent experienced playwright is C.T. Khanolkar. That is how we say Chitran Khanolkar because if I say C.T. Khanolkar nobody will understand Chitran Khanolkar. He died when he was not even fifty. Round about the age of forty-five he died.

He was a great friend of mine. He is a great introvert. He wrote some very fine stuff but I am not an enthusiast of his theatre. So I will be very cautious when I criticize his plays or talking about his plays. His plays are out of this world. Whole structure of the play, whole concept of the play is non-traditional from the point of view of experimentation, he is even further up then, Tendulkar and that is why there are lots of enthusiast of Khanolkar. However, in India what happens is whenever the man is dead, people forget him after few months. Nobody remembers the dead. So Khanolkar after his death, some people tried to stage programmes of his lyrics. P. L. Deshpande and P. L. Deshpande's

wife Sunita Deshpande did a programme of Khanolkar poetry. Some other programmes were also staged. But nobody touches Khanolkar's plays after Khanolkar's death. When I say something about his plays I may sound vague, but I shall make a few points. You know he had a very peculiar philosophy about man and he believed in the vulnerability of man. Man is vulnerable. Also he believed in complex relationships. Then again he believed in some sort of projection of sex, for example, in his play called 'Avadhya' there is an actual kiss. There is an embrace and a kiss which you cannot have on the stage. But my friend Amol Palekar, he with another actress they showed this embrace and the kiss. They could not do it the way western actors do. So they had to go through a lot of circus in order to do that and when I criticized that I said they become very self-conscious because they had to do a lot of contortions without actually kissing each other and so on. So that lady got very angry with me or I heard that she got very angry with me. But in recent years I met her. She has given up acting. She gave up the stage. She was quite nice but anyway I was a critic of Amol Palekar, I was a critic of Khanolkar also. Khanolkar used to get very angry.



Ek Shunyo Bajirao

He used to stop talking. I think such things happen in Calcutta also. But anyway they happened to me also. There is a farce play called 'Ek Shunya Bajirao'. There is a photograph of that production there with Vijaya Mehta and Madhav Vatave. 'Ek Shunya Bajirao' was highly talked of and I was perhaps the only critic who attacked 'Ek Shunya Bajirao'. So for a few days Khanolkar did not talk to me. I regret his death very much because he was a very brilliant writer. He was not just a playwright, he was a novelist he was a poet also. He was a really brilliant writer. He had an untimely death. Khanolkar stands like an island in this experimental world. Then we come to Mahesh Elkunchwar. He made a very good impression with his one act plays. There is a lay called 'Holi' which has been done into film by Ketan Mehta and if you see Ketan Mehta's film 'Holi' that gives you an idea about Avant Garde theatre and Avant Garde cinema because the thing that happens in 'Holi' they really shock you, they disturb you. But this was first a very compact one act play, small play. Then there was a play called 'Sultan'. Elkunchwar is very novel in his characterization. His characters are very unusual. Elkunchwar's writing also is very unusual. Although it is unusual it is very evocative. In a way we can compare Elkunchwar with Khanolkar but Khanolkar is a poet who is writing plays. Elkunchwar that way is not a poet. He is a prose writer. Then Elkunchwar came out with many more full length plays. He did a play called 'Garbo'. Here is a photograph from 'Garbo' showing Dr. Shriram Lagoo and his wife Deepa. 'Garbo', first half an hour is brilliant but later



Satish Alekar

on I will tell you what is wrong with this experimental playwriting. First there are structural lapses. They cannot evolve a good structure and secondly I would put it like this, they cannot cool their tempers. Their tempers are white hot and when their tempers are white hot they wrote these plays. Afterwards there is no cooling process. Tendulkar is a very rational creature, very rational, very thoughtful. After 'Garbo' – before or after 'Garbo' there is a play called 'Vasana Kand'. 'Vasana Kand' is about incest between brother and sister. These roles were acted by Amol Palekar and Chitra Palekar. So there is a last scene where the whole house is set on fire. That was shown on stage. Incidentally, both 'Sakharam Binder' and 'Vasana Kand' they became object of court cases. 'Sakharam Binder' was sought to be banned by certain people and Mr. Justice Kaviya – we had a very good judge at that time, Kaviya gave a very good judgment and he absolved 'Sakharam Binder' from all these charges. 'Vasana Kand'- similar attempts even to block the production. I do not know whether it happens here or not, but at 6.30 you are having the show and somebody brings the stay order and at 6.30 you can't have the show! So the stay order had to be vacated. All that happened in case of 'Vasana Kand'. There is a book about 'Sakharam Binder' case written by the producer of the play called Kamalakar Sarang and this book is called 'Binders'? It is quite described the whole court case and how much trouble people had to take. Kamalakar Sarang had to go through hell in order to fight this case. Ultimately again just as people forget dead people, people also forget about the case also. If they have an orthodox cause, the orthodoxy forgets its own cause. So they forget about 'Sakharam Binder'. Nobody bothers about 'Sakharam Binder' just as nobody bothers about 'Ghasiram Kotwal'. The case of 'Ghasiram Kotwal', the case was more famous. There were people who sought to block it from leaving our shows. But it went all the same. It had a triumph for two. Anyway coming back to Mahesh Elkunchwar, Garbo and now we have this play 'Wada Chirebandi'. 'Wada Chirebandi' is a very mild play. It has no experimental fervor. It is a traditional play and I have liked one half of 'Wada Chirebandi'. At the moment, I don't remember which half I liked because I saw it very long time back. I will tell you what I liked. There is one incident in the play which is very moving and which is very dramatic and which has got a very high literary quality. That is the episode in which man's wife puts on all those golden ornaments. You know that is a very fantastic (?) episode. I think

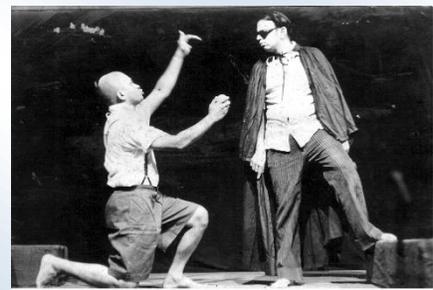


Garbo



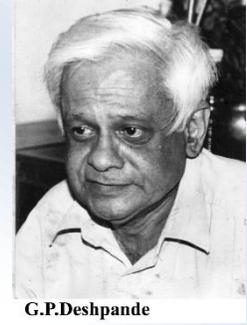
Vijaya Mehta

'Wada Chirebandi' has got such values. 'Wada Chirebandi' seeks to portray decay in values of Vidarbha bourgeois. I wonder whether Nagpur people are here, because they were here yesterday. It is a household which is typical of Vidarbha. I was told that Vidarbha people are very rich or rather they were very rich. So they had lot of money. Then the money started disappearing. 'Wada Chirebandi' is from children's lyric which is about moon and Mama Cha Wada. Chirebandi means Stone house. So that is the play. Mahesh Elkunchwar has not been very prolific. Then we have another playwright who unfortunately has stopped playwriting. I shall mention him very briefly. His name is Achyut Vaze. He was a very promising experimental playwright. He wrote a play called 'Chal Re Bhopala Thunak Thunak'. It has been produced in Hindi 'Chal Re Bhopala Thunak Thunak.' It is a very peculiar play. Then he wrote a play called 'Sofa-Cum-Bed'. 'Sofa-cum-Bed' was first produced by Satyadev Dubey. Achyut Vaze saw the production. Achyut Vaze did not like the production. So Achyut Vaze staged his own production. I wonder whether that sort of things happen here, especially in regard to Dubey because Dubey comes here and produces so many things. Anybody does not like Dubey's production or rather the author does not like Dubey's production. Then he can take inspiration from Achyut Vaze and do his own production. And both productions stars prominent people on our stage. Then after Achyut Vaze we come to a playwright called Satish Alekar. Satish Alekar is mainly known for his play 'Mahanirvana'. I have got a photograph here from 'Mahanirvana'. 'Mahanirvana' what is described as black comedy. It is what happens after a man's death. So you see the dead man going all around as if he is dead and not dead. In both ways he goes around. This comedy is full of satire of our bourgeois orthodoxy. The bourgeois orthodoxy is satirized here and it is also Pune orthodoxy. This is not the bourgeois orthodoxy in any other state. Pune 'Chitpavan Brahmins' – they have a peculiar moral code and they have a peculiar social sort of ambience. It is these people who are criticized there. Satish Alekar has written other plays, but frankly speaking, now that he is not around here, I can say that they are not worth talking about. He tried very hard. I don't know what has happened to him, I am a writer myself so I know how difficult it is to maintain one's standard. I am a writer in the sense I am a writer apart from being a critic, creative writer. So Satish had not been able to accomplish anything. Now his play is coming with Vijaya Mehta and that is called 'Doosra Samna'. This 'Doosra



Mahanirvana

Samna' - if Vijaya Mehta has taken it, it might be a very good play. There are many one act plays he has done. There is one outstanding play which I must mention and that outstanding play stands out without belonging to any moment and that play is by G. P. Deshpande. Deshpande is known to many people. He is an intellectual. He works in Delhi JNU. He is very much Marxist and all that. I am very new to all that things.



Pratibha Agrawal

Govind Deshpande.

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

I can't even pronounce the word 'Marxist' because I am nowhere near it. He is a Marxist, say he is a leftist. Some people object to be called leftist. They say what do you mean by leftist? So anyway we call him leftist for the time being. He is great intellectual and there is no doubt about it. He wrote one play called 'Udhwasta Dharamshala'. I don't know if it has been staged in Bengali.

Pratibha Agrawal

It was done in Hindi by Shyamanand Jalan.

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

Shyamanand Hindi, right you are. Om Puri did the Hindi version. Shyamanand Jalan did the Hindi production. But I have seen only the Marathi production. That is by Dr. Shriram Lagoo. Shriram Lagoo, Shriram's wife Deepa was there and there were other people. It is a brilliant play. Most unfortunately, G. P. Deshpande has not come up with anything like that afterwards. I have a very



Udhwasta Dharamshala

vague notion about 'Andhaar Yatra'. Opinions are very critical about 'Andhaar Yatra'. But I have read some of his scripts. He has given some scripts for reading and I have read some scripts and these scripts do not come to the standard of 'Andhaar Yatra'. I shall move a little away from chronology. I am sorry it does not come up in standard with 'Udhwasta Dharamshala'. Now we are on the subject of 'Udhwasta Dharamshala'. I shall mention a recent play which is written by a youngster which is a brilliant play. It is called

'Shatkhandha' and 'Shatkhandha' is written by a young playwright called Ajit Dalwi. Ajit Dalwi is a lecturer in Aurangabad and Ajit Dalwi is socio-political worker in that area. Aurangabad comes in region called Marathwada and Ajit Dalwi's play reminds you immediately of 'Udhwasta Dharamshala' and of the play called 'Padgam' by Arun Sadhu. We have an audio cassette of 'Padgam'. May be if we are in a mood we may have a hearing of 'Padgam' because 'Padgam' is a musical which is satirical musical. All these three plays they satirized contemporary Marathi politics, contemporary Maharashtra politics and 'Shatkhandha' forms part of the scheme of Theatre Academy of Pune which was founded by Ford Foundation for the discovery of playwrights. So four playwrights were discovered and among the four playwrights I think Ajit Dalwi is the best from what I hear. I could not attend their deliberations because this has been going on for three years. Then I shall mention another playwright and who is not an experimental playwright. He is actually the playwright of the mainstream and till the other day we could call him a young playwright. But we can't call him a young playwright now. He is Ratnakar Madkari. I call him an experimental playwright because of plays like 'Lok Katha 78' which has been done here in Hindi. I think 'Lok Katha' has been produced here?



Padgam

Pratibha Agrawal

Yes, it is going on now.

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

So 'Lok Katha' was based on certain incidents on Marathwada, certain Dalit women were raped and the police did not conclusively conduct the case or that is there. But Ratnakar Madkari's staging is brilliant. He uses lot of mind. He uses a lot of bodily action. For example, if he wants to suggest a wall or a hut, then two actors will stand near each other close to each other and when somebody wants to enter through the door in the wall then they will go apart. Then will make a room and they will suggest a door like that – he did lot of things. Then he used a lot of utensils. You know this village people and Dalit people - they have lot of utensils. So all utensils used in a very musical fashion. Because of such efforts, I call Ratnakar Madkari an experimental playwright. But otherwise he is a very bourgeois playwright. He is a very successful playwright.

One of our most successful playwrights. So these are the experimental playwrights. I shall now go back to mainstream. I already told you about Shirwadkar. I shall say a few words about other mainstream playwrights and then I shall make my concluding remarks.

Pratibha Agrawal

You have to talk about Marathi contemporary theatre.

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

What I am talking about?

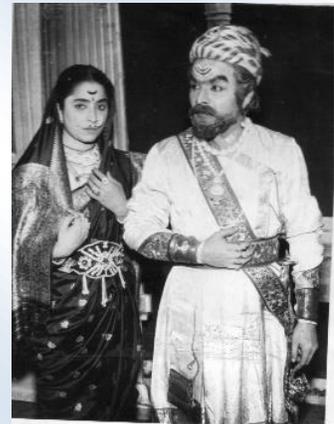
Pratibha Agrawal

You are talking about Marathi plays only. You have to talk about theatre also. So you will have to talk.

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

I will talk but don't threaten me like this. I am not talking about Marathi dramatic literature. But I must tell you about playwrights what are directors producing. I must tell you what they are producing. I am not going to run away.

So after Shirwadkar we have very successful playwright Vasant Kanetkar. Vasant Kanetkar has been extremely prolific. But there are always sliding standard in his writing. I will talk about first bloom of his writing and we come to a play I shall not mention every play but I shall mention a few plays. First play I like to mention is a historical play – 'Raigadala Jewa Jag Yete'. If you refer to my book, you will find some photographs in Marathi book of this play. 'Raigadala'. Is about the conflict between - Shivaji who is again fifty years old. Shivaji died very soon after he was fifty. Shivaji is fifty and Shambhaji, his son. Now, Shambhaji was a very irregular type of person. According to legend, he would go after women, he would drink, and all that sort of things. Type of son whom the father could not control. Now there is a conflict



Raigadala Jewa Jag Yete

between the two. There is a double conflict. The first of all, Shambhaji will be king after Shivaji. So Shivaji is worried that Shambhaji will not be the proper



Vasant Kanetkar

type of king. Secondly, he is his son. Father to son. I once asked Vasant Kanetkar there are always father and son themes in his writings. So, whether it is autobiographical because his father was a very eminent poet. He said no, no, it is not autobiographical. Conflicts are there. I will tell you where else they are. Take 'Matsyagandha', a mythological play. It is about Dushyanta, Bhisma and all that. So there is a sort of dramatic relationship between

Dushyanta and Bhisma. Father and son and there are many number of plays which has got such relationship. So that is why 'Raigadala Jewa Jag Yete' becomes a very important play. What is Kanetkar's achievement in the play? Kanetkar's achievement is this. He brought down Shivaji from the pedestal. These Maharana Pratap, Shivaji, they were all blessed by historical playwrights on a pedestal. Shivaji would always speak his dialogue with his sword in his hand and Shivaji would move the sword and speak the dialogue like that. Shivaji's worriers also. Kanetkar brought him down to human level. He told you about Shivaji's wife, about Shivaji's son, about the son's wife. There are photographs of Shambhaji's wife also. Shambhaji's wife that was acted by one of our very promising actresses – Ashalata, and you see these days Ashalata in TV serials quite a lot. She is of course not young any longer. So she is playing mothers and aunts and what not! And of course as usual she is playing in terribly bad TV serials. That is where she has ended up. Not to any point of us. That is how mechanism works. Then we have 'Matsyagandha' where Ashalata acted the role of Matsyagandha. It was a singing role and as for as the mainstream profession is concerned, I can tell you that 'Matsyagandha' is the fisher girl and Dushyanta falls in love with her. So Matsyagandha says I



Matsyagandha

can marry you only if you disinherit Bhisma – your son, and my son will have to be the king. So Dushyanta says Okay. The role of Dushyanta was played incidentally by a person who used to act with Bal Gandharva. He was in Bal Gandharva's company during the final years of Bal Gandharva. It was also a singing role and music was given by Jitendra Abhiseki. Jitendra Abhiseki has produced music to a number of plays and 'Matsyagandha' was one of them. So the first forty shows, they were a dead loss. Nobody wants to see 'Matsyagandha'. After the first forty shows, His Master's Voice brought out the records of 'Matsyagandha' and that is supposed to have made this play popular and the

play started running. This should be noted. If you are going to think about history of mainstream theatre or what you called professional theatre. These days in Bombay or Pune, we have a programme called 'Natyavalokan'. So suppose Sandhya Chaya, Jaywant Dalvi's 'Sandhya Chaya' is not running, there is a programme on Sandhya Chaya. So people see some excerpts from 'Sandhya Chaya'. So the people get excited and that is what they think. They get excited and they start going to the play. So, 'Natyavalokan' is used to promote plays. I don't know of whether this really is true. But that is what people believe in Bombay or Pune. Anyway, to come back to Kanetkar, another fine play is called 'Himalaya Chi Sawali' in which Dr. Lagoo is cast in the role of a real life historian. Kanetkar takes historian-not historian sorry, centenarian this is moulded after the character of Anna Saheb Karve. The historian appears in other plays called 'Vish Vriksha Chi Chaya'. Kanetkar is fond of taking these big figures in Maharashtrian history like Karve, then historians - any of the historians will do. Baba Amte in - I forgot the name of the play. 'Vada? . Baba Saheb Amte is the central figure of this play. So Kanetkar goes on plodding and produces a lot of plays. I shall mention only one play because it will be stylistic interest to you and that play is called 'Gagan Bhedi'. In 'Gagan Bhedi' - He has taken four plays of Shakespeare together. Let us say 'Hamlet', he took a little part from Hamlet, then he combined it with a little part from Macbeth, and then he combined it with a little part of Othello. You are astounded how this happens; but it did happen in his play. The he put on - the last thing is 'King Lear' of course and it is all cast in a modern mould. I told you Shirwadkar translated Beckett. Kanetkar took the whole theme of Beckett and cast it in a modern mould where the king is an industrialist. So you can see how interesting things are happening on Marathi stage. But all these has got a sort of gimmicky touch. So Beckett he transformed that way and Shakespeare's plays he transformed that way. Now all these people went to England and they staged 'Gagan Bhedi' there in London and then they went to Stratford-on-Avon. That was the first show of 'Gagan Bhedi' actually. They gifted the Shakespeare library with copies of 'Gagan Bhedi' and then they came back. People thought that they staged 'Gagan Bhedi' in Stratford-on-Avon. Well, they did not do that. They just gifted the copies of the play. I asked the main actor Mr. Todarmal (he played the main role in those days) two questions - first thing was 'Did you see any plays in England? He said, No, because we were having our rehearsals. I was shocked! People go to England and actors go to England without seeing plays! I was most shocked. Then I asked him, 'Did you go to Europe?' He said, No, because we did not get Visa in time etc. So he had a readymade explanation for everything and our friend Vasant Kanetkar was busy in only one activity. Well, apart from the activity that you imagine him to be in, the other activity was shopping! He was only shopping. So

this is the story of Marathi mainstream theatre that when you go abroad, you are disinclined to absorb anything of the Marathi theatre. I will take a few mainstream playwrights, but before I do that, I will tell you something about Shirwadkar's independent plays. There aren't many. 'Yayati ani Devyani' is a mythological musical. 'Veej Mahnli Dhartila' is about Rani of Jhansi which has also got some lyrics. It has got some ghazals which are sung by a Sakhi of the queen. But the best play known, (may be it has been staged here) is 'Nat Samrat' in which Shriram Lagoo recreated the role of an ageing actor cast in the mould of King Lear. Now King Lear had three daughters and two of the daughters went against him. Here, instead of two daughters, there was a son and a daughter. Married son and married daughter and they go against this actor. King Lear of course has no wife but this actor has a wife and there is a very moving sequence



'Natasamrat'
Production: Rangayatri, Mumbai

concerning that actor and the wife. King Lear has a fool and here too there is a character called Vithobha. Vithobha is like the fool. The whole mood of the play and whole progress towards tragedy is like 'King Lear'. But otherwise it is an independent play full of fine speeches. Dr. Lagoo gave those fine speeches like a true actor. I should tell you something about the theatre history of this play. Lagoo did two hundred shows of this play. There was another actor called Dutta Bhatt...he got Sangeet Natak Academy Award...he is unfortunately dead....Dutta Bhatt did four hundred shows in the same role and poor Dutta Bhatt told me that the people who were staging the play, want me to be made up exactly like Dr. Lagoo. So there could be nothing creative in his effort. Dr. Lagoo had a bald head and poor Dutta Bhatt had to have a similar head. So, all the actors after that put on the same make up. After Dutta Bhatt, it was Satish Dubhashi who acted the role. Satish must have done after may be hundred show. Then Satish must have had some differences with the producer. Then Chandrakant Gokhale, one of our really old actors, he must be 65 or so now, Chandrakant Gokhale is the father of the man who played Barrister - Vikram Gokhale so he acted that and last - Yashwant Dutta. I have seen in a few excerpts and Yashwant Dutta does a good job in the role. So that is 'Nat Samrat'. Shirwadkar has done many plays but I won't go into that. I have told you a little about Ratnakar Madkari. I will now tell you about Jaywant Dalvi - one of our most prolific playwrights and he has got an experimental urge but he writes in a traditional manner. Jaywant Dalvi is very well known for portraying the emotional stresses suffered by the old people, old couples. The first of these is 'Sandhya Chaya' produced by Vijaya Mehta with Madhav Vatve and Vijaya Mehta in the roles of old man and old woman whose sons are staying away from them.

One son stays in the US and one son later dies. It is a very tragic but very well written play. Then the recent play called 'Kalchakra' in which there is another old couple acted by Yashwant Dutta and Sudha Karmarkar. Sudha Karmarkar is one of the major actresses, also one of our major directors and a vanguard of our children's theatre movement. So Sudha Karmarkar and Yashwant played these roles in 'Kalchakra'. There are other plays like 'Durgi' and several other plays in which old people appear. According to me the best play of Dalvi is 'Barrister'. I think you know about 'Barrister'. There is this England-returned barrister who is pinning for some female love and then there is tenant – a husband and wife. The wife gives birth to a child. After that the husband dies and he develops an attraction for that lady. Because of the typical atmosphere of those times, this play is set in the early decades of this century because Lokmanya Tilak is mentioned there, Bal Gandharva records are played that are early 1914/15 or 1916. Tilak died in 1920, just before that. So that whole claustrophobic social atmosphere kills this man. It does not literally kill him – it drives him mad. There is some madness in the family. There is a mad character in the play and this fellow that is the brother also gets the madness. That is the end of the play. There are any numbers of playwrights in the mainstream. There must be quite a few in the experimental theaters. But I shall now turn to my 'farmaish' that is about the theatre.

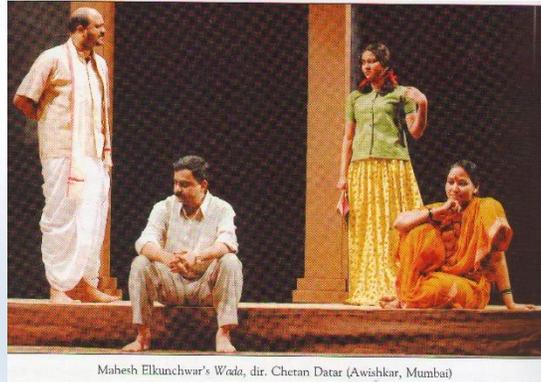
Pratibha Agrawal

No, no, we are not at all in a hurry.

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

First of all I must say that I consider the playwright very important. All these actors and producers and people who do the lighting they come next. They don't come first. First comes the playwright. Now the playwright for all you know, may be a very stupid fellow. Now take Shirwadkar for example, Shirwadkar is not very stupid but he is very insistent. He has got his own structure and he will not allow you to change the structure. You know, when you stage a play like 'Nat Samrat', it is extremely difficult to design the décor because Shirwadkar's structure runs like a railway train – one bogie and another bogie and another bogie. It is like a novel. In the novel, first chapter describes, for example, things in one particular area. Suppose one chapter describes things in Dadar and the next chapter describes things in Girgaon, the next chapter describes things in Porbandar - there is a sequence. But you can't have a similar sequence in a play. So when the actor leaves his son's house, he goes and starts to live with the daughter. In

between there is a scene where you have a railway station in Nat Samrat. So the railway station scene is there. Now, there is a box set for the son's house and suddenly you can't create a railway station unless you have the drop curtain. It was quite a job for play. In fact, a specialist was brought there to advice on décor. That reminds me, many years ago in London, many years ago, I saw Orson Welles in 'Othello'. Orson



Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Wada*, dir. Chetan Datar (Awishkar, Mumbai)

Welles, as you know in every way and his hundred percent scene, there was a one scene going on in you could see the workmen right on flat. So Shirwadkar's me of Orson Wales happens even in the

London Theatre. But it was not properly done. I mean the finishing touches had to be given. So Shirwadkar was very adamant about his structures. Ideally speaking the playwright, the producer and the director have to come together and they have to collaborate. Now in such a collaboration you see in the plays of Jaywant Dalvi, as they are produced by Vijaya Mehta...according to reports, Vijaya Mehta makes vast changes. When she produced 'Wada Chirebandi' she went to Nagpur, stayed with Mahesh Elkunchwar for several days and then through the process of collaboration the script of 'Wada Chirebandi' took its final shape. Similarly, the script of 'Sandhya Chaya', but more than 'Sandhya Chaya' the script of 'Barrister' – they have taken shape because of collaboration. So I come to the theatre people. Vijaya Mehta is the most respected. She had some training under Alkazi, some training under Adi Marzban and she started acting in experimental plays well as mainstream plays at the same time. When she was barely 25, she acted with great Marathi actors. With Nana Saheb Pathak she acted in Marathi version of Othello. She acted with Master Dutta Ram in 'Sawai Madhavacha Mrityu' by Khadilkar. She acted in other plays of Deval and Khadilkar and she acted on Sahitya Sangh stage. She acted in classical tradition which was very difficult. I will tell you one reason, why it is difficult. For example, like classical plays of Deval and Khadilkar you require a very sound diction. You can't use your slippery sounds – the sounds this modern girls use. You have to have chaste diction. I mean modern Maharashtrian girls. I don't know anything about Bengali girls. So she had to be trained in that and she used that. Even today I find her diction is a mixture of her own CKP origins and the diction she thinks is Brahmin diction. But it is not easy to imitate Brahmin diction. It is not at all difficult. For example, I am a Konkani speaking man. My mother tongue is

Konkani. I have been told that when I speak Marathi, I do speak reasonably good Marathi that is people do not realize that I am Konkani at the back of my mind. So similarly if there is a CKP background and you have to absorb the Brahmin diction, it is very difficult.

Pratibha Agrawal

What is CKP?

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

CKP is Chandraseniya Kayashtha Prabhu. I won't shock you – but they are specialized in eating mutton and fish. Now Vijaya Mehta - she was Vijaya Jaywant. She married Durga Khote's son. Unfortunately he died. She has two sons from Khote. So she became Vijaya Khote. Then she married Farooque Mehta. She has a daughter from Farooque Mehta and her sons are very active in theatre. But they are active in English theatre, not Marathi theatre. So she, Vijaya Jaywant, we will call her, appeared in one of the first plays of Vijay Tendulkar and she directed the play. This was in 1955. Vijay Tendulkar, Arvind Deshpande, Sulbha who later married Arvind Deshpande, Damu Kenkre – all these people formed a group who were inspired by the idea of doing something new in Marathi theatre. They are all our best directors. Vijay Tendulkar wrote a number of one act plays which were directed by Vijaya Mehta and which were directed by Damu Kenkre. The versatility that Vijay Tendulkar shows in his one act plays are hardly known to people. They know him mainly as playwright (of full length plays) but not as a writer of one act plays.

Parallel to these attempts in the Bombay theatre, we have the Pune people. In Pune we have Bhalba Kelkar. Bhalba Kelkar and Shriram Lagoo were together in the Progressive Dramatic Association. They produced this Kanetkar play



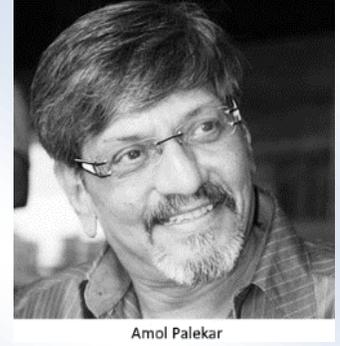
Mahesh Elkunchwar

called 'Vedyacha Ghar Unhat'. It is a brilliant play. There is a lot of madness in the play and Dr. Lagoo who was 30 years old put on make-up of an old man. I think Dr. Lagoo afterwards was always fated to play old people. He played in 'Nat Samrat', he played in 'Himalayachi Savli'. He was always playing old man, hardly playing men of his own age, except in play like 'Mee Jitalo Mee Haralo' by Vijaya Tendulkar. So Vijaya Mehta, Vijay Tendulkar and Arvind, they eventually started this group called 'Rangayan' and

'Rangayan' went on for a long time. 'Rangayan' did a lot of workshops, intimate

theatre. Rangayan first staged the plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar and Rangayan did other one act plays as well as Rangayan did some – you saw Vasant Rao Deshpande here yesterday - Vasant Rao Deshpande very unusually played a role in 'Mee jinkalo me harlo'. He played, if I remember it, he played the role of an actor. Lagoo was the main actor. In Pune Progressive Dramatic Association they produced the plays of Kanetkar and they produced the plays of other playwrights. Jabbar Patel was a leading actor in Progressive Dramatic Association. But in 1972, when Jabbar Patel directed Ghasiram Kotwal for Progressive Dramatic Association, there was a big controversy, a big irruption in Pune. I must tell you that Bhalba Kelkar started receiving obscene letters from the Pune people. I think there are Pune people who are capable of doing that because they have nothing else to do. Obscene letters in the sense not obscene in abstract but obscenely about their own wives and daughters and all that. It was very hurtful. So poor Bhalba, Jabbar has said in a recent lecture, he gave some lectures in Bombay recently and he said with tears in his eyes. This is what the situation is. So Jabbar said that I will move the production away from your wing and therefore about a hundred people left Progressive Dramatic Association and they started this organization called Theatre Academy. It was under the auspices of Theatre Academy that this thing went on. As far as the other workers in the theatre are concerned, one can't say much because we don't have a man who.... like Tapas Sen we can point out that this is our greatest lighting expert or like anybody else this is our greatest designer – things like that. We have had people like that but instead of talking about all those, I shall place two or three problems before you. First is the problem of musical drama. Yesterday I said that musical drama is the real characteristics of Marathi Theatre. Now, how do we revive this musical drama? People are making a lot of attempts but they are not arriving at a solution. From the audience point of view it appears to me that people are losing interest in music. People have a lot of interest in classical music but those people do not go to musical plays. Somehow they are not going. Vidyadhar Gokhale has written musical plays. Some of them moulded after the old classical plays. Quite a number of this plays remind you of Saubhadra, they remind you of Manapaman. Vidyadhar Gokhale writes plays but he has become less and less prolific. His last play was 'Bawannkhani' produced by Balchandra Pendharkar who has produced a number of his other plays also like 'Jay Jay Gauri Shankar'. He had not been very prolific. So Marathi theatre today, as far as the revival of the great form of musical is concerned, nothing is being done absolutely. We are facing a problem. We are facing an insoluble problem. Number two – I must mention that some years ago, at least fifteen years ago, there was a great exchange among theatres of our country. It was the greatest event in Indian theatre. There was Mohan Rakesh from Hindi, there was Badal Sarkar from

Bengal, there was Vijay Tendulkar from Marathi, and there was Girish Karnad and much later Chandra Sekhar Kambar. Chandra Sekhar Kambar came much later, Girish Karnad from Kannada. So there was a great confluence of these theatres in Marathi. There was a literal Badal Sarkar wave in Marathi which lasted for ten years. Badal Sarkar used to come to Bombay, conduct workshops and up to a particular point, every play of Badal Sarkar was staged in Marathi, every play. In fact, Badal Sarkar was such a fashion that the first Badal Sarkar play which I saw was in Gujarati, not even in Marathi. It was a version of 'Evam Indrajit'. It was staged in Gujarati and the Gujarati audience was used to commercial productions was terribly restless throughout the play. I saw 'Evam Indrajit' recently in English with Anmol Vellani and Dolly Thakore. But I remember the Gujarati production very vividly. It went over the heads of the audience. But Badal Sarkar's productions – many were staged. Some of them were flops like Sari Raat. Translated by P. L. Deshpande and staged by Arvind Deshpande was a big flop. But there were other plays Vallavpur ki Dantakatha. We have a photograph of Amol Palekar. It was directed together by Satyadev Dubey and Amol Palekar. It was the first play in which Amol Palekar came to the forefront. Amol Palekar incidentally was a big force in the experimental theatre. But very soon he went over to the cinema, I mean directing cinema and then he went over to the TV serials and at the moment I do not know what he is doing except that till the other day he was chairman of the Children's Film Society. Anyway, Amol Palekar was a valid force in the experimental theatre. Apart from other productions, the production which I remember is a production of 'Roshomon' based on the Kurosawa film. There was also a stage version of this 'Roshomon' on Broadway starring Rod Steiger and Claire Bloom. So they must have got the text from that and they turned it into Marathi and Chitra Palekar acted that lady and Amol Palekar acted one of the other characters. It was a brilliant production but unfortunately very badly received. Then he did 'Vasana Kand'. I have already referred to 'Vasana Kand' and he did a number of other plays. Both Chitra Palekar and Amol Palekar were very active in experimental theatre productions. We come back to Vijaya Mehta. Vijaya Mehta started Rangayan. No, I am sorry. I was talking about the influence of the Badal Sarkar and all that. That was one movement, that phase is gone. The last problem I would like you to tackle is what exactly the role of folk theatre in our theatre. Folk has been talked about. In my Marathi book, I have written extensively about this and I have said, I have maintained that folk theatre cannot be the only solution to our problems. I will give you the example of a Marathi play 'Ekach Pyala'. You know what happens in 'Ekach Pyala' - The lawyer who



Amol Palekar

takes to drink and starts harassing his wife and poor devoted wife etc. etc. It is in a middle class Marathi household. We can even say it is in a Pune household – typical Pune household because there is a scene in Bund garden. So it could only be in Pune. But it could be anywhere in Marathi middle class household. Now, can you cast this whole plot – can you cast this theme in the form of a folk theatre? Can you cast this as a Tamasha? You cannot. I am sorry to go into this at length. But let me just expand what I want to say. Folk theatre always has mythical characters. You know Jatra, Jatra has Lenin and Hitler and what not! Over size characters - ‘Ati Manush’. So similarly our Tamasha has Kings and Queens. Now, of course, those Kings and Queens are presented in a ridiculous manner. The King carries his own throne which is a folding chair actually. He carries a folding chair and that is his throne and he sits on the folding chair. But he is still a King. He is conceived as a King. Now suppose you come down



Chitra Palekar

to ordinary human beings, to the human beings you see is Vijay Tendulkar’s plays or Jaywant Dalvi’s plays or plays like Ekach Pyala, how you can cast that whole thing into the ambience of folk theatre? You can’t and therefore folk theatre cannot be the solution. Folk theatre can reinvigorate your style only up to a certain limit. Now in this context I want to mention Vijaya Mehta again because she staged a play called ‘Deva jinhe Karuna Keli’ which is Marathi version of Venkatesh Madgulkar – one of our great playwrights and writers – Venkatesh Madgulkar. Here is a photograph from one of Venkatesh Malgudkar’s folk theatre oriented plays. But the play which he wrote for Vijaya Mehta was a translation of... adaptation of ‘The Good Person of Schezuan’ by Bertold Brecht. Then Khanolkar did ‘Caucasian Chalk Circle’ – ‘Ajab Nyay Vartulacha’ – Khanolkar did a version of that. Now these were caste in a folk theatre mould because Mr. Fritz Benevitz, who is known as a Brecht authority, he said that your folk theatre comes nearest to Brecht’s idea of staging a play. So they cast it into a folk theatre mould. Then she did ‘Hayvadana’ which is also very much folk theatre oriented, very stylish. Then she did ‘Shakuntalam’ after Bharata Natya Shastra because we have had experimental theatre cast in the lines of Bharata Natya Shastra. For example, she did ‘Mudrarakshasha’...nothing to do with folk theatre but classical theatre. Mudrarakshasha by Vishakhdutta was done in a Bharat Natya Shastra style and Shakuntalam. The original ‘Shakuntalam’ she did in Hindi. She did it in Marathi also. So these were cast after Bharata. But let us forget the classical attempts. Let us come to the folk theatre attempts. They are very important. You know as well as I do that she went abroad and she worked very consistently in East Germany. She was honored by East German

Government for working on these productions for ten years. She has now turned to films which is not my subject. So that ultimately is the sum total of our contemporary theatre. You may ask me what is happening to Tamasha these days. The answer is nothing is happening to Tamasha because the time when Tamasha was really used in a new form and certain writers like P. L. Deshpande, Vasant Bapat, Vasant Sabnis were attempting to revive Tamasha and people like Dada Kondke, we have got a photograph here of Dada Kondke who is very famous in films started as a stage actor. He started as a Tamasha farceur. In that tradition he did a lot of good work. He did a play by Vasant Sabnis called 'Viksha majhi Puri Kara'. That was the first play which really brought Dada Kondke some fame and later on he turned to films. So Tamasha is not doing anything. As far as the experimental theatre is concerned, I would say that the annual competition run by the state government – the state government runs an annual competition of plays. That competition gives a big impetus to the writing of plays and till the other day I used to believe that every year there is a vast explosion of plays in Marathi. If people from all sorts of places... Aurangabad and Lator and all sorts of places are writing plays and some of these plays are quite interesting. I will just give you a few examples and then finish. For example, one of the entries at the government festival is no less a play than Peter Shaffer's 'Amadeus'. I was astounded that Peter Shaffer's 'Amadeus' should come so fast to the Marathi theatre. I have read the script but I read it in a hurry. Sometimes I am on the script committee but anyway this was a script which did not qualify because it was a translation. Translations are not considered but still I took the play home and read it in a hurry. I can't say whether it is a good translation or a bad translation....what I am trying to emphasize is that a play like 'Amadeus' which is still running in western theatres...that....and unfortunately I saw a film version of 'Amadeus' which is about Mozart and his relationship with Salieri...so



Sai Paranjpye

that turned into Marathi....but again what astounds me, after this play makes an appearance at the state drama festival, it must have been staged somewhere in Lator or Aurangabad. It was not one of the Pune-Nagpur-Bombay circuit. After the play is staged there, it is forgotten, it is not heard of. Nobody knows that 'Amadeus' was staged. That is the great tragedy of these festivals. We, of course, have workshops and people come and exchange views, lots of things are going on. Some people are doing excellent work. Not the youngsters but Playwrights like Sai Paranjpye. Sai Paranjpye I saw a very recent thing by Sai Paranjpye.....a very fine reworking of Tamasha called 'Tik Tak' - very well done, full of satire, full of humor, full of intelligent puns. Sai Paranjpye is a very bright playwright apart from being a filmmaker. So I would sum up by

saying that the theatre scene is still very mixed. Professionally, as a profession, things are very bad in Marathi stage industry. People say they are not making money, they are losing money, and people are not coming to see the plays. That is what they say. But I am not an authority on that – things are going on and things are going on in a hopeful manner. All I would say is that it is likely that the generation of Vijay Tendulkar and Vijaya Mehta will make way for a new generation and we already have some very fine directors like Kumar Sahni, who is from National School of Drama. I must tell you that a number of people are now engaged in professional or experimental theatre, they are from the National School of Drama. We have at least fifteen to twenty people who are from National School of Drama and working in the Marathi theatre. So that does credits to the National School of Drama in some way. We have got very fine playwrights.....I mean directors....we have a number of promising playwrights whom I haven't mentioned. I have already mentioned Ajit Dalvi. There is a playwright called Pra. La. Mayekar and he wrote a play for Dr. Lagoo. His plays are being staged and he is coming up. 'Agni Pankha' he wrote for Shriram Lagoo and Suhas Joshi which is a very fine play. Although you may go on hearing only of Elkunchwar and Vijay Tendulkar, there is a new generation which is steadily coming up and I hope that that generation will gain down. Thank you.

Pratibha Agrawal

Mr. Nadkarni must be quite tired but there may be some questions in your mind and he has already offered to answer them. So if you want to ask any question, you can.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

We have two questions. Question number one - we know very little of Marathi theatre visually. We have a lot of information which is second hand and second hand information never really gives you a picture. But we have a general impression that the level of acting in Marathi theatre as a whole, professional as well as experimental is very high, very high all over the place consistently. Now is that true or is that an illusion and there are a few very good actors and actresses that we have seen anyway?

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

The level of acting is 'very high' - I wouldn't say that. But the level of acting is high and you see this good level of acting even among the young actors. I can

now remember a number of young actors who are very good. For example there is no theatricality. But the point is that suppose you are in search of good plays what would set off good acting? You must have good plays. If the plays are bad, you would never turn to those plays. For example, we have good acting at all levels. We have good acting at the levels of Tamasha farces. Now in Tamasha farces an absolutely unlettered fellow or maybe he had gone to school and run away. Even there is some instinctive good comic acting and there is a sense of timing also. Similarly there are a number of actors who act by instinct in the bourgeois theatre. Let us call it the middle class theatre. They act by instinct, they are not trained. You know these workshops and all – they make no dent on them. Nobody goes to a workshop and some of the workshops are for very young callow people – I mean, they don't produce any result. So they are self-taught. In that sense they are self-taught.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

Could we say these self-taught actors become good actors or shape as good actors eventually from the challenge of regular theatre work in professional theatre? Or it just remains instinctive?

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

No, the regular work in theatre...that does shape them.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

That is the only way they can shape because they don't have any training.

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

That's right. They shape bigger and bigger challenges. I must also tell you, I must not give you wrong ideas. The point is, the average professional actor moves in a very narrow ambit. The plays which he is staging, for example, have got a playwright called Bal Kolhatkar. That type of playwright writes plays which are meant for a mass audience and they have very little literary value. So, you know, that particular actor – you know we have what is called the 'night system' of operating, probably it is the same system here, that is you stage one performance and at the end of the performance you get your 100 rupees or 200



P.L. Deshpande

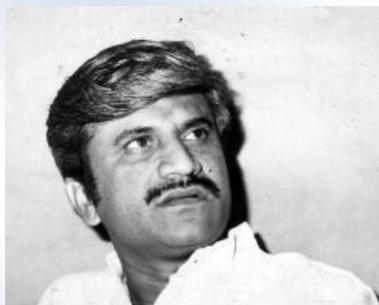
rupees and then you go. That is 'night system'. So there is partial insecurity in this profession. Another thing in our profession is, which may not be true about your theatre here, is the vast tours. They load themselves in buses and they go to Nagpur and go to little towns in Vidarbha or they go to Aurangabad and they go to little towns in Marathawada,



Teen Paishacha Tamasha

be it Latoor - places many of us have not seen. They go there and stage the plays. These tours also supposed to fetch them an income. So that is the average professional actor's life. As far as the plays are concerned, he moves in a very narrow ambit. He moves in an ambit of average workable plays, so there he has no chance of growing his wings. One other thing before proceeding further, there is one gentleman whom I somehow always forget and that is P.L. Deshpande. Just a few words about P. L. Deshpande - P. L. Deshpande has not written many plays. Actually he has written very few plays. He started with the number of adaptations. There was no special thought behind those adaptations. For example, he has adapted Gogol's 'Inspector General' or 'The Government Inspector'. Then he adapted Maugham's 'Sheppey'. Then he adapted Rudolph Besier's 'The Barretts of Wimpole Street'. Now, any revolutionary playwright shall not touch Maugham's 'Sheppey' or 'Barrettes of Wimpole Street' but still it was translated. His great play...his first independent play - 'Tujhe Ahe Tujhapashi' which is a satirical play and he puts two contradictory characters face to face. One is an epicure 'Kakaji' and the other is an Acharya who is a Gandhian who is very austere and who has a very strict code of ethics. They come face to face and there are other characters. So P. L. Deshpande has placed his play in Indore. It happens in Indore. P. L. Deshpande's three plays at least have got the background of marged princely states...princely states which have merged. You have got it in 'Ammaldar' that is 'Government Inspector'. We have got it in this 'The Barretts of Wimpole Street' and we have got it in 'Tujhe Ahe Tujhapashi'. So these are three plays with same type of backgrounds. There are other plays of his. He wrote plays after that - I would like to mention 'Oedipus' which he did from Sombhu Mitra's Bengali. You know he has mastered Bengali. He has been lecturing on Tagore and he has been struggling with the biography of Tagore. He says it is a great task and I still can't finish it. He is still at that task - The biography of Tagore. He did 'Oedipus' and we heard a fantastic reading of Oedipus and it so happened that it was during the days of emergency and so the

play began to take some color of the situation around us. It was a very unique experience. What made it more unique was among the audience was also a minister. This minister came out of sheer sort of admiration for P. L. Deshpande. All the same, he was a Congress minister and there was this play and there was 'emergency' around us. So it was a very unique combination. He has done 'Ti Phulrani' which is based on 'Pygmalion' by George Bernard Shaw and 'My Fair Lady' - a musical, a very versatile musical in which Satish Dubhashi used to act the role of Professor Higgins. Satish Dubhashi incidentally was his cousin. And then came this 'Teen Paisa Cha Tamasha' that is 'Three Penny Opera'. That was done by Jabbar Patel and with lot of rock music or pop music. Nobody knows firsthand what is rock music or pop music. We generally call it rock music and pop music. So we had this great rock-pop star Nandu Bhende who is the son of the actor Atmaram Bhende. Nandu Bhende is still a very popular rock-pop singer. So Nandu Bhende acted the role of Macbeth and he also devised the music for his own songs. It was a strange mixture but quite interesting - Teen Paisa Cha Tamasha. He also got inspired by Ajitesh Banerjee's version - Teen Poishar Pala which I saw in Bombay actually. Many years ago, I saw this Teen Paishar Pala in Bombay in the Shanmukhanand Hall. So P. L. Deshpande acknowledged his debt to Teen Paishar Pala also. Then he has done a number of one act plays, witty, humorous, satirical one act plays and lastly he has done his readings. His first reading was from 'Bataya Chi Chawl' which is a collection of humorous essays on Bombay's middle class life - 'chawl' life. So it is called 'Bataya Chi Chawl'. He read four of these sketches and one of them was a serious introspective sketch. Then he did other readings from other books and other writings. He is now very active as the director of NCPA, honorary director of NCPA. Last but not the least he has projected a number of our poets Maldekar, Khanolkar, Bolkar..... I heard his reading at Bhopal which he does with his wife. All his readings are done with his wife. They are very unique experience. I shall describe the Bhopal experience because it is the latest for me although I heard their other readings. Now, Bolkar was both Konkani speaking and Marathi speaking. Bolkar composed in Konkani and he composed in Marathi. He



Jabbar Patel

composed much more in Marathi. He was a very prolific poet and he was a very sensuous poet. So the sounds of the words.....they produced their own music. It is a unique kind of poetry. So the experience was this that P.L. and Sunita Deshpande, they were full of Borkar's poetry but they were also full of Bolkar's poetry but they were also full of themselves. Full of themselves that is full of each other. They were sort of - I can't describe it.....they were full of each

other....you know – the rapport – even rapport will not describe it. This rapport was so perfect that you could feel they were full of each other and they were full of each other because of the poetry. They were full of each other through the poetry. It was such an experience. It was very unique which you do not get and the experience belongs to the theatre I suppose. It does belong quite a lot to the theatre. This is one gentleman I forgot to mention. I think there is something very peculiar. I always forget to mention him.

Pratibha Agrawal

Just one question I would like you to answer. How would you place these modern musicals in Sangeet Natak Parampara? Quite a number of them are being done nowadays or have been done recently in last ten or fifteen years - Ghasiram Kotwal, Mahanirvan, then this 'Three Penny Opera' and many others – now are they not the modern musicals which are a direct outcome of the Marathi tradition?

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

Well, they are a movement away from classical tradition. We have got a very strict classical tradition of Marathi musicals and Ghasiram Kotwal or Three Penny Opera or Padgam for example they do not fit into classical tradition. I will tell you something about a talk which I attended recently. There was an American giving a talk and it was about modern western sculptures. He showed us specimens of sculptures which were all together very unnerving. It was not like sculptures as we imagine it to be. We can imagine a bust, we can imagine a statue and we can imagine the most stylish sculpture in marble or bronze. We can imagine somebody doing a bird which indicates that it is a bird but it is not like the bird. In other words we can imagine some experimental sculpture. The sculpture was beyond it. In other words, it was a deviation. It was a deviation. It was a branching out from traditional sculptures. So similarly these musicals they are a branching out. They are deviations from classical traditions. But all the same this branching out is highly necessary. It is like any other theatre form. Such a branching out is necessary.

Question

I have a very simple question. You mentioned P. L. Deshpande's readings while you were describing contemporary Marathi theatre. I was interested – do all

playwrights write for stage only or for reading also? Sometimes playwrights are interested in selling out books for reading. Are there such playwrights?

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

All our playwrights write for stage.

Question

And play-reading isn't it common?

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

In fact, no publisher will publish your plays unless it is being staged. You know, during Bal Gandharva's times or during these years, some fifty years back, copies of the plays were available at the first show itself. These days they are not available at the first show and they were sold at the first show and they would cost you only a rupee. Only one rupee would be the price and as I have told you, there were some people who would open a book like this and when Bal Gandharva was singing a song or anybody was singing a song they would say, yes, like that and generally one sees people like that today.

Question

You divided Marathi theatre into mainstream theatre and experimental theatre. Now in West Bengal we have a trend of commercial theatre and Avant Garde theatre which we sometimes refer as Group Theatre. But would you not say in Maharashtra there are three streams actually – the commercial, the professional and the experimental? I mean would you say that Vijaya Mehta's productions are at the same level as Bal Kolhatkar's plays? Could you make some distinction between these?

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

Quite a few of these terms are interchangeable. I have, in fact, started using the word mainstream which is a very convenient word, because when I want to say mainstream that gives some respect to commercial productions. So now in order to give more respect to commercial productions we start calling it professional production. Now suppose you pay the actors, suppose you change the ticket rates and suppose you earn money on that, now whether you earn 3000 rupees or whether you earn 3 lakhs of rupees, you will have to call it commercial. You don't like the sound of the word 'commercial' and therefore you start using the

word 'professional'. I will give you an example. You know, most of these plays of Dalvi directed by Vijaya Mehta in early stages, they were produced by Goa Hindu Association, Goa Hindu Association Kala Vibhag. They also produced 'Hayvadan', they also produced 'Shakuntalam'. They used to pay their actors and they used to earn some money, not much money, on the productions. Okay? That is one type of institution. They also are a public institution in the sense. They are involved in lots of public causes like educational causes. They would be running a library for example. They would be running a medical centre. They also do that - Goa Hindu Association. Now take Bal Kolhatkar. Bal Kolhatkar didn't do any such thing. Bal Kolhatkar earns money on his plays and productions and since Bal Kolhatkar is the proprietor, after paying the actors, after paying the theatre rent, and after paying the décor people....I was told at one time....many years ago I was told that décor people are not paid at all. There were décor directors who were not first paid. They were just asked to work, but they were not paid. I don't know what happens these days but we have some eminent décor directors. In fact my Marathi book is dedicated to two friends of mine and one of them was a famous décor designer. It was he who solved the problems of Nat Samrat. He was called in to solve the problems of Nat Samrat. So that Nat Samrat would not be something like Orson Wales productions because there were similar problems. Now this fellow retired from Marathi theatre in disgust. He left working for Marathi theatre in disgust and one reason was the treatment was very bad. I was told in those days, in 50s and 60s, décor directors were not just paid. Anyway, we are coming to Bal Kolhatkar. Bal Kolhatkar pays all these people then he gets some money which is his profit. So what exactly is the difference between Goa Hindu Association and Bal Kolhatkar's company? There is no difference at all. If you call Goa Hindu Association with people like Jaywant Dalvi and Vijaya Mehta 'commercial' - nobody would like it. Vijaya Mehta would not like to be called commercial. Then what is the difference? There is no difference.

Question

Would you not differentiate between the qualities of productions?

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

Yes, there is a slight difference. I mean these commercial productions which go round the whole of Maharashtra - their quality is not as good as the professional productions. Take for example Nat Samrat. The first Nat Samrat, the quality of production was very good but Bal Kolhatkar's quality is hybrid. But, you see, it is very easy to spot somebody and call him experimental, spot somebody and call him professional, spot somebody and call him commercial or spot somebody and

call him Avant Garde. It is very easy. I have used the word 'mainstream' merely for the sake of convenience. I will tell you why actually I do this. People who talk a lot about Avant Garde or experimental theatre, they do not talk at all about Shirwadkar or Kanetkar. Some of Kanetkar's plays are inferior plays but still he belongs to mainstream and we must always talk about the mainstream. So that is why, in order to assert that point of view, I have used the word 'mainstream'.

Pratibha Agrawal

I think one more question and that should be the last one please.

Question

Where will you place Dalit theatre?

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

Actually, I have very little acquaintance with the Dalit Theatre because you have to chase Dalit theatre here and there. I have seen the Dalit Theatre but I can't say anything about the Dalit Theatre. I do not have any information because much of it is staged in Pune. What happens, if you go to Pune and at that time they are not staging any play? This always happens. I have seen a few productions. I am a little puzzled because I have seen productions which portray Dalit life but which may not be products of the Dalit theatre. There is much a thing as Dalit theatre with its own playwrights and all that. I am not conversant with what they are doing.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

I have experienced over the years in Bombay – in the 60s till right now...I have noticed a general falling away of audience from the so called Avant-Garde theatre. I have never found the audience really big or very exciting even in the great Chabildas days. I have been there and seen Arvind's productions or Dubey's.....never very crowded. It was a small place - it was about 3/4th full every time I have been there. In the last 1 or 2 years when I have seen plays there.....recently I saw Dubey's 'Teen Ekank' at the Karnataka Sangh. There were about nine people or ten people for the night show and that was the 2nd or 3rd show. It is a sign of the times that the Avant-Garde theatre – and may be one of the reason I see is that all these people whether its Nasir or Dubey or Amrish or Vijaya, they are all so much in the cinema or the TV that they do not really have much time for Avant-Garde theatre to do it seriously enough. So occasionally

they do something, do it quickly, not enough publicity and they do not carry on audience with them. Even in 70s or 60s I could at least see audience growing or building up slowly. When I saw 'Vasnakand' for the first time, was the time I saw it in Chabildas, but for the last 2 or 3 years, I see a progressive falling away and Vijaya, when she was here with us, she acknowledged that somehow the more serious people who supported the Avant-Garde have fallen away from this theatre. All that remains is very cheeky executive crowd which support the Aleque Padamsee type of plays and very cheeky English musicals and that looks like very sad state of things if you come to speak of the really progressive theatre, theatre which experiments and tries to do new things - whether you call it Avant-Garde or where it gets absorbed into the mainstream whatever it is. But the serious theatre, committed theatre, worthwhile theatre, I think the state is very poor and bad in Bombay as bad as it is in Calcutta.

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni

Yes, I agree with you. But I must say, say about 10 years back, even when the Chabildas Hall was 3/4h full, even then, things were lively from the Avant-Garde movement. You see, I have seen several plays at Chabildas. For example, 'Udhwasta Dharamshala' I have seen in Chabildas. Amol Palekar's 'Party' – 'Party' written by Elkunchwar that I saw at Chabildas. It was a packed show. But as you say the audience has fallen off. This question about whether there is this decline in the Avant-Garde because of people getting involved in cinema and TV, I have never considered it properly because you see, for example, Dubey have not been in cinema in recent years, neither he has been in the TV. I can explain the Karnataka Sangh debacle. That can be very easily explained because Karnataka Sangh does not have the draw. You see, it is like this, suppose you have a Gujarati play in Bombay. You can stage the Gujarati play in certain theatres so that, people will come and see the Gujarati play. Suppose you stage the Gujarati play in Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangha, nobody will come and see the Gujarati play there. Suppose you stage a Marathi play at Bhaidas, nobody is going to see Marathi play in Bhaidas. But suppose you stage Gujarati play in Tejpal, Gujarati audience will come and see the play in Tejpal. They used to see plays like 'Gidhade' in Tejpal. But suppose you stage Marathi play in Tejpal, or if Dubey stages any play in Tejpal, nobody is going to come to that play. So, there is a certain tradition which a theatre builds around it and Karnataka Sangh has no such tradition and Karnataka Sangh has no such draw and Dubey is only doggedly putting on performances after performances there. That whole thing has to be filled up. Meanwhile, unfortunately, you know, Dubey has his quarrels. He quarrels with this theatre, he quarrels with that theatre. So I am told he has

something with Chabildas, something with the NCPA, so Dubey's productions never come to the NCPA where experimental theatre is doing very well. I saw Ajit Dalvi's play 'Shatkhandas' in the Tata experimental theatre and it had a very receptive all language audience - all language because of the membership of the NCPA. So Dubey is just doggedly staging the plays there without any thought of the response and most of the productions have flopped.

