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**THEATRE IN MAHARASHTRA**

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# **THEATRE IN MAHARASHTRA**

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## A Word from the Publishers

**T**HE three booklets, *Theatre in Maharashtra* by K. Narayan Kale, *Origin of the Marathi Theatre* by Bapurao Naik, and *New Directions in the Marathi Theatre* by Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni, now being published, are intended to introduce the whole panorama of the Marathi drama and stage to readers outside Maharashtra.

An attempt is made in Shri Naik's booklet to demonstrate that the origins of Marathi drama can be traced to a period preceding the late 19th century and that these lie deeply embedded in the evolution of this country's theatre itself. Shri Kale takes up the thread at the stage, when more than a hundred years ago, Vishnudas Bhave produced the first Marathi play in a form more or less recognisable by comparison with its modern counterpart. He spans the achievements of the century that followed. Shri Nadkarni deals with modern trends which crystallised in the wake of the revival signalled by the 1943 centenary celebrations of the Marathi theatre.

Although these booklets are written with a non-Marathi speaking reader in view, they have also to serve as a record of the past; as such the occasional mention of names which are bound to be unfamiliar has been inevitable.

It is hoped that the three booklets together will project a faithful picture of the history and progress of the Marathi theatre in the minds of all those interested in this important aspect of Maharashtra's culture.

New Delhi, 5th November 1967

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**T**HE professional theatre of Maharashtra has for long been a matter of pride and prestige for its people. The nostalgic memories of its glorious past still linger in the minds of its audiences, and some vestiges of its achievements can still be witnessed in the drama festivals of today.

The first permanent theatre in this region was built in Bombay in the year 1770. European amateurs performed English plays there, generally providing fare consisting of musical comedies, farces and occasional productions of Shakespearean and other serious plays. It was not, however, until 1842 that a private theatre, "available for European and Indian productions, at a fixed daily rent", was built in Bombay by one of its distinguished citizens, Jagannath Shankarshet. It was in this theatre that Vishnudas Bhave, the accredited founder of the Marathi theatre, gave performances of his plays while on tour in Bombay in 1853.

The theatre in Maharashtra was mainly inspired and influenced by the example of the British theatre of the Victorian era; but in some respects it had also a claim to have its roots in indigenous tradition of some sort. The Marathi theatre has the background of *lalit*, *tamasha* and the *bharud* plays which were immensely popular with the general public. They used to be extempore and topical in their story material and dialogues. No stage was required and no scenery either. A curtain of some sort, a few torches and a chorus of two or three men with crude musical instruments was all the paraphernalia required for these performances. The treatment generally

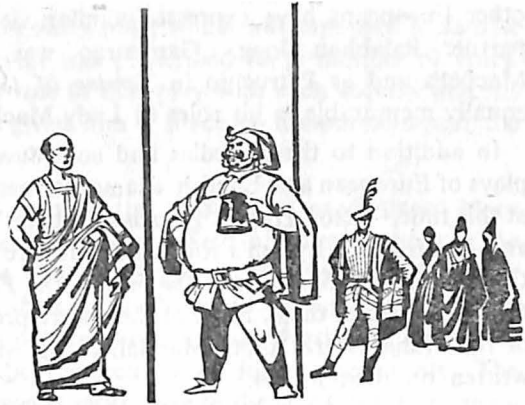


used to be coarse and obscene but the quality of the acting was realistically superb, especially in the contemporary satires. The modern professional theatre and these medieval forms of plays, however, soon parted company and began catering independently to their own different classes of audiences.

The first Marathi writer of an original historical and also a romantic play was V. J. Keertane. His *Thorle Madhavrao* was published in 1861 and his *Jaypal* in 1865. *Manorama*, the first social play in Marathi, was written in 1871 by M. B. Chitale and, but for its coarseness, the play can still be considered a very successful attempt for its construction of the plot, raciness of dialogue, and treatment of the theme.

A number of Shakespearean plays such as *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, *Tempest*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Cymbeline*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Winter's Tale*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *King Lear*, were translated into Marathi during the period 1860 to 1880 and most of them were performed on the stage by professional or amateur players. As these performances had no songs in them they were styled as "bookish plays" by their audiences, to distinguish them from the more popular *sangeet* plays of the day. These translations and their performances on the stage educated the taste of the audiences and ultimately ushered in a new era in the history of the theatre of Maharashtra.

The period of forty years, between 1880 and 1920, is the brightest epoch in the history of the professional theatre of Maharashtra. It began with the birth of the Kirloskar Natak Mandali. Annasaheb Kirloskar is the pioneer



of the tradition of the *sangeet* play on the Marathi stage. He translated *Shakuntala* from Sanskrit and wrote *Soubhadra* and *Rama Rajyaviyog* for his company. He completely broke away from the style of Bhave and introduced a new style of singing and a different form of play on the Marathi stage. It was an admixture of the Sanskrit classic drama and the Shakespearean play.

G. B. Deval who professed to be a disciple of Annasaheb Kirloskar adapted *Mritchakatika* of Shudraka and the *Kadambari* of Bana, under the title *Shapa Sambhrama*, and wrote his one and only social play *Sharada* for this company. *Sharada* is a literary masterpiece in Marathi and its popularity with the audiences of Maharashtra has suffered no change even to this day.

Shreepad Krishna Kolhatkar also helped to enrich the repertoire of the Kirloskar Natak Mandali but the most outstanding personality from this company, after Kirloskar and Deval, was Bhaurao Kolhatkar. His memory is still cherished most affectionately and appreciatively by the lovers of theatre in Maharashtra, both as an actor of note and a singer of exceptional ability.

From 1882-83 on to his death in 1922, Ganpatrao Joshi was the greatest Shakespearean actor in India. He interpreted *Hamlet* as a "tragedy of thought". An English I.C.S. has stated that it was a revelation to him that the dramatic art of India had attained such a high pitch as that displayed by the Shahunagarwasi Company. "Ganpatrao's rendering of the great characters of Shakespeare", he writes, "is beyond all praise. He is a finished actor of the highest quality and of marvellous talent." Many



other Europeans have expressed similar views about Ganpatrao and his partner Balabhau Joag. Ganpatrao was superb as Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth and as Petruchio in *Taming of the Shrew* while Balabhau was equally memorable in his roles of Lady Macbeth, Iago and Katherine.

In addition to the tragedies and comedies of Shakespeare several other plays of European and English dramatists were staged in the Marathi theatre at this time. Victor Hugo's *Hernani*, Schiller's *Robbers*, Sheridan's *Pizzaro* and *Rivals*, Lord Lytton's *Richelieu*, Moliere's *Tartuffe*, *The Mock Doctor*, *Citizen Turned Gentleman*, *The Miser*, *The Forced Marriage* and Addison's *Cato* are some of them. Most of these were presented by the Shahunagarwasi or the Maharashtra Natak Mandali along with several other original ones written on their model.

The Maharashtra Natak Mandali, established in the year 1904-5, was another important institution which rendered signal service in raising the standard of production of Marathi plays and securing a place of respect in society for the actor. Ganpatrao Bhagwat was the most dominant personality of this company and he is the only other actor from the Marathi stage whose name can be mentioned in the same breath with Ganpatrao Joshi's.

The highest achievement of the Maharashtra Natak Mandali was its discovery of K. P. Khadilkar as a dramatist. His play *Kanchangadchi Mohana* was staged by the Shahunagarwasi Natak Mandali but was an utter failure in their hands. The Maharashtra Natak Mandali, however, revived it with a thumping success and Khadilkar's reputation as a dramatist of the first order was firmly established. He wrote about half a dozen plays for the Maharashtra Natak Mandali, each proving more powerful and popular



than its predecessor. His play *Keechakwadha*, which was supposed to satirise Lord Curzon and his Government was proscribed for a number of years. Ganpatrao Bhagwat played his role in that play with such success that his interpretation of Keechak has given him a place of honour amongst the immortals of the Marathi stage.

The theatre of Maharashtra reached the peak of its professional glory by about 1920. So far it had no rival in the field of entertainment. The advent of the cinema however challenged this monopoly and made the nabobs of the theatre restless in their minds. Many of them, however, hoped that the cinema would, in due course, die a natural death and their own profession would once again be restored to its former popularity. The playwrights of the time were however more alive to the spirit of the changing times and an altogether fresh and modern note was heard in B. V. Warkerkar's *Sanyashacha Sansar*. Warkerkar, who was essentially a man of the theatre, had a passion for the reform of the theatre and tried every means within his power to gain that end. The prejudice against all his modern methods was, however, so strong amongst the other producers that he never received the attention he rightfully deserved from them and consequently could not achieve any conspicuous success in directing the Marathi stage along new lines.

The eighth of July 1921, is a red-letter day in the annals of the professional theatre of Maharashtra, which had by that time reached the summit of its glory. The joint performance of Khadilkar's musical play, *Manapman*, on that day, put up by the Gandharva and the Lalitkaladarsha Natak Mandali, with Keshavrao Bhosle and Balgandharva playing Dhairyadhara and Bhamini, was indeed the acme of its achievement.





The splendour and prosperity which this performance symbolized were, however, not to last long on the Marathi stage. Within a few months of this memorable event Keshavrao Bhosle died of typhoid (4th October 1921) and the resplendent Lalitkaladarsha Natak Mandali was reduced to the miserable plight of a ship without a captain. About a couple of years earlier the Marathi theatre had suffered another mighty blow in the sudden and premature death of R. G. Gadkari (23rd January 1919), the most brilliant poet and dramatist of his age. His *Punyaprabhav* and *Premasanyas* had been holding the stage for a number of years, but his best plays, however, were to see the limelight only after his death. The Gandharva Natak Mandali produced *Ekach Pyala* (1919) and the Balwant Sangeet Natak Mandali his *Bhawabandhan* (1919). His unfinished play, *Rajasanyas*, has been time and again produced on the Marathi stage.

The Gandharva Natak Mandali produced several plays by K. P. Khadilkar, S. K. Kolhatkar, N. V. Kulkarni, Y. N. Tipnis, V. S. Gurjar, V. S. Desai and others; but none of them reached the standard and popularity of *Ekach Pyala* or *Manapman* and *Swayamwar*.

Besides *Bhawabandhan*, *Rajasanyas* and *Vedyancha Bazaar* by Gadkari, the Balwant Natak Mandali produced the plays of W. W. Khare, S. K. Kolhatkar, N. C. Kelkar, Wamanrao Joshi, V. D. Sawarkar and V. C. Bedekar. Most of these had historical or mythological backgrounds and, like the cloak and dagger plays of the Western theatre, were full of fantastically thrilling situations and chauvinistic harangues. Some of them, like *Ranadundubhi* (1927), however, proved good theatre, especially



when they provided ample scope for the exploitation of musical values to an able singer of Master Dinanath's calibre.

On the death of Keshavrao Bhosle in 1921, the property rights in Lalitkaladarsha Natak Mandali passed on to S. N. Chaphekar and V. B. Pendharkar. Both these young men were very lucky in being able to secure the active co-operation and guidance of B. V. Warerkar in their endeavour. Warerkar was associated with the Lalitkaladarsha ever since 1916, and two of his plays, *Hach Mulacha Baap* and *Sanyashacha Sansar*, had become very popular on its stage.

Lalitkaladarsha produced his *Satteche Gulam* (1922), with Pendharkar and Chaphekar playing Vaikuntha and Nalini respectively. The play was an instantaneous success. Its decor, by P. S. Kale, had several new features hitherto unnoticed on the Marathi stage. The lighting arrangement and the realistic atmosphere of the sets charmed its audience with a new experience in the theatre.

The success of *Satteche Gulam* was, however, followed by the disastrous debacle of their next venture, *Turungachya Darant* (1923), and the company was suddenly reduced to a miserable financial plight. It took them about two years to come back to normal conditions. In the meanwhile Chaphekar had dissolved his partnership in the concern and Pendharkar became the sole proprietor of the company, with Warerkar as his trusted author, guide and philosopher.

*Sonyacha Kalas* by Warerkar was put on the boards at the beginning of 1932 and it proved a good source of income for its producers. It was followed



by *Swayamsewak* (1934) by the same author, but somehow it did not find favour with the audience although it was in no way inferior to its predecessor. Pendharkar with his flair for novelty and adventure got himself involved in a project for producing motion pictures and incurred such heavy financial liabilities that they ultimately proved to be the doom of his company and himself (1937).

Yet another theatrical company which suffered dire financial consequences and ultimate extinction on account of its adventures in film production was the Balwant Natak Mandali (1933). Balgandharva also closed down his concern (1934) and joined hands with the Prabhat Film Co. of Poona, to produce his own pictures in partnership with them (1935). After one picture, however, he broke the partnership and returned once again to the theatre to follow his original profession, in a manner suited to his needs and temperament.

T. S. Karkhanis of the Maharashtra Natak Mandali retired from active theatrical business in 1918, handing the company over to K. T. Date and Dattopant Deshpande. By 1931 Date parted company with Deshpande and joined the Samarth Natak Mandali which was also an offshoot of the Maharashtra Natak Mandali (1927). There he produced what may be called the first modern realistic play in Marathi, *Sarala Devi* (1931), written by W. W. Bhole. Date gave a magnificent performance of his role in this play but the audiences were not sympathetically disposed towards the theme of the play and its treatment by the author.



The Samartha Natak Mandali had about half a dozen partners but Vishnupant Aundhkar was its mainstay and refuge. He wrote three plays, two of which received an enthusiastic ovation from audiences of all classes. He had an unfailing eye for "stage effect" and a very sensitive ear for the phonetic values of the spoken word. He had an almost uncanny sense of what the audience would or would not like.

Almost right up to the late twenties the theatrical companies were the only agencies for the public entertainment of the middle classes of Maharashtra. By that time, however, the cinema had gradually begun to assail their monopoly and by 1931, when the motion pictures began to talk, the professional Marathi theatre was shaken to its foundations and its very existence threatened with extinction.

The talking picture of those days was more or less akin to the stage play and had, in addition, several other features which a play lacked. It was therefore but natural that the motion picture should steal a march over the stage play in the esteem of the average theatre-goer. Seeing a picture was much cheaper than witnessing a play, and the film made fewer demands upon his understanding than the play did. As the popularity of the cinema increased, more and more picture-houses were required for putting up shows and naturally those play-houses which were not sufficiently frequently rented by theatrical companies were, as a matter of course, immediately converted into cine-halls and cine-theatres. This completely flabbergasted the actor-managers and the proprietors of theatrical companies. They



began to feel a dearth of theatres for putting up their shows, both in cities and in small towns.

While the profession was thus embarrassed about its present and future policy some of the amateurs decided to take the matter into their own hands and launch theatrical enterprises to produce plays of new types on the stage, at their own risk and on their own initiative, on the lines of the Little Theatres in England and the Community Theatres in America. P. V. Altekar who had considerable experience of amateur theatricals, persuaded some of his friends and a couple of society ladies to co-operate with him and appear on the stage in a new play he intended to produce. The play, *Baby*, was first staged on 19th November 1932, under the banner of the Radio Stars. It was written by S. N. Bende, who also appeared as an actor in its production along with Altekar, Nandu Khote, Nayampalli, Girija Kelekar and others.

The Radio Stars, however, did not survive more than a year or so and their place was taken by still another band of youthful lovers of theatre who organized themselves into a limited liability company, called the Natya Manwantar Ltd., with the object of introducing the modern intellectual play of Europe to the Marathi reader and theatre-goer. Theirs was an organized active protest against the customary style of acting, against theatricality, against declamation, against painted cloth curtains that rolled up and down at the end of scenes, against over-emphasis and exaggeration, against the use of songs in the midst of dialogue, against the star-system, against plays written for the benefit of this actor or that, and against the practice of men playing women's roles.



S. V. Wartak was the genius behind this organization and his optimism and vigour were the life-blood of its activities. Anant Kanekar, K. Narayan Kale, Dr. G. Y. Chitnis and Keshavrao Bhole were responsible for its ideological moorings, while Keshavrao Date was in charge of the practical side of its production and T. S. Karkhanis served as a venerable guide and philosopher. P. Y. Altekar joined this group as an actor and an associate.

Besides *Andhalyanchi Shala* (1933) Wartak wrote *Lapandav* and *Taxshila* for the Natya Manwantar Ltd., but they did not click with the audience and the enterprise suffered heavy losses. There were differences of opinion amongst the promoters and the concern was closed down after a life of about two years. Even in this short span of life, however, it blazed a trail which everyone coming after it has necessarily to follow and, if possible, attempt to emulate.

Just a few months prior to the first performance of *Andhalyanchi Shala* in Bombay P. K. Atre's first hilarious comedy, *Sashtang Namaskar* (1933), had appeared on the stage in Poona. It was produced by the Balmohan Natak Mandali of Damuanna Joshi. The Balmohan was originally founded as a children's theatrical institution but, the original performers now having outgrown their childhood, it was necessary for the founder to provide them with some theatrical fare suitable for adults. *Sashtang Namaskar* was, therefore, the first choice for that new enterprise.

Atre followed with about a dozen plays, in approximately the same number of years, for Balmohan Natak Mandali. Almost every single one of them was a success and paid both the author and the company sumptuous





dividends. Everyone of Atre's plays, whether it be a comedy, tragedy, melodrama or farce, has been a hot favourite with the audience. Of these *Sashtang Namaskar*, *Gharabaheer*, *Udyacha Sansar*, *Lagnachi Bedi*, *Vande Bharatam*, *Mee Ubha Ahen* and *Jag Kay Mhanel* have a high place of honour in Marathi dramatic literature.

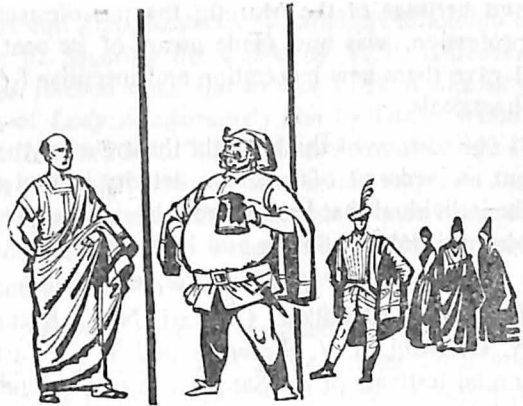
By about 1935 most of the major theatrical companies had closed down their business and most of the leading actors and authors were absorbed in the film industry.

The Natya Niketan, the last professional venture worth the name, came into existence in these circumstances. Its founder, M. G. Rangnekar, was a journalist and a motion picture producer. He brought his experience of these twin former loves of his to bear on this new adventure in the theatrical world and made a bold bid for immediate commercial success.

Rangnekar writes his own plays and also directs them himself for his concern. Jyotsna Bhole, who won her laurels for her excellent portrayal of Bimba in *Andhalyanchi Shala* in Natya Manwantar, is his trump card and she is starred in almost all his productions.

Rangnekar is a prolific writer and has about a score of plays to his credit. *Kulavadhu* is the most popular of all of them, and has been successfully performed on more than a thousand nights since its first production.

The decade between the years 1932 and 1942 was the best period in the life of the film industry in Maharashtra and one of complete black-out for its theatre.



It was just about a hundred years ago that the first performance of the first Marathi play was staged by Vishnudas Bhawe, for the then Chief of Sangli, on 5th November, 1843, and proposals to celebrate the centenary of that memorable occasion were mooted through the columns of newspapers by a number of enthusiasts of the theatre. Dr. A. N. Bhalerao of the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh and Prof. S. N. Banhatti of Nagpur rendered yeoman service, for the propagation of the idea amongst the people of Bombay Presidency and the Central Province, and in canvassing the sympathy and co-operation of the erstwhile professionals of the theatre. The response from all quarters was spontaneous and encouraging, and what was just an idea, in the beginning, became a movement, gathering greater and greater momentum and more and more popular support.

The centenary was celebrated on the date fixed for the occasion under the presidency of V. D. Sawarkar and was attended by mammoth crowds of delegates and visitors.

The most memorable feature of this festival was the performance of *Sharada*, written by G. B. Deval. Chintopant Gurav, who was one of the actors of the original production, played the character of Shrimant, a rich old coxcomb desperately eager to marry a young bride.

Smaller festivals at various other centres were also celebrated with great enthusiasm, and most of the well-known actors took part in them. There was a great awakening of interest in the hearts of the people about plays, plays and their authors. A whole generation of young men and women who had almost never come in contact with the real living tradition

and heritage of the Marathi theatre, on account of the evanescence of its profession, was now made aware of its past glory and achievements, and it gave them new inspiration and incentive for their own activity in amateur theatricals.

The history of the Marathi theatre after the centenary festival, is nothing but an account of amateur activity in that field; and the institution and the individual that have played the most important part in it are the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh and its secretary, Dr. A. N. Bhalerao.

Almost all the major plays of the old masters, like Kirloskar, Deval, Kolhatkar, Khadilkar, Gadkari, N. C. Kelkar, M. N. Joshi, S. P. Joshi, W. G. Joshi, B. V. Warerkar and S. V. Wartak, have been revived in the annual festivals of the Sangh with new splendour and appeal and have met with immense popularity among new audiences. Dr. Bhalerao who always had a watchful eye on the proceeds of the festivals was very particular in selecting a cast of actors and actresses that would easily and automatically attract the attention of the theatre-goers.

The bill of fare of the Sangh festivals was not always cluttered with old plays, but performances of new ones, mainly translated from the masterpieces of British and European dramatists, were also included in them. *Doorche Dive* (*An Ideal Husband* by Oscar Wilde), *Vaijayanti* (*Monna Vanna* by Maurice Materilnck) and *Rajmukut* (*Macbeth* by Shakespeare) were translated by V. V. Shirwadkar, who also wrote two more original plays, *Kounteya* and *Dusara Peshwa* for the Sangh. Anant Kanekar translated Sir J. M. Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows* and John Galsworthy's *Strife*



under the titles *Patangachi Dori* and *Zunj*, respectively. Madhav Manohar's *Sashachi Shinge*, a translation of *Squaring the Circle* by V. P. Kataeve, was also produced on the Sangh festival stage and so was V. H. Kulkarni's translation *Shobhecha Pankha* of *Lady Windermere's Fan* by Oscar Wilde. Atre translated Moliere's *The Miser* while C. Y. Marathe wrote an original historical play, *Honaji Bala*, for the Sangh festivals. In addition to producing plays in the festivals, the Sangh players went sometimes on tour to some of the important centres in Maharashtra, such as Poona, Nasik, Nagpur and also to cities, such as Belgaum, Ahmedabad and Delhi, outside it.

Besides the veterans of the theatre the Sangh included and encouraged fresh amateur and professional talents and also invited other local and outside groups to participate in its festivals. Out of the new professional actors whom the Sangh made popular through its festivals the names of Master Dattaram, Dattopant Angre, Ram Marathe, Suresh Haldankar and Mama Pendse stand out prominently, while amateurs like Anant Wartak, Daji Bhatavdekar and a few others have been brought to the appreciative notice of the audience.

Another literary body to emulate the worthy example of the Marathi Sahitya Sangh and to follow in its footsteps was the Vidarbha Sahitya Sangh of Nagpur. It has been able even to out-distance the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh in certain respects on account of the substantial grants it has been able to receive from the old C. P. Government, from time to time. Its drama department has had the benefit of the leadership of capable and experienced men of learning and playwrights of note including Kusumavati





Deshpande, W. W. Bhole, S. N. Banhatti, Nana Joag, Gomkale and others. The late Nana Joag was a dramatist of imagination and purpose and his profound knowledge of politics and psychoanalysis gave his plays, *Chitrashala*, *Sonyache Dev* and *Bharati*, a distinct flavour and character.

It need not be thought that the senior entrepreneurs of the professional theatre were altogether inactive in the forties. Most of them were actively co-operating with the efforts of the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh whenever they were asked to do so. Chintamanrao Kolhatkar was also associated with the Rajaram Sangeet Natak Mandali (1939) of G. M. Londhe, the last hero in the *sangeet* tradition and the Natya Niketan of M. G. Rangnekar in its earlier days (1941). He also tried to organise a couple of other enterprises and produce plays on behalf of them. His Lalit Kala Kunj staged a very good production of a war propaganda play, *Yuddhachya Savalya*, by G. D. Madgulkar. He was also responsible for the direction of *Jiwashiwachi Bhet* and *Doulat Jada* (1950) written by B. V. Warerkar and produced by Sarvodaya Kala Mandir, sponsored by the Bombay State Government.

The most outstanding production to Chintamanrao's credit during this period is that of *Zunjarrao* (*Othello* by Shakespeare) adapted for the stage (1890) by G. B. Deval. Kolhatkar collected a very brilliant cast for his production, including Baburao Pendharkar, K. Narayan Kale, Vasant Thengdi, Raja Paranjape, Snehaprabha Pradhan and Kusum Deshpande.

Parshwanath Altekar founded his Little Theatre in 1941. He produced B. V. Warerkar's *Udati Pankhare*, *Mazya Kalesathi* and *Saraswat* on behalf of this institution.



K. Narayan Kale produced Anant Kanekar's *Gharkul* (*A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen) with his own troupe (1941). In 1949, Kale produced for the Indian National Theatre, Bombay, the play *Fas* written by Anant Kanekar. It was an adaptation of a European play, with only two characters in it. Kale and Leela Chitnis played the two roles.

As there was no professional theatre in existence in this period, all the new plays that were written and published were either for reading or for production by the amateur groups. Most of them are, however, translations of famous foreign plays. Madhav Manohar introduced Karl Kapec, Clifford Odets and J. B. Priestley to his readers through the translations of *Mother* (*Aaee*), *Waiting for Lefty* (*Davarechi Wat*) and *Dangerous Corner* (*Zoplele Nag*). *The Inspector General* by N. V. Gogol and *The Inspector Calls* by J. B. Priestley were translated by P. L. Deshpande and Vyankatesh Vakil under the titles *Ammaldar* and *Sarech Sajjan*, respectively. P. L. Deshpande is also responsible for the translation of Maugham's *Sheppey* under the title *Bhagyawan*.

Out of the other authors who have written original Marathi plays, two names, C. Y. Marathe and G. K. Bhat, stand out distinctly. *Honaji Bala* by Marathe and *Grihadaha* by Bhat are works of high literary merit. Dr. A. V. Warty, H. V. Desai and M. K. Shinde have also written good original plays. Dr. A. V. Warty's *Raneecha Bag*, Shinde's *Andolan* and *Janabai* and H. V. Desai's (1947), *June Ten Sonen* and *Ardhya Watevar* deserve mention. Muktabai Dixit's *Jugar* and Tara Wanarase's *Kaksha* are two powerful social plays.



A large number of plays have also been written and produced by members of the working classes. There is quite a crop of playwrights of this type in the labour localities of Bombay, out of whom L. K. Ayre and Vasant Dudwadkar deserve recognition.

Since the attainment of national independence, the Central and State Governments have rightly recognised and appreciated the importance of theatre as the index of the culture of a nation and begun taking steps to help its cause. The establishment of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the creation of national awards of prizes to the veterans of the theatre arts, and the grants in aid to various worthwhile theatrical activities have given a new fillip to amateurs and the number of amateur institutions have increased in leaps and bounds.

The main centres of this activity are Bombay, Nagpur, Poona, Nasik, Ahmednagar, Kolhapur, Sholapur, Satara, Sangli, Belgaum and Aurangabad. The Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh, the Mumbai Marathi Granthasangrahalaya, Bombay; the Progressive Dramatic Association, the Social Club, the Maharashtra Kalopasak Mandal, Poona; the Vidarbha Sahitya Sangh, Nagpur; Kalopasana Mandal, Belgaum; Vidarbha Natya Mandir, Amraoti; Abhinav Kala Mandir, Satara and Abhinaya Sadhana Mandir, Sholapur, are some of the amateur institutions which have rendered creditable service to the cause of the theatre by organising drama-festivals, series of lectures on topics of theatrical importance, tutorial classes for amateur actors and seminars on theoretical and technical aspects of theatre arts. Many of them have encouraged new playwrights by arranging competitions of plays and producing the winning entries.



In 1955 the Bombay State Government started organizing drama festivals in Marathi, Gujarati and Kannada and awarding substantial cash prizes for new plays, productions, and individual actors and actresses with a view to encouraging dramatic activity in the State. The same practice has been continued by the Maharashtra State Government; and, as Marathwada and Vidarbha are now integral parts of Maharashtra, the theatrical activities in those regions are brought in line with those of the Marathi-speaking parts of the former Bombay State. The amateur institutions in Vidarbha and Marathwada are now enthusiastically participating in the Maharashtra State drama festivals and proving their merits by winning a number of prizes in the competitions.

The annual State drama festivals have also encouraged the writing and producing of new plays. Vijay Tendulkar, Vasant Kanetkar, Ratnakar Matkari, Purushottam Darvekar are some of the dramatists who have shown great promise in their work. *Madhalya Bhinti*, *Chimnichen Ghar Hoten Menachen*, *Vedyache Ghar Unhant*, *Varyavarcha Mushafir*, *Chandra Nabheenchha Dhalala* are a few of the new plays which were produced on the festival stage and possess a considerably high standard of literary and aesthetic values.

These festivals have further helped the amateur institutions to make a headway in their productions of plays both in the standard of acting and decor and to introduce new directors of plays to their audience. Out of these, Bhalba Kelkar, Raghunath Ksheersagar, Damu Kenkare, Vijaya Jaywant are some names which command ready recognition.





Apart from the amateur institutions there are still a few professional companies of the old type touring in the rural and urban areas of Maharashtra. Out of these the Natya Niketan and the Lalit Kaladarsha deserve special mention. Bhalchandra Pendharkar is the proprietor of the latter and he is very diligently emulating the example of his late father, V. B. Pendharkar. P. B. Bhawe, Bal Kolhatkar and Vidyadhar Gokhale are the new playwrights whose works he has popularised on his stage. The Natya Niketan has recently entered a period of partial inactivity. Some plays by Rangnekar himself and by G. N. Dandekar and L. N. Bhawe have, however, been produced even during this time.

Since the award of the first prize to the performance of *Bhaubandki*, produced by the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh, in the first National Drama Festival, held in New Delhi (1954), veterans of the Marathi stage like Balgandharva, Ganpatrao Bodas, Chintamanrao Kolhatkar and Nana-saheb Phatak have been honoured by the Sangeet Natak Akademi with gold medals for their services to the Indian theatre while B. V. Warerkar was graced with the title "Padmabhushan" by the President of India. Several theatrical institutions have also received grants-in-aid for some of their schemes and projects conducive to the progress of the theatre in the country.

The Marathi Natya Parishad is the central organization of the entire theatrical activity, whether professional or amateur, in Maharashtra and, although it has had a chequered career, it has a tradition of more than half a century. It was reorganized in 1955 and since then it has been working with renewed vigour for furthering the interests of the Marathi theatre and drama.



Well-equipped play-houses is a crying need of the Marathi theatre. The Central and the State Governments have so far concentrated their attention on the construction of open-air theatres in cities and urban areas; but now they seem to have been persuaded to the view that a chain of play-houses with properly enclosed stages and auditoria is needed for a really stable and progressive theatrical profession. In the meanwhile the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh has completed the construction of its theatre, while the Mumbai Marathi Granthasangrahalaya will soon follow suit, with its own theatre.

The Marathi theatrical profession has several praiseworthy characteristics and achievements to its credit. The first and foremost of these is its attitude towards drama as a literary form of art. It has always treated its dramatists with respect and realised the dignity of the text of their plays. As far as possible it never took any liberty with it and no extra commercial stuff or farcical songs were ever interpolated with it. The national movement in Maharashtra has received considerable help and support from the theatrical profession and the cause of social reform, too, has derived similar benefits from it, though not to the same extent. The Marathi theatre has never maintained that it was merely a thing of thrill and laughter and its dramatists have always endeavoured to aim at appealing both to the spectators in the theatre and the reading public outside it.

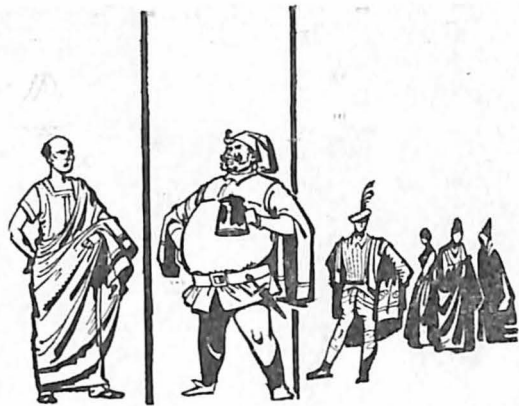
The *sangeet natak* is a typical product of the Maharashtra stage. It is a curious admixture of the opera and the musical comedy of the Western theatre, and yet it is neither the one nor the other and hence rather difficult



to understand and appreciate, especially for those who are not conversant with its genesis and tradition. The songs in a *sangeet natak* are words set to tune and not words musically rendered. The maestro and the musician have, therefore, great importance in a Marathi *sangeet* company. Great pundits of classical music like Bhaskarbuwa Bakhale, Wazebuwa, Govindrao Tembe, Sundarabai and Krishnarao Fulambrikar have composed tunes for Marathi *sangeet natak*s and versatile musicians like Kadarbuksh and Tirkhawa have supplied accompaniment at their performances.

The quality of music and the standard of acting taken together give a *sangeet natak* its high or low rank in the view of its audience. There are about a dozen plays in Marathi which have attained the status of classical *sangeet natak*s by such standards. Even in the worst days of the theatre business, a performance of *Soubhadra*, *Mritchakatik*, *Sharada*, *Sanshaykallol*, *Manapman*, *Vidyaharan*, *Swayamwar*, or *Ekach Pyala* never lacked patrons. It is neither the musical nor the dramatic element in them alone, but a collaboration of both of them which has made them what they are.

This peculiar demand of the Marathi audience has made it incumbent upon the *sangeet natak* mandalis to maintain a very high standard, both of music and of acting, in their production of plays. It is not enough to have only a Balgandharva, Keshavrao Bhosle, Sawai Gandharva, Sarnaik, Bhatebuwa, Hirabai Badodekar, Pandharkarbuwa, Master Krishnarao, Dinanath or Mirashibuwa; but a *sangeet* company must also have a Ganpatrao Bodas, Chintamanrao Kolhatkar, Nanasaheb Phatak, Ranade, Dinkar or Deodhar, if it intends to produce a real *sangeet natak* to the satisfaction of its discriminating patrons.



It has already been observed that the Marathi theatre during the last quarter of a century is an amateur activity and that it has acquitted itself very creditably. Nevertheless, with all due deference to the amateur actors, directors, producers and institutions, it must be admitted that it has its own drawbacks and limitations. It is not possible for the amateurs to build up a tradition of the theatre which requires constant, consistent and concerted effort on the part of its exponents. It is, therefore, inevitable that there must be a class of people which will be wholly and solely devoted to the cause of the theatre for ensuring its progress and maintaining its prestige. All the energy, time and talent of this class must be exclusively available to the cause of the theatre and in return the theatre must provide them with their livelihood and comforts.

The creation of such a class of devoted and dedicated professionals is the immediate need of the Marathi theatre of today. What we had in the past was a professional theatre; what we need to develop in future is the profession of the theatre. This is, indeed, a difference with a distinction. For the former the theatre is only a commercial activity, while with the latter it will be the means of creative expression. The objective of the professional theatre was to amuse and entertain its patrons while the objective of the profession of the theatre will be to disseminate culture and informal education amongst the people in an entertaining way. This new theatre of ours must, of course, be thoroughly national and popular in character and it must be the theatre of a free and independent people freely expressing its tradition, culture and aspirations.

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