

EPIC TO POLEMIC

Social Change in Marathi Drama 1843—79

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With a unanimity, which is somewhat rare, scholars of Marathi theatre and literature have pinpointed the year 1843 as the most important year in the history of Marathi theatre when Vishnu Amrit Bhave, a Brahmin young man, employed in the personal service of the Raja of Sangli, at his patron's behest staged the performance of *Sita Svayambar*, a composition written by himself based, as the name indicates, on an episode from the *Ramayana*. The traditionalists¹ view this event as a revitalisation of a dramatic and theatrical tradition, which (*Gondhal*, *Bharud*, and *Lalit*) and secular cultural performances, (such as the *Tamasha*) goes—back ultimately to the main-spring—the classical Sanskrit drama of the great poets and the theatre described in such great detail and with such a thoroughness in the *Natyasastra* by the legendary Bharata. The modernists,² on the other hand, emphasising the absence of dramatic texts in pre-19th century Marathi literature and defining theatre in a more specific way so as to exclude the various related cultural performances mentioned above, look upon this year as marking the very birth of Marathi theatre and drama.

The immediate impetus to Bhave's venture had been provided by a visit to Sangli in 1842 by a company of *Bhagvat Mela* players from the North Kanara district. According to Bhave's own account, the Raja of Sangli, who patronised a couple of their performances thought them to be crude (*Obadhobad*) and loud or vulgar (*Bibhatsa*) and asked Bhave to perform "a new Marathi composition with goodly improvements"³. This has brought about another argument amongst theatre historians with the most prestigious and painstaking amongst them supporting the theory of southern origin of Marathi theatre⁴ with the possible additional evidence of the 34-35 manuscript plays, composed during the 17th and 18th centuries in the Sarasvati Mahal

Library attributed to three Bhonsla kings of Tanjore. This, however, only provides a new southern twist to the traditionalists' argument for continuity and indigenusness of Marathi theatre, which is declared to be truly native, "not an imitation of English theatre but originated and created by *deshi* minds, untouched by English drama or by any English arts." ⁵

In so far as nothing ever is absolutely new, Bhave's theatre has its ties with the traditional—not the traditional theatre, for it was non-existent in Maharashtra and witnessing a couple of performances of traditional southern theatre can hardly provide sufficient expertise to be incorporated into that tradition—but the traditional structures of society. In 1843, twenty-five years after Peshwai, Sangli with its Brahmin ruler could very well be traditional in its outlook and thinking. This is reflected in the thematic content of Bhave's compositions. The content of his theatre is religious, being based on major and minor episodes from the *Puranas*. It is this preponderance of *puranic* themes which gave Bhave's theatre its name—*Puranik Natak*. As patronised by the ruler of Sangli, Bhave's theatre could very well have conformed to the pattern of a traditional court theatre. That it did not, cannot be dismissed as a historical accident, although Bhave himself seems to think so. According to Bhave⁶ the chief of Sangli was so pleased with the play *Sitasvayamvar* and the ten other compositions based on the *Ramayana* which he presented during the course of the next year that he offered to make land grants [*inams*] to the members of the theatrical troupe and employ them in the service of the Ganapati temple there. This could not come to pass because the chief died in 1851 before the necessary papers could be made. Bhave's story is rather hard to believe because of the period of 8 years which intervened between the first performance of the play and the death of the Chief. It is possible that Bhave attempted during these eight years to obtain *inam* lands in the service of Ganapati temple but his attempts came to an end with the death of the Raja. This, however, prompted him to ask for a leave of absence for four years travel with his company to distant places. It is in this that we find a true expression of the modernity that brought forth Marathi theatre. Bhave's company was a modern commercial venture quite unlike the traditional Bhagvat players who visited Sangli. The *Bhagvatars* in the South are members of the Brahmin caste who specialised in theatrical performances. As a caste their skill and expertise were transmitted through the generational principle. Bhave and most of the members of his troupe were Brahmins whose traditional occupation was not that of entertainers-performers and who were consequently innovators. The spirit that moved Bhave was that of innovation. Rightly or wrongly the Chief of Sangli was not amused by what he thought to be crude and loud entertainment of the *Yaksagana* or the *Bhagvata Me!a Nataka* and he ordered Bhave to make new Marathi composition with goodly improvements. This can hardly be called a traditional approach.

Bhave's father was a Chitpavan Brahmin who had received military training in service with the British army at Belgaum and who held the

rank of *Subhedar* with Sanglikar's army.⁷ Young Vishnu, generally playing traunt at school, occupied himself with such wayward pursuits as making clay figures and models of buildings. It was this skill of craftsmanship that earned him a place in the personal retinue of the Chief of Sangli.

Bhave never acted in his plays. He was primarily a designer, a shaper, a maker and not a poet or a writer. His main emphasis was on spectacle. He designed and made the costumes and the decorations which formed the most important part of his stage presentations. Vishnu was no scholar nor had he a literary bent of mind. However, his attempts to get poems and songs for his presentations from the local *kirtankars* proved futile and he was forced to compose his own songs to the tune and *raga* which he had in mind for the expression of the emotion embodied in an episode. It was the scenic image, a fusion of sight and sound, which was primary to his theatre. The verbal image of the poet's theatre was subordinate in his theatre; so was the action image of the physical movement, gesture and mimesis which forms the basis of the actor's or dancer's theatre.

The stage for Bhave's theatre appears to be a polyscenic stage of succession.⁸ The various locales or scenes were indicated by successive entrances and exits of characters. These 'scenes' were known as *kacheris*.⁹ This is quite unlike the medieval European practice of juxtaposing different 'mansions' on the stage and symbolising change of locale by using a different stage area or 'mansion'. As the episodes, almost without exception, depicted the struggle between gods and demons, the *kacheris* were labelled as god's *kacheris*, demon's *kacheris* and women's *kacheris*. The area marked off for a stage had no front curtain but the back area was covered by a red curtain. Characters entered from behind this curtain or would make their way through the audience, depending upon the conditions of the temporary stage and auditorium. The entrances of characters on stage was heralded by the quick rhythmic beating of the *Mridangam*, the characters would enter with dance steps in consonance with the rhythmic frenzy of the drums. The demons would let out furious screams to terrorize the audience. This frenzied drumming and the awe-inspiring screams of the demonic characters earned Bhave's theatre such popular nicknames as *Alalaladurra Nataka* and *Tagadtham Nataka*.

Although the *Akhyana* or the dramatization of a *puranic* episode formed the main core of Bhave's theatrical presentation, it consisted of a great deal of other ritual and improvisational matter which made an evening's performance a fairly long one. A typical performance seemed to follow the pattern given below:

(1) *Ritual Introduction*

- (a) The *Sutradhara*, his companions, singers and musicians stood in front of the back curtain (probably to introduce themselves and welcome the spectators);

- (b) the *Sutradhara* established the image of Maruti on the stage. Verses in praise of gods and various other invocatory hymns were sung;
- (c) the *Vidusaka*, dressed as a forest dweller in an eccentric costume entered and evoked laughter with his antics;
- (d) a humorous dialogue (probably of topical and improvisational nature) took place between the *Vidusaka* and the *Sutradhara*. During the course of this the *Sutradhara* informed him of the name of the episode to be presented;
- (e) after a song in praise of Ganapati was sung and his blessings invoked, Ganapati entered the stage and blessed the *Sutradhara*. As Ganapati seated himself the *Sutradhara* sang verses invoking the blessings of Saraswati, his wife;
- (f) pleased with the devotion of her disciple, Saraswati entered riding a peacock. She blessed the *Sutradhara* and the performers;
- (g) the *Sutradhara* requested the divine couple to rest awhile and refresh themselves by the singing and dancing of young *gandharvas*;
- (h) a band of young *gandharvas* and *kinnaras*, dressed like gods but with the added appendage of long wing-spreads over their arms entered to sing and dance.

(2) *The Episode*

- (a) With everybody in the proper pleasurable frame of mind, the *Sutradhara* introduced the play material in verse;
- (b) the characters entered as indicated by the *Sutradhara's* verses and made their speeches based on the verses being sung by the *Sutradhara*. Although these speeches were generally set and memorised earlier, the characters were free to extemporise and improvise;
- (c) the places where songs were to be introduced were fixed earlier and the characters would pause in their speech with cue sentences such as—"now listen—". At this the *Sutradhara* would sing a song appropriately expressing the characters' feelings or the plan of action, etc;
- (d) The different *kacheris* followed each other. There does not seem to be a fixed order in this. The *Vidusaka* would show himself in all the *kacheris* and participate in the proceedings whether it was an assembly of gods or the rabble of demons or the inner quarter of a palace reserved for women that was being represented on the stage;
- (e) The episode ended after the battle scenes with the triumph of the divine party and rout of the demons.

(3) *Ritual Resolution*

The performance ended with an *Arati* in which probably the performers as well as the spectators participated. The *Arati* at the end was a traditional device used for the *Kirtans*, *Gondhals*, *Bharuds* and other forms of older cultural performances.

Bhave's theatre, the description above would bring out, performed ritualistic function. The ritual framework of the introduction and resolution was this theatre's strong link with the traditional society in which it was born and which sustained it. Bhave's theatre was truly a Hindu theatre. It operated within the didactic framework of traditional Hindu (Brahmanical) values. With this didactic-ritualistic framework it succeeded in making what essentially was an innovation, have the semblance of the traditional institution. In its didactic approach, its subordination of the verbal element and emphasis on the visual-aural elements of the performance, Bhave's theatre appears to have those stylistic elements which Brecht once characterised as those of Epic theatre.¹¹ The epic theatre differs from the dramatic theatre in its expository character and emphasis on virtuosity. In epic theatre the literary text of the drama is subordinate to the theatrical performance. The mechanics of the plot in dramatic theatre are unimportant because expository narrative takes their place. Epic theatre is presentational rather than representational. Its mode is theatrical rather than naturalistic. Instead of imitating reality in theatre it creates its own reality. Where the dramatic theatre implicates the spectator in the stage situation, and makes him share the experience, the epic theatre turns the spectator into an observer, brings him to the point of recognition, letting him stand outside, studying rather than participating. Larger than life, the epic theatre depends on alienation rather than identification for its effect. Epic theatre deals with situations which are not confined to the limits of narrow psychological reality. It is peopled with archetypes, prototypes and abstractions rather than believable human being like masks and puppets they try to reach a reality beyond the ordinary. *Kathakali* amongst all the extant traditional theatres of India, seems to possess many of the elements of the epic theatre. From the description of Bhave's theatre that has been recorded it seems possible that it too had many of the elements of the epic theatre and if it had been able to develop within this style, an epic theatre of the middle classes, combining technical innovations with traditional value, would have come into existence in Maharashtra, a phenomenon like the *Kabuki* theatre of Japan. But this, of course, is nothing more than speculation.

Bhave's active involvement with the theatre profession covered a period of little over ten years. It was when his hopes of obtaining *inam* land for himself and his troupe disappeared with the death of the Chief of Sangli that Bhave embarked on his first professional tour after the Divali season in 1851 and travelled all over the southern Maratha states. He returned to Sangli in April of 1852 to travel again after the Divali of that year. This time he covered an entirely new territory from Satara, Poona to Bombay and returned to Sangli in May, 1853.

This second tour was the most important of Bhave's tours with his company. This gained him great popularity in these new urban centres

and he developed valuable contacts with the elite of Bombay and Poona. Amongst the people who helped him actively with his endeavours he mentions Kerunana Chatre, Krishnashastri Chiplonkar and Keshavrao Bhavalkar from Poona and Dr. Bhau Daji, Nana Shankarshett and Sir Jamsetji Jeejibhoy from Bombay.¹² The advance notices of the company's season in Bombay as well as the review published in the *Bombay Times* provide an excellent description of Bhave's stage which seems to have impressed the cosmopolitan and European audience a great deal.¹³ That Vishnudas and his backers in Bombay, such as Dr. Bhau Daji and Nana Shankarshett, prized the indigenouseess, high moral quality and improving tone of this theatre and wanted this to be used as an inducement for the Bombay audiences to patronise the shows, can be seen from the advance notice ('write-up' or 'plug' in modern terms) which appeared in the *Bombay Times* before the first performance. "These plays are of genuine native origin from the early classic dramas of Hindoostan. They are void of everything approaching to licentiousness and indecorum and are images of the old moralities in which the Christian Church in older times used to rejoice."¹⁴ This probably is a rebuff to the 'immoral' productions of the European stage.

Perhaps, this harping on the genuine Indianness and high morality of Bhave's theatre was a wrong move on the part of Bhave's backers as far as the prospective Hindu theatre-goers of Bombay were concerned. The review in the same paper of a later date says, "We regretted to see the house so thinly attended, and are surprized that the Hindoo gentry do not extend their patronage more freely to their national drama. Several European gentlemen were present, but no ladies."¹⁵

One of the reasons which kept the parsimonious Hindu gentry out was the high cost of admission which ranged from Rs. 4 for Box seats to Re. 1 for Pit. (From the fourth performance the rates were somewhat lowered with Rs. 3 for Box as the top price and Rs. 1 for the Pit remaining the same.)¹⁶

Bhave himself is on record regarding the great popularity and prestige he earned during his very first season in Bombay. "At the end of the performance the Secretary to the Governor of Bombay himself was brought backstage by Dr. Bhau Daji. He was greatly pleased by our organization and tidiness. He told us: 'I am very happy to see this performance. If you go to Europe with this show you will make a lot of profit and also get fame.' But I refused because of the clause of religion. He then said that he would write to Europe regarding this."¹⁷

Bhave toured with his company annually. Each tour lasted five to six months. He generally left Sangli after Divali (October-November) to return in the month of *Vaishakh* (April-May). Evidence from contemporary records points out at least seven such tours. He visited Poona at least five times and Bombay four times.¹⁸

In spite of the money and success he gained in his endeavours Bhave gave up theatre as a profession in 1862.¹⁹ He published the collection

of his 52 *Akhyanas* in 1885 with a short preface.²⁰ He died in 1901, nearly 40 years after he left the theatre profession.²¹

The members of Bhave's troupe were mostly Brahmins. The most obvious reason for this is the maintenance of ritual purity within the small group of people working in close physical proximity to each other as Bhave's company. It had to be a homogeneous caste group whose contact, physical and social, would not be polluting. The extensive travelling involved in the profession would complicate matters still further. A theatrical troupe thus had to be like an extended family.

Again, the Brahmins alone had the opportunity or freedom to choose a new profession. This was true especially in the Brahmin princely states of southern Maharashtra, where Bhave's troupe and the other troupes which were formed later, originated. In 1843, after Bhave had organised his band of players and staged his new Marathi play, a group of arch-conservative Brahmin priests organised themselves to ostracise the actors on the grounds that the *Smritis* prohibited the Brahmins from adopting such a *shudra*-like profession. Chintamanrao Pandurangrao Patwardhan, his patron came to his rescue with the full authority of his own Brahminness and as the Chief of the State. He asked a learned *shastri* in his employ to find contrary arguments from the *shastras*. This being done conclusively, the social boycott just evaporated.²

Another reason which is often cited in explaining the preponderance of Brahmins amongst actors is the Brahmin tradition of oral learning and recitation of texts which made them with their good voice (*vani*), clear speech (*svaccha*) and correct enunciation, (*shuddha*) a natural choice for Bhave.²³

The Brahmin young men and boys recruited by Bhave for his troupe were hardly likely to follow any respectable Brahmin profession, even with their clear speech and correct enunciation. They, in reality, were the jetsam and flotsam of the Brahmin community with little or no training and education, traditional or modern. Many of them earned their living by such menial, yet ritually pure professions as cooks and water-carriers (*panake*). Bhave has been criticised²⁴ for recruiting people from such low social stratum for the theatrical profession. It has often been regarded the root of the evil which degraded the profession and made it a hotbed of licentiousness, immorality and vices.

The relationship between the entertainment profession and the world's oldest profession is a very close one. This is almost a universal phenomenon—as universal as the denunciations which periodically are directed against it. Charges of immorality and unreality have been levelled against all theatres, in all epochs, in all countries. In medieval India, Moslems are generally condemned for putting an end to the theatrical tradition in the North. But before them the Brahmins and the Buddhists had been equally intolerant of actors and the theatrical profession. Like its Christian counterpart in Europe, the 'Hindoo Protestantism'²⁵ of the *Varkari* cult in Maharashtra has been generally

intolerant of theatre or art in general. Tukaram in one of his *abhangas* has advised good men not even to see the face of an actor who dresses up as a woman.²⁶ Ram Joshi, Anant Phandi and Prabhakar were Brahmin poets who composed for and were associated with the *Tamasha* people but each one of them repented his wayward ways and recorded this repentance in his poems. Anant Phandi's *Fataka*, enumerating what a good man should do and what he should avoid is a testament of home and hearth morality. (Anant Phandi, incidentally, lived in Sangli when Bhave organised his theatrical troupe and the two knew each other very well.)

It would be interesting in this respect to compare the attitude of the social reformers and the reform movement toward arts such as theatre and music. In Bengal, the aristocratic leaders of the Brahmo-Samaj movement were patrons as well as practitioners of these arts.²⁷ The Tagore family is the most striking example of this. Amongst the founders or the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj, there are not many who can claim to have a similar interest in the arts. Chandavarkar, Telang, Bhandarkar—scholars and savants not insensitive men—was it puritanism at the back of their mind which looked down upon art and theatre as immoral and corrupting and distrusted it profoundly or was it a combination of platonism and utilitarianism which dismissed art as imitative and useless—mere child's play?

The number of theatrical troupes, performing plays in the style of Bhave's company, grew within a short time. Some of these were formed by the rebellious actors who broke away from Bhave's original troupe. A theatrical troupe which was formed in Ichalkaranji around 1850, surpassed Bhave's players and had a very successful career till it was finally disbanded in 1892.²⁸ In its long life, the troupe incorporated many changes in its production style and format, introducing new material in accordance with the change in public taste. Although it started as a competitor of Bhave's troupe, staging plays based on the Puranas, the Ichalkaranjikar troupe staked its own episodes posed by a learned *shastri*—Pandurang Raghunath Datar. From the literary point of view these episodes show a refinement of style and quality which Bhave's compositions lack. Many of the actors in this company were *shastris*, well versed in Vedic recitation, who entered the profession more out of the love of the art and adventurousness than the need for making a living. It differed from Bhave's troupe in this respect.

Once the novelty of theatrical innovation wore off the traditional content of the *puranic* theatre with its familiar, oft-told tales began to bore the audience. The ritual framework with its invocations and praises became dull. The doings of divine and demonic beings became absurd and ridiculous to the newly educated elite who no longer could believe in them. Acquainted now, either through translations or in the original, with the masterpieces of Shakespeare and Kalidasa, the elite²⁹ scorned the efforts of the *puranic* playwrights.

As quoted earlier the 'Hindoo gentry' of a cosmopolitan, commercial town like Bombay was probably never sufficiently interested in the traditional morality of the *puranic* theatre. The interests of such commercial, modern centres tend to be of more contemporary and topical nature. It is not surprising that the next phase of the development of Marathi drama and theatre occurred in Bombay. This was the introduction of a new genre which was styled as farce. The year was 1857 and the credit for this innovation goes to a theatrical troupe in Bombay called the Amarchandwadikar Hindoo Natak Mandali.³⁰ As the name 'farce' indicates, this was in imitation of the European theatre in Bombay where the major and minor pieces of farcical theatrical written during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century were very popular. The farces in Marathi satirised some ridiculous aspects of contemporary society. The humour in these farces depended upon the situation and the mechanics of the plot. It differed from the *Vidusaka's* miming, atrocious puns and clowning which provided the laughter in *puranic* dramas. The farces, again, dealt with human beings and human situations, contemporary life and contemporary manners. The credit for introducing illusionistic scenery with drops and curtains also goes to Amarchandwadikar troupe. This was at the performance of the episode *Krishnajamma* in the same year.³¹

The word 'farce' which was originally applied to humorous pieces performed after the main episode, was later applied to any afterpiece whether serious or humorous.³² The introduction of the farces were the first step toward the humanisation of Marathi drama and theatre.

Like the Restoration comedies of the 17th century or the sentimental comedies of a later day, the farces depicted the immorality and viciousness in society only to find them their cure. Like muckraking and yellow journalism, their purpose was to expose the lack of virtue in society and thus to bring about reform. This brought about a debate between *Vartamandipika*, a Bombay newspaper and the *Dnyanaprakasa* of Poona as to which was moral and improving—the farce or the *puranic* episode.³³

The farce was too slight a vehicle to bear the burden of the polemics of social reform. The farces were primarily short, amusing afterpieces, written or adapted by hacks with little education and pretension to literary merit. The duty was gladly undertaken by Western educated young men of ideas who either translated English and Sanskrit plays or wrote new plays as works of literature and published them in book form. Ichalkaranjikar company was the first theatrical troupe to stage one of these published plays—which were known very appropriately as 'bookish plays'.³⁴ The play was *Thorle Madhavrao Peshwe*³⁵ by Vinayak Janardan Kirtane who later rose to high posts in the princely states of Baroda and Indore. The play was published in 1861 and it was first performed in 1865.³⁶

Kirtane wrote the play when he was a student at Elphinstone College in Bombay.³⁷ The play is divided into four acts. The first and

the second acts have four scenes each. The third act is divided into six scenes and the last act into eight scenes. Although inspired perhaps by Shakespeare's chronicle plays, the play stands as a successful play of psychological characterisation in its own right, striking a balance between the carefully evoked historical atmosphere through the recreation of the pomp and circumstance of the Maratha state and the depiction of the personal tragedy of an honest, ambitious and dedicated young man and a loving husband that was Madhavrao Peshwe. Kirtane's young age and his own far from robust health at the time must have helped him project his own feelings and fears into the character of the hero, but as it is, Madhavrao comes off as a very believable young man. The play opens with the traditional *Sutradhara* and *Vidusaka*, though instead of the *Nandi* verse, the play has a short prose sentence invoking god's protection. The *Vidusaka* and the *Sutradhara* reappear in the play—the *Sutradhara* once and the *Vidusaka* twice. The play ends with the death of Madhavrao and Ramabai's self immolation. It thus radically departs from the traditional pattern of Hindu dramaturgy. Ramshastri is portrayed as an impartial jurist who excels as Madhavrao's adviser. One more noteworthy aspect of the play is its use of the rural dialect for all non-Brahmin characters of the play—high or low—Ramraja, the king of Satara.

Kirtane's other play *Jayapa*³⁹ is based on the story of Joseph from the Old Testament. Kirtane's plays were the first bookish plays to be performed on stage. It then became quite a fashion to write and publish plays on various issues of contemporary interest, which were staged by the various theatrical troupes. The bookish plays were weapons in the growing polemics of reform and tradition. The farces were content with the laughter they evoked through the depiction of social ills. Some of them were never even printed. The bookish playwrights had all the weight of posterity weighing down on them. They wrote with the zeal of missionaries to propagate their ideas. Ranade in 1898 wrote of them, "Just as the farces superseded the interest in the old *Puranic* dramas, they have been in their turn succeeded by dramas which refer to social and political subjects."⁴⁰ Widow-remarriage, women's education were two issues around which was centered most of the polemical writing—especially the plays. *Manorama* (1871)⁴¹ by Mahadev Balkrishna Chitale and *Svairsakesha* (1871)⁴² by Raghunath Sankarshastri Abhyankar are two such well known plays—depicting in detail the plight of the Hindu widow and the debauched practices they are forced into by the hypocritical social laws. Of these two, Chitale's play is truly sympathetic to the widow, advocating widow-remarriage as the only remedy for the decadent condition. Chitale recognised the importance of drama as a vehicle of ideas. As he says regarding the drama in his preface to the play, "It claims a decided superiority over all the rest in representing vice and virtue, in obliterating the fatal customs that frequently take a deep root in society. . ."⁴³ *Svairsakesha*, on the other hand, takes the more traditional approach toward womanhood, making the woman the root of all evil, debauchery being her way of life as expressed in a famous Sanskrit verse.

Balvant Pandurang Kirloskar's *Sankardigvijaya* (1874), his first essay in the field of playwriting, is perhaps the best example of the change from the *puranic* to the polemic style of playwriting. A play in five acts dealing with episodes from the life of Adya Sankaracharya, shows the influence of the *puranic* mode in its introductory scenes where an assembly of gods requests the god Sankara to go to the earth to save Vedic Hinduism, which he promises to do in his incarnation as Sankaracharya, whose birth takes place in the third act. What follows is a medley of various things, details of Sankaracharya's early life depicted in the manners of the contemporary domestic life in Maharashtra, showing the hallmarks of Kirloskar's simple, naturalistic style of dialogue, philosophical debates and miracles. The fourth act deals with Sankaracharya's debate with Mandanmishra, the philosophical content of which is balanced by the vulgarity of the invective and vituperation used by the two adversaries. The play though not dealing with contemporary problems, is thus polemical in its purpose and style. Kolhapurkar Natak Mandali staged the play with some degree of popularity.

The trend in polemical playwriting continued strongly after the period under review, the debate on the age of consent bill brought a spate of plays for and against.

The spirit of change penetrated the theatre profession too which till now was the stronghold of people with traditional background. People with education and new ideas banded together for the first time in organizing the Aryoddharak Natak Mandali, whose very name proclaims its high aim. Aided by college professors such as Professor V. B. Kelkar in their discussion of acting and literary merits, Shankarrao Patkar, who served in the Military Accounts in Poona and Govind Ballal Deval, a young man in Ranade's circle, who had finished the certificate course in agriculture at the Science College in Poona, staged *Zunzarrao*, Deval's version of *Othello* in 1879.

With concerned young men, firmly convinced of the use of drama as a means of spreading their ideas, writing polemical plays, organizing theatrical troupes with grandiose names and mottoes, we should end this survey. For the next year, 1880 was to bring the Marathi *Sakuntal* of Kirloskar to the stage in Poona and in its wake were to follow the songs and the singers, the music and the musicians, and the idealistic playwrights and their plays which confronted the social and political systems. All this spelled success—money and status—which was to make Marathi theatre the foremost expression of the cultural aspirations of a resurgent Maharashtra.

FOOTNOTES

The main source for information used in this paper is the well documented and detailed account of Marathi drama given in Shrinivas Narayan Banhatti *Marathi Rangabhumica Itihasa*, Vol. 1, Venus Prakashan, Poona (1957). As a sourcebook of theatre history, the work is the product of a lifetime's devotion and painstaking research. It is abbreviated as MRI.

- (1) The traditionalist point of view, in its extreme form is stated by V. K. Rajwade in his short preface to the printed text of the 'first' Marathi drama, attributed to Shahu, the ruler of Tanjore and the son of Shivaji's stepbrother Vyankoji. Rajwade dates it around Shaka year 1604. "There have been many dramatists in Marathi from the days of Dnyanadeva and before Vishnudas Bhawe of Sangli...it appears that plays are being performed in Maharashtra for the last six hundred years." Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade preface to *Laksmi Narayana Kalyana Nataka*, *Granthanala Masika Pustaka* (Marathi) (n.d. 1915?), p. 2.
- (2) Keshav Narain Kale, *Theatre in Maharashtra*, Maharashtra Information Centre, Government of Maharashtra, New Delhi 1 (1967), p. 1.
- (3) Vishnu Anmt Bhawe, *Natyakavitasangraha* (Marathi), Sangli (1885), p. 6. Quoted in *MRI*, p. 20.
- (4) Banhatti, *MRI*, pp. 16-31.
- (5) *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- (6) *Op. cit.*, Bhawe, pp. 6, 7. Quoted in Banhatti, *MRI*, p. 92.
- (7) Banhatti, *MRI*, p. 18.
- (8) For an explanation of the term see A. M. Nagler, "A Terminology for Sixteenth Century Stage Forems", *Theatre Research* I, No. 1, 30.
- (9) The word means 'office' and the similarity of the term with mansion is rather striking. The *kaksya* referred to in the *Natyasastra*, XIII : 3, might be a similar arrangement.
- (10) For this analysis of the structure of the Puranic drama I have used extensive quotations from two published accounts. Appaji Vishnu Kulkarni, *Marathi Rangabhumi* (Marathi) (1903), and Vasudev Ganesh Bhawe, *Vishnudas Charitra* (the life of Vishnudas Bhawe in Marathi) Sangli (1943). These can be found in Banhatti, *MRI*, pp. 46—61.
- (11) For Brecht's discussion regarding Epic Theatre see John Willet (tr.), *Brecht on Theatre*, Hill and Wang, New York, (1964), pp. 37—39; 75—76.
- (12) *Op. Cit.*, Bhawe, pp. 7—8. Quoted in *MRI*, pp. 102—103.
- (13) The review of the performance in the *Bombay Times*, Friday, March 11, 1853, testifies enthusiastically. Quoted in full in Banhatti, *MRI*, pp. 396—398.
- (14) Editorial in the *Bombay Times*, Tuesday, March 8, 1853. Quoted in Banhatti, *MRI*, p. 392.
- (15) Review in the *Bombay Times*, Friday, March 11, 1853. Quoted in *MRI*, p. 396.
- (16) Advertisements in the *Bombay Times*, March 8 and March 17, 1853. Quoted in *MRI*, pp. 393, 403.
- (17) *Op. cit.*, Bhawe, pp. 7, 8. Quoted in Banhatti *MRI*, p. 103.
- (18) Banhatti, *MRI*, p. 113.
- (19) *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- (20) *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- (21) *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- (22) *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- (23) *Ibid.*, p. 126 enumerates these 'natural' qualities.
- (24) Shankar Bapuji Mujumdar, *Maharastriya Natakakara Yanchi Charitre*, Poona (n.d.), pp. 10, 11. Quoted in Banhatti, *MRI*, p. 122.
- (25) A term used by Ranade. M. B. Kolaskar (ed.), "Hindu Protestantism", *Religions and Social Reform. A Collection of Essays and Speeches of Mahadev Govind Ranade*. Bombay (1902) pp. 198—228.
- (26) Rajwade's preface referred to in f.1.
- (27) Sukumar Sen, *History of Bengali Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi (1960) pp. 191—203; 245—257; 304—310. Also Prabha Charan P. Guha Thakurta, *The Bengali Drama: Its Origin and Development*, London (1930).
- (28) Banhatti, *MRI*, p. 139.
- (29) *Ibid.*, p. 291.
- (30) *Ibid.*, pp. 173—174.
- (31) *Ibid.*, pp. 173—174.

- (32) *Ibid.*, pp. 177.
- (33) *Ibid.*, pp. 175—176.
- (34) According to Banhatti, the term 'bookish' was originally applied only to translated plays from Sanskrit and English. The total number of 'bookish plays', original and translated, cannot be more than 30, according to him. *MRI*, 288.
- (35) The play along with *Jayapal* with a critical introduction by Professor Laxman-shastri Lele, Poona, and a life of Kirtane written by Balkrishna Narayan Deo was reprinted in a volume by Kirtane's grandsons in 1927. This volume is used for this paper.
- (36) Banhatti, *MRI*, p. 199.
- (37) Balkrishna Narayan Deo, "Raobahaddur Vinayak Janardan Kirtane Yanche Charitra", *Thorle Madhavra Peshwe Va Jayapala*, Mundhwa, Distt. Poona (1927), p. 200.
- (38) *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- (39) Datto Vaman Potdar, *Marathi Gadyacha Ingraji Avatara*, Poona (1922) appendix pp. 14—15, traces the story to Genesis, Chapters 41—49.
- (40) Mahadev Govind Ranade, "The Growth of Marathi Literature", *The Miscellaneous Writings of the Late Hon'ble Mr. Justice M. G. Ranade*, Bombay (1915), p. 41.
- (41) For a summary of the complicated plot see V. V. Patwardhan, "Natyavangmaya," *Marathi Vangmayacha Itihasa*, Vol. 4, Maharashtra, Sahitya Parisad Prakashan, Poona (1965) pp. 384, 385.
- (42) For a plot summary, see *Ibid.*, pp. 387, 388.
- (43) Mahadev Balkrishna Chitala, *Manoramanataka*, Poona (1871) p. 2. Quoted *Ibid.*, p. 384 fn.