

Some Prominent Playwrights In The Marathi Theatre

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There is a pivotal place to the living traditions which have a natural flow in the social system of Maharashtra. The traditional art forms undoubtedly reflect the ideals of the society, its determination to survive, its ethos, emotions, fellow-feelings, and other aspects. The art of singing has its own prominence in community and naturally songs and art of singing and acting occupy place in the traditional theatre forms. Traditional music of the theatre seems to be an expression of the feelings of the society. A theatre represents the various entities of the society giving the fictional realities of human situations, problems, feelings, emotions and relationship. It conveys a picture of life not the picture that is actually true, but a picture that has its own kind of truth which is not abstract but a concrete and dramatic presentation may allow the individuals to experience imaginatively the lived meaning of a piece of life. It is a parallel world.

The Marathi Theatre began in the mid 19th century when Bhave started writing his plays and performed in the palace of the King of Sangali. The beginning was not grand because of lack of required chores to perform however, it was considerably good however, the first half of 20th century witnessed changes in social, political, cultural and literary spheres. The death of Tilak, the freedom movement, Gandhi's work, cinema, and the World Wars affected economy, morality, life style and other spheres that found place in the plays which resulted in the change of nature of genre. The influence of Ibsen has imparted the Marathi theatre novelty in presentation and creation. The impact of these factors brought the drastic changes in the theatre and begot the Modern Theatre.

Vishnudas Bhave:

The Marathi theatre and drama starts with Vishnudas Bhave's *Sita Swayamwar* staged in 1843 with the active support of the King of Sangali, Chintamanrao Patwardhan, it came as response to order to create a refined version of the *Bhagwat Mela*

Plays that king and others had seen for entertainment and edification of the royal household and courtiers. Further Bhave himself performed dramatic performance in other parts of Maharashtra and was applauded for his task. He is a 'pioneer and father of the Marathi Theatre' (Internet Entry) of entertainment as well as the professional theatre.

Balwant Pandurang Kirloskar:

Kirloskar saw both traditional and proscenium type of plays and theatre. His *Shakuntal* helped to flourish the Marathi *sangeet natak* to an unprecedented level of artistry. The performance of *Shakuntal* by Kirloskar was actually an act of reclamation of the lost heritage and the strong signs of the Western influences. It answered the cultural needs of the people. The nature of the lyrics and melodies, their place in the dramatic action of the play and their relationship with the spoken word and stage design show the features of the elements of modern drama. This cast light on the fact that he elevated the Marathi Theatre and drama to considerable extent.

Ram Ganesh Gadkari:

A rich imagination, lively response to every aspect of human life and vibrant poetic spirit are core ingredients of Gadkari's play writing. He is revered especially for his contribution to enroot his humour in theatre and literature. He appeared with *Premasanyas* as his maiden play performed by the *Maharashtra Natak Mandali* in 1912. The dual between an imaginary world and a practical world is a thematic concern of the play. *Ekach Pyala*, 'the greatest tragedy in Marathi' (Internet entry), is a milestone work in the sense that it is thought to be the first experimental play in which he brought various moods, forms and concerns and combination of tragic and comic elements. It illuminates the tragic effect of alcoholism on a man and his family. *Punyaprabhav*, *Bhavbandhan* and *Rajsanyas* also reveal the contemporary social scene. V. B. Deshpande has asserted, 'Gadkari can't be forgotten

at least till the Marathi language, literature, play and human beings exist.’ (Deshpande, 18)

Shridhar Vinayak Vartak;

The first modern play in Marathi is *Andhalyachi Shala* by Shridhar Vinayak Vartak, which was performed on 1 July 1933 by *Natyamanwantar* in *Ripan Theatre*, Mumbai. It marked the advent of new trends and tendencies in the composition as well as the presentation of the drama. *Andhalyachi Shala* revolutionized the entire set up of the Marathi Theatre, making the social realism the new watch world. The play itself seems to attempt to establish its credentials as a modern work in a lugubrious manner. Its presentation reflected all the characteristics of the modern play. It is an argument that as all human beings have made mistake in their life, they deserve forgiveness to change and to defend themselves rather than condemn them. It is certainly modern attitude to avail a chance to change oneself who wishes to come out of degraded sphere. This imparts the fact that it is obviously first modern play. *Takshashila* written in adaption of Ibsen’s *The Warriors of Helgeland* and *Lapandav* are Vartak’s other significant works. S. V. Vartak really moulded the nature of Marathi drama and theatre. He along with *Natyamanwantar* fostered modernity to the Marathi theatre.

Pralhad Keshav Atre:

He was a multifaceted Indian figure. As a playwright his versatility could be observed in his treatment of pure force as well as stark melodrama given to subject matters. His play *Sashtang Namaskar* is hailed as the first original modern play which revolves around an idiosyncratic family and its friends. K. Narayan Kale commented on the play, ‘Not only does *Sashtang Namaskar* have literary value but historical importance too, for having given Marathi drama completely new turn.’ (Kale, 262.) *Bhramacha Bhopla* is pregnant with verbal wit, clever imagination, sharpness and cleverness of dialogue that came on the stage as a genuine gift by him to the Marathi theatre. His inclination towards comedy writing has often had a happy ending in spite of adverse situation and tension in the beginning and the middle part is seen in *Gharabaheer*. *To Mee Navhech* and *Lagnachi Bedi* are two ever-green humorous plays in Marathi. Along with comedies, he also wrote serious plays on the model of Eugene

Brieux. Atre recognized the mob psychology and accordingly produced his plays which brought success and rendered ‘pioneer of professional writing’ (Gokhale, 81) call to him.

V. V. Shirwadkar:

He is the Jnanpith Award winner in 1988 and one of Maharashtra’s senior most and best loved poets, belongs to the main stream who writes poetry under the pseudonym Kusumagraj and plays under his own name. His most outstanding play *Natasamrat* carries ‘clear echoes of *King Lear*’. (Pandey Sudhakar and Taraporewala Freya, 14) It is the harrowing tragedy of an old time classical actor. Shirwadkar’s *Natasamrat* is crystallized from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, tragedy of error judgment; he has applied his approach in his the play to make a real scene seen in the society at all times. He profoundly contributed to the Marathi Theatre with his others plays –*Durche Dive*, *Dusara Peshawa*, *Vaijayanti*, *Vij Mhanali Dhartilal*, *Ek Hoti Waghin*, *Mukhyammanti*, *Kaikayi* and *Anand*. These plays incorporate *puranic* (myth), historical, social and political issues that show his variety in handling the themes. He has employed every manipulative technique in his power to force us to see the world.

Purushattam Laxman Deshpande:

He stands as a solitary island in contemporary Marathi Theatre and has many adaptation and very few independently written plays to his credit. *The Government Inspector* is written in adaptation of Gogal’s play. In 1956, he came out with *Tuze Aahe Tuzyapashi*, unique satire, in which an austere Gandhian Acharya fights a battle of ideas with an old epicure steeped in the ways of princely India. His *Batatyachi Chawl* presents the middle class characters living at Batatyachi Chawl in Mumbai. The specimens of bourgeoisie are ridiculed but at the same time their sense of values is praised. *Varyavarchi Varaat*, *Watwat Watwat*, *Teen Paishacha Tamasha* and *Raja Oedipus* are some other popular plays by him. P. L’s plays really have a hilarious touch that evokes laughter from the bottom of heart.

Vijay Tendulkar:

He, avant-gardist, has highly individual outlook, vision of life and personal style of writing that take him to create a powerful impression in the field of literature and drama. He has rendered a new

dimension to the post independent Marathi drama. He began his career as a dramatist with one-act writing entitled *The House Holder* and subsequently followed by *In An Island Called Man* and *Vultures*. *Silence! The Court Is in Session* is a milestone craft in the Marathi literature. It raises the questions about man-woman relationship that make one speechless. *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Sakharam Binder* are controversial plays. The playwright seems to weave an allegory of struggle between the individual and society and between power and exploitation. Another play *A Friend's Story* is about a lesbian relationship perhaps presented for the first time on the Marathi stage. His contribution as a playwright is truly versatile, experimental and innovative.

Mahesh Elkunchwar:

He is one of the most influential and progressive playwright not just in the Modern Theatre but also larger Modern Indian theatre. (Internet Entry) He is an experimental playwright casting many dramatic expressions ranging from the realistic to symbolic and expressionist to absurd theatre. His maiden one-act play *Sultan* was published in *Satyakatha* in 1967. He is well known for his trilogy consisting of the plays—*Wada Chirebandi*, *Maglya Talyakathi* and *Yuganta* which focuses on the disintegration of traditional joint family and traditional village life under the onslaught of modern forces of urbanization and industrialization. Elkunchwar's perception of men and women and the family is quite different from Tendulkar and Dalvi. He seems to be first to represent the mature and human culture of women in family which remains in a sense invincible. *Garbo* is heavily symbolic play in which Garbo, the eponymous female character, is surrounded by the three males—Intue, (Intellect), Shrimant (Wealth) and Pansy (Effect Man). It is replete with absurd situations. One fails to understand why these men look for new hope and purpose in the fetus and commit inhuman action of murdering for not real cause. He emulated the same line in *Vasanakand* (Period of Desire) that mainly focuses on incest. His plays impart equality to inequality, mutual understanding and justice to injustice and human dignity to suppression. They are varied in themes and experimental in technique.

Satish Alekar:

He is highly individual and subjective playwright of the Marathi Theatre. He makes use of traditional Maharashtrian culture as the subject-matter for his plays. In this respect, Alekar said in his interview, 'In this country, theatre is essentially regional. Marathi plays are mostly playwright centric.' (Internet Entry) He wrote—*Mahanirvan* (The Dread Departure), *Mahapoor* (Deluge), *Mickey Ani Memsahab* (Mickey and Memsahab), *Begum Barve*, *Dusra Samna*, *Pidhijat* (Dynasts), *Shanivar-Ravivar* (Saturday-Sunday), *Bhajan*, *Binta* and *Walam*. Satish Alekar has encapsulated such scenario in his plays. These plays have no story or plot to speak of, mechanical (puppetry) characterization, themes without a proper beginning and an end, reflection of dreams and nightmares, incoherent babblings, isolation, existential query, etc. and other aspects. He has employed a distorted language, a blending of foreign and native symbolism, and dramatic techniques and devices to present the thematic concern effectively. These plays express sense of senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought. These plays are the perfect specimens of the Theatre of the Absurd.

Shyam Manohar:

His writing in general began primarily with the realization of troublesome and perverse mind, which he possesses and secondly, finding out the answers of his own questions through writing. The play *Yakrit* (Liver) deciphers some vital links between the personal world of the desires, the heart, the mind and the world outside. He seems to put forth such burning problems of society and hints the crux of them. *Yelkot* makes the personal life to be the social one writing about the tabooed subject matter called sex. The work seems to be social manifesto indeed. His other works like *Hriday* (Heart), *Darshan* (Sacred Vision) and *Premachi Goshta* (Story of Love) are an attempt to explore questions about civilization and to manifest the real social picture. S. Gokhale writes about his writing, 'Turn it inside out or stand it on its head and see it from the opposite angle'. (Gokhale, 325-326)

Shafaat Khan:

He explored and incorporated the modern problems in his writing that mirrors in *Mumbaiche Kawale*. It depicts the modern problem like the breakdown in communication and the meaninglessness of the goals people run after. Then he came with the two parts-play *Kisse I and II*. It reinforces light on middle class people's fear of the external world of noise and change. At one moment, they look at each other for support; the very next moment, they feel afraid of each other and withdraw and make them alien from each other. Nissim Ezekiel's statement 'Brief will not save you / Nor disbelief' (Jha, 4) suits well to the modern individuals outlook at each other. His *Bhoomiticha Farce and Popat Panchi* are satires on the double faced nature of people and society, politics and government departments. The plays are replete with absurd speech and behaviour of characters and suitable language.

Conclusion, the Marathi Theatre tradition began with Vishnudas Bhave in the mid 19th century and still is in progress. It started with the musical plays however, there is a constant flux with the passage of time in thematics, plot construction, characterization, techniques and devices, trends and linguistic aspects. The playwrights have employed the words in powerful, effective and captivating manner to point their picture of human experience of the contemporary social, political and economical issues in the society of Maharashtra. It has come under the influence of foreign literature as well. The fusion of the native and foreign aspects has really enriched it. It mirrors more prominently the state of Maharashtra, and worldly scenario.

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