CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A drama is basically a piece of writing in which a story is told to the audience through its performance by the actors in a theatre. According to W.H. Hudson, the drama is designed for representation by actors who impersonate the characters of its story and among whom the narrative and the dialogue are distributed. Plot, characters, dialogues, an atmosphere, and a certain view of life, are the chief elements of the drama. A drama contains the dramatist’s criticism of life and is the product of his imagination working upon his experience and observation. It is meant for the delight as well as instruction of mankind. It reflects whatever is happening around us.

A playwright faces many limitations. Unlike a novelist who enjoys an absolute freedom in respect of the length of his work, the dramatist has to compress his material so that the spectators can see the performance in a single sitting. Therefore, the playwright is required to eliminate everything that is not absolutely essential for his purpose. Unable to communicate to the audience directly, a playwright has to rely on dialogue and action for the delineation of his characters and the unravelling of the plot. The drama, as it is performed, gives the audience an opportunity to view the happenings, the expressions of the actors and listen to the dialogues. Thus it has an edge over the novel by its visual and oral dimensions. The dramatist has some advantages too. The drama can be used as a device of spreading awareness among people through their entertainment. It also gives an opportunity to many people such as the actors, the director and the technicians, in addition to the playwright, to exhibit their talents at the same time.
It is said that the work of a playwright does not finish with the completion of writing the play’s text. M.K. Naik observes, “Drama is a composite art in which the written word of the playwright attains complete artistic realization only when it becomes the spoken word of the actor on the stage, and through that medium reacts on the mind of the audience. A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, thus needs a real theatre and a live audience.” Thus a playwright’s work ends only with his play’s performance on the stage. A question, therefore, is sometimes raised as to whether a play can be properly evaluated just by reading its text. Shanta Gokhale, a leading theatre critic and writer has suggested that all the interpretative and presentational possibilities exist simultaneously only in the written text of a play, whereas specific productions reduce these diverse possibilities to a single interpretation. That’s why; the study of the written text of play has its own importance.

Indian drama has had a rich and glorious tradition. It begins with the plays in Sanskrit. The earliest extant play in India can be dated as far back as AD 200. The chief dramatists in Sanskrit were Bhasa, Kalidas, Bhavabhuti and Ashvaghosa. The Indian drama has undergone various changes in the course of time. It has continued to flourish in the regional languages though somewhat overshadowed by fiction and poetry. India is a large country with as many as fourteen developed regional languages. Literatures written in these languages exist side by side but the writers and literature lovers are often ignorant about the experiments or achievements of one another. It is only when these works are translated into English that they become understandable to everybody overcoming the language barriers. A critical discussion of the literary works translated into English, therefore, assumes a special significance. The translations of the works written in regional languages into
English, thus, function as a link among the different parts of India and enhance the
harmony and richness of the contemporary creative consciousness. Indian English
drama has achieved a remarkable growth through English translation of the regional
drama. The leading regional dramatists like Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, Mohan
Rakesh in Hindi and Badal Sircar in Bengali, have dealt with the feelings and
experiences of common people engaged in the day-to-day struggle of life. Of these
writers, Vijay Tendulkar, according to Arundhati Banerjee, “has not only been the
most productive but has also introduced the greatest variations in his dramatic
creations.”

Vijay Tendulkar’s plays can be related to the actual life of an ordinary human
being.

Vijay Tendulkar is a prominent playwright in Marathi, the principal
language of the state of Maharashtra. He has thirty plays to his credit. His concern
with the social issues is the key to the understanding of his plays. He exposes the
evils and shortcomings of the contemporary society with an impartial and analytical
mind. His plays are marked by a deep compassion for the humanity. His bold
innovations and experiments have given new dimensions to contemporary Indian
drama. Vijay Tendulkar’s reputation of being a highly controversial figure in
Marathi Drama springs from the fact that he has time and again dealt with the issues
of sex and violence in contemporary society. While challenging the conventional
values and ideas of an orthodox society, he forces it to take notice of the ugliness
that exists in it. There is a possibility of the social message of his plays getting lost
against the backdrop of the controversies which have engulfed him. That’s why, the
present study makes an attempt to understand Tendulkar’s vision of society and
human life in order to do justice to the complexities of his plays. His plays interpret
life from various angles and provide the motivation and inspiration required for the
creation of a new society based on the principle of equality. Having their roots in the actual life around him, Tendulkar’s plays mirror both the positive and the negative sides of society. They bear testimony to his firm grip on the contemporary social reality. The present study is an effort to analyse and interpret Tendulkar’s vision of society as reflected in his eight plays translated into English, viz. *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *The Vultures*, *Encounter in Umbugland*, *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *A Friend’s Story*, *Kamala*, and *Kanyadaan*. The study examines Tendulkar’s attitude towards social problems and his views on human existence. It proposes to show Tendulkar as a social critic who offers a rare and very powerful insight into the contemporary Indian society.

The fact that the works under the present study have been translated from Marathi into English has to be kept in mind. An attempt has been made to understand whether the reflections of the author in the translated plays match with those that are found in the original Marathi texts. It is prudent to take a review of the growth and development of the translation studies in this regard. According to Professor Susan Bassnett, the process of translation involves the rendering of a source language text into the target language so as to ensure that the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and the structures of the source language will be preserved as closely as possible.\(^5\) Thus a translation is a rendering of the same ideas in a different language from the original. The discipline that concerns itself with the problems raised by the production and description of translations is known as ‘Translation Studies’. Earlier it was seen as a sub-branch of linguistics. It began gaining ground steadily since the late 1970s. It is no longer seen as a subsidiary art as translation is now being perceived as a fundamental act of human exchange. Translation is being seen as an act of inter-cultural communication which
ensures the survival of a text in another language. Commenting on the relationship between source and target texts, Octavio Paz writes that it is the task of the writer to fix words in an ideal, unchangeable form and the translator has to liberate those words from the confines of their source language and allow them to live again in the language into which they are translated. Thus both original and translation are now viewed as equally valuable products of the creativity of the writer and the translator.

Translation is a matter of converting an utterance in one language into its exact equivalent in another. Every language has a culture of its own. It has a distinct style and character, a particular manner of expression. So the translator has to take into account the cultural aspects of translation and the contexts within which the translation occurs. He has to use words, phrases and idioms in such a manner that the nearest equivalent sense is suggested. There is no full equivalence through translation. Edward Sapir aptly remarks: “No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.”

Idiomatic translations are universally preferred to literal ones. A literal translation follows the words of the original very closely and exactly whereas an idiomatic translation takes the peculiar character of a language into account. The translated product is a result of a complex system of decoding and recoding on the part of the translator. The translator first reads and translates the text in the source language and then translates it into the target language. Hence the interlingual translation is bound to reflect the translator’s own creative interpretation of the source language text.

The issue of the untranslatability of the text is raised when the translator comes across terms or concepts in the source language that do not exist in the target
language. Such untranslatability can be linguistic or cultural. The cultural associations and connotations of the words in one language may not be transferable into another language adequately. The linguistic untranslatability results from the differences between the structures of two languages. As there cannot be sameness between two languages, something may be lost or gained in the transfer of a text from source language to target language. At times, the translator can enrich or clarify the source language text as a result of the translation process.

The translation of the text of a drama presents its own specific problems. The drama text is written with a view to its performance. It contains certain distinguishable structural features that make it performable. The translator has to ensure that these features reach the target language text. While studying translated literature, one has to compare it with the original to see whether proper justice has been done to it. Vijay Tendulkar says that he tries to give his characters their own separate existence and expression by attributing certain nuances and variations of speech to them. This can be felt more in the original versions of his plays as some of these nuances and variations of speech are lost in a translation. An attempt has been made to solve this problem by comparing Vijay Tendulkar’s translated plays with their original Marathi texts.

**Background of the Marathi Theatre:**

It is important to examine the state of the Marathi theatre before the appearance of Vijay Tendulkar in order to get a proper understanding of his art. The strong playwriting tradition in Maharashtra has been alive now for over 150 years. The various folk forms of theatre such as *Lalit, Tamasha, Keertan, Dashavatar* and *Bharud* originated from different regions of Maharashtra. All of them are accompanied by music, dance, and mimic action. There is simplicity in language,
costumes and staging. The germs of Marathi drama lay in these folk forms. They influenced the evolution of Marathi drama,

Shahajiraje Bhonsale, the King of Tanjavar, had written plays in Marathi towards the end of the 17th century. They bear the influence of the classical Sanskrit plays as well as the *Yakshagana*, a folk form of South India. The plays, however, were not staged and the tradition of playwriting did not continue after Shahajiraje.

The Marathi theatre rose in full swing in Pune and Bombay with the arrival of Vishnudas Bhave, an extremely talented playwright and director. Vishnudas Bhave is generally considered as the father of Marathi drama. His play *Sita Swayamvar* (*Sita’s Selection of Bridegroom*) was staged on 5th November 1843 in the court of the King of Sangli, Chintamanrao Patwardhan. Vishnudas’s father, Amrit Vitthal, was an officer in the king’s army. Vishnudas was born in 1820. He began working as a personal attendant of the king while he was still in his teens. He used to write poetry. The king, who was a connoisseur of arts, took note of that and appointed him as a storyteller-poet in his court. According to Shanta Gokhale, a troupe of *Bhagwat Mela* performers from north Kanara visited Sangli in 1842. *Bhagwat Mela* was a popular folk form in southern India in which the Bhagwat or the Sutradhar tells a mythological story through song and dance. The Bhagwat also used to take the guise of various characters in the story. Witnessing this performance, the King of Sangli saw in it a form of entertainment that would add to the cultural life of the court. So he asked Vishnudas Bhave to present a refined version of the *Bhagwat Mela* performance for the royal household and courtiers. This led to the performance of *Sita Swayamvar* which is regarded as the first Marathi play.
After the successful presentation of *Sita Swayamvar*, the King of Sangli encouraged Bhave to compose other plays. Bhave formed a company and gave his dramatic presentations in different parts of Maharashtra in the next ten years. His innovations consisted in having the play’s characters act in a manner closer to that found in everyday encounters between people and the inclusion of some western stage production techniques, such as changeable scenery. His plays gave prominence to songs and music. They were one-man shows with the Sutradhar or the narrator dominating most of the action. The Sutradhar and his accompanists sang the songs and the actors, wearing masks, enacted the content of the songs. The element of humour was provided by the clown and the *asuras* (demons) through their dialogues and actions. They were allowed some improvisations too. The clown’s role was similar to that of the Shakespearean clown. Through his clever, sharp and witty remarks, he provided comic relief and satirical comedy and also threw light on the temperament and actions of other characters. The inclusion of skilful sword-play and dances appealed to the masses. Besides Bhave’s company, other drama companies also came into existence, chief among them being Narharbuwa’s Company, Shahunagarwasi Company, Mumbaikar Natak Mandali and Amarchand Wadikar Natak Mandali. The plays performed by these companies attracted large audiences. Plenty of songs, crude actions and abundant humour characterised these early mythological plays. According to Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni, these troupes evolved a mixed type of drama whose backbone was a repertoire of songs with the actors improvising dialogue to fill in the gaps between two successive songs.¹⁰ As such there was no complete play as a uniform and permanent creation. After the Bhave Company the Aryoddharak, the Maharashtra and the Shahunagarwasi Company played an important role in the development of the Marathi Theatre. These
companies started giving performances throughout Maharashtra setting up temporary camps wherever they performed. These touring companies were happy to be itinerants and soon won the allegiance of the newly educated middle class.

The drama companies were closely associated with the newly educated middle class people. Due to their itinerant character, they had reached in various nooks and corners of Maharashtra. The social thinkers like Agarkar, Kelkar and Savarkar, and political agitators like Khadilkar and Wamanrao Joshi had turned to drama. Their works had become powerful carriers of their ideals. The top-ranking political leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak had been taking keen interest in the theatre. That’s why, the Marathi theatre became directly involved in the movements for social reform and political independence. The Aryoddharak and the Narharbuwa’s produced mostly prose plays. A version of Shakespeare’s ‘The Comedy of Errors’ was part of their repertory. The Aryoddharak was founded due to the efforts of G.B. Deval and his colleagues in 1879. G.B. Deval played the hero Zunjarrao in the adaptation of Shakespeare’s ‘Othello’ by the Aryoddharak drama company. The play is still popular with Marathi audience. The Shahunagarwasi drama company had been formed under the leadership of Ganpatrao Joshi in 1881. It produced mostly mythological plays. Its fame rests on Ganpatrao Joshi’s skilful performances as the poet-saint Tukaram and Balwantrao Jog’s wonderful portrayal of female parts. The company also produced the Marathi version of Shakespeare’s ‘The Taming of the Shrew’ done by Prof. V.B. Kelkar. Ganpatrao Joshi worked histrionic miracles on the stage playing Hamlet in Gopal Ganesh Agarkar’s translation of this Shakespearean tragedy.

The Marathi theatre was dominated by the singer actors such as Bhaurao Kolhatkar, Ganpatrao Joshi, Ganpatrao Bhagwat, Keshavrao Bhonsale and
Narayanrao Rajahans alias Bal Gandharva. They played a significant part in bringing wide acceptance and respectability to the Marathi theatre. Many of them became legends in their life time due to their unique performances in female roles. Bhaurao Kolhatkar, a heavenly singer, played the female parts in Kirloskar Natak Mandali’s mythological adaptations. Keshavrao Bhonsale immortalised the role of the eponymous character of G.B. Deval’s play *Sharada*. Sharada is a young girl who is forced by her greedy father to marry a rich old man in this play.

The names of two playwrights, Madhavrao Patankar and Babajirao Rane, deserve mention for writing plays with an eye to the ordinary villager. They used simple plots with a straightforward message to draw the ignorant masses away from their favourite pastime, the local *Tamasha*. Rane used to carry a generating set with him and staged plays literally in bright light in the farthest villages of Maharashtra. He used to play the role of the wife of Saint Tukaram.

With the passage of a decade or so the audience started growing weary of the Bhave style of drama. The introduction of English education in India by the British administration also contributed to the decline of early mythological drama. The young men studying in the colleges were introduced to western literature and Shakespearean drama. They also studied the Sanskrit plays of Kalidasa, Sudraka, Bhasa, Bhavabhuti etc. According to Shanta Gokhale, the Bhave school of drama seemed crude to these university-educated men in comparison with the Sanskrit and the Shakespearean plays. They yearned for a new kind of Marathi drama and began translating Sanskrit and Shakespearean plays into Marathi. Thus the newly awakened sensibility took the form of translations and adaptations from Sanskrit and English drama.
Mahadeoshastri Kolhatkar translated Shakespeare’s ‘Othello’ in 1867. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar brought ‘Hamlet’ into Marathi. The scholarly men produced adaptations of the plays of Shakespeare one after another. K.G. Natu’s *Vijaysingh* was based on ‘Julius Caesar’ whereas V.M. Mahajani’s *Tara* was based on ‘Cymbeline’. Prof. Vasudeo B. Kelkar produced a Marathi version of ‘The Taming of the Shrew’ for the Shahunagarwasi touring company. B.R. Pradhan adapted ‘Comedy of Errors’ as *Bhrantikrut Chamatkar*. The classical Sanskrit plays were also translated a great deal. Krushnashastri Rajwade translated *Vikromorvarshiya, Malatimadhav* and *Mudrarakshas*. Ganeshshastri Lele brought *Janakiparinay* and *Malavikagnimitra* into Marathi. All these translations contributed to the development of the Marathi theatre. Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni writes that the foundations of the ‘prose’ school of Marathi drama were laid by these Shakespearean translations.

Vinayak Janardan Kirtane’s *Thorle Madhavrao Peshwe* (The Elder Madhavrao Peshwa) written in 1857 had no songs or musical recitals. The whole drama was acted with dialogues which were totally in prose. Kirtane used history rather than mythology as his material and drew upon the conventions of both the Sanskrit and the Shakespearean plays for its structure. The newly educated class was dissatisfied with the stuffing of songs and dances just for their entertainment value in the early Marathi plays. The adaptations of plays from a different culture could not retain the interest of the masses in large numbers. Kirtane’s *Thorle Madhavrao Peshwe* was a sort of experiment to deal with the history of the glorious Maratha Empire which had disappeared only half a century ago. It catered to the contemporary needs and aspirations by trying to correct the wrong impressions of the Marathas created by the British historians. Shanta Gokhale writes that “the play was a landmark in Marathi theatre, begetting a whole body of dramatic writing
comprising what came to be known as ‘prose’ plays, that is, plays without songs.” This genre ran parallel to the *Sangeetnatak* (verse play) in the period from 1890 to 1920. After the decline of the *sangeetnatak* in post-World War I period, the writers of modern drama received impetus from this tradition to chart their own course.

After Vishnudas Bhave, the next important actor-playwright in the Marathi theatre is Balwant Pandurang alias Annasaheb Kirloskar. He began his career with mythological Bhave-type plays. *Shankardigvijay* (The Conquest of Shankara) can be cited as an example. According to Kapila Vatsyayan, Kirloskar continued to follow the conventions of the Sutradhar, clown, the invocation of Lord Ganapati etc. in his earlier plays. He gave the Marathi theatre a new turn by the incorporation of classical ragas for the singing of all parts in his later plays adapted from Sanskrit classics such as *Shakuntalam* and *Mrichakatikam*. After composing half a dozen plays for a drama company which he had joined at the age of twenty, Kirloskar formed his own company, the Kirloskar Natak Mandali in 1880. His adaptation of the Sanskrit classic *Abhijnanshakuntala* by Kalidas was the finest production of the company.

Kirloskar had come across *Abhijnanshakuntala’s* Kannad translation by Turamari Sheshgiri Rao in 1870. Rao had given his own renderings of the Sanskrit verses as footnotes in addition to the translation of the original verses. Adya Rangacharya comments: “Kirloskar saw the significance of this innovation and in his own Shakuntala he introduced songs in simple Marathi at appropriate places. The final result was a combination of prose and music, the former keeping up the dramatic narration and the latter adding to the enjoyment of the audience. This pattern started a tradition which till now is popular on the Marathi stage. Plays of the type were called ‘Sangeet’ (musical) plays.”
Kirloskar discarded Bhave’s convention of having the *Sutradhar* (narrator) providing all of the singing. In his plays, the characters were made to express their thoughts and feelings through their own singing. He used the different Hindustani ragas and folk songs from Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat as tunes for these songs. The songs succeeded in creating a proper atmosphere for the traditional and mythological themes. They advanced the narrative by providing information to the audience and also elevated the mood of the scene. Prose speech was also used at suitable places. In the hands of Bhave’s imitators, the opening scene with the *Sutradhar* had merely become a convention. Kirloskar made the dialogue between the *Sutradhar* and the *Nati* (an actress) a dramatic device of great evocative power. He also gave up the practice of having a *Vidushak* (clown) in the play.

The tradition of the *Sangeetnatak* (verse play) started by Kirloskar was continued by able playwrights like G.B. Deval, S.K. Kolhatkar, R.G. Gadkari and K.P. Khadilkar. Govind Ballal Deval was a student of Kirloskar. He gave up the career of teaching to become a playwright and joined the Kirloskar Natak Mandali. Most of his plays were adaptations with the exception of *Sharada* (1899). This play dealt with a burning social problem of the period, i.e., the custom of marrying young girls to old men. The play continues to be popular even today though the problem it dealt with has faded into the background. It is Deval’s dramatic art that has made this possible. Shanta Gokhale gives the credit of *Sharada*’s timeless appeal to Deval’s deeply humanistic treatment of character and situation. The skilful use of music contributes to the dramatic narrative of this play, something which Kirloskar’s lesser imitators were unable to do. Uptil now the Marathi theatre had consisted of mythological plays, verse plays and adaptations from Sanskrit and Western plays. Deval’s *Sharada* was an attempt to deal with an actual social problem in a realistic
manner. Thus Deval was a forerunner to the modern Marathi playwrights like Tendulkar, Alekar and Elkunchwar who displayed social realism in their works.

Shripad Krishna Kolhatkar appeared on the dramatic scene with his play *Veertanaya* (The Son of the Brave) in 1896. He continued the Sangeetnatak tradition but his methods were different to those adopted by Kirloskar and Deval. His innovations included jaunty melodies and highly Sanskritised, stylised dialogues. A university educated man of the time, he was dissatisfied with the stagnancy of the verse plays of the Kirloskar imitators. Patankar Sangeet Mandali staged *Vikram-Shashikala* in 1891. Kolhatkar’s biting criticism of this play resulted in Madhavrao Patankar, the owner of the company, daring him to compose a good verse play himself. Game for the challenge, Kolhatkar wrote *Veertanaya* and approached Kirloskar Natak Mandali for its production. The instant success of the play gave a new star to the Marathi theatre. Afterwards, Kolhatkar wrote plays such as Mooknayak (The Silent Leader), and Mativikar (The Disease of Intellect) etc.

In his plays, Kolhatkar revolted against all the characteristic elements of the Kirloskar-type verse play. Kirloskar’s plays bear the influence of the Sanskrit classic plays whereas those of Kolhatkar show the influence of western plays. Chandra Bhan Gupta comments that the style of Kolhatkar’s plays is in the manner of western dramatists like Shakespeare. Kirloskar’s plays used to open with a dialogue between the *Sutradhar* and the *Nati* (an actress). Kolhatkar got rid of this convention and moved straight into the invocation in his plays. Kirloskar-style dramas were based on mythological stories. Kolhatkar’s plots were imaginary in character. Shanta Gokhale writes: “His (Kolhatkar’s) plot devices include impersonation, magic rings, miraculous herbs, events foretold. His characters were convenient vehicles for advancing his complex plots. His dialogues had nothing to do with building
character. Rather, they were designed to showcase the playwright’s wit, intellectual conceits and free-ranging imagination.”

Thus Kolhatkar tried to be free of all conventions and endeavoured to stretch the audience’s disbelief as much as possible. He introduced tunes from the Urdu and Gujarati plays for his songs. Instead of the soft and subtle Hindustani ragas, he used jaunty tunes with novel note clusters. Because of his habit of using either Sanskritised or invented words, his lyrics became a little obscure for the audience. A significant contribution of Kolhatkar was his introduction of the comic sub-plot which later expanded into pure comedies in the post-World War I period.

Another important playwright of the early twentieth century is Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar. A disciple of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Khadilkar was an important leader of the nationalist movement. After working as the editor of Tilak’s ‘Kesri’, he had begun his own newspaper ‘Navakaal’. He wrote seven prose plays and eight verse plays. Nemichandra Jain comments that Khadilkar’s early mythological and historical plays show the strong influence of Shakespearean tragedy.

As a freedom fighter, he was opposed to the British domination. As a playwright, however, he had accepted the English model in his plays. His first play Sawai Madhavrawancha Mrityu (The Death of Sawai Madhavrao) was written in 1893. It was based on the period of the Peshwa regime in the history of the Marathas. It depicted how domestic quarrels led to the suicide of a Peshwa. The play shows clear signs of being influenced by the characterisation of ‘Hamlet’ and ‘Iago’.

Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni writes that the “villain of Sawai Madhavrawancha Mrityu is very much cast in the mould of Iago, though he stands out as an independently sustained and artistically valid characterisation”. The characters of Raghobadada...
and his wife Anandibai in Khadilkar’s *Bhaubandaki* remind us of Macbeth and his lady.

Khadilkar’s *Keechakwadh* (The Slaying of Keechak) is considered as one of the most significant political plays in Marathi. It was banned by the British administration. It is a good example of the way the dramatists invented subtle stratagems to present their point of view as plays displaying national self-awareness were being banned by the English administration. The play dealt with an episode taken from the epic ‘Mahabharata’ in which Bhima, one of the Pandavas, slays Keechak, an evil-minded warrior, for trying to molest Draupadi. Keechak symbolised British rule as represented by the hated Lord Curzon. This intelligent and forceful allegory satirised the Curzon regime. Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni writes: “During the period of national discontent, the Marathi stage was not only in the vanguard of the freedom movement, but also underwent far-reaching changes in the technique of writing and producing plays. More than the newspaper, the play forged the aspirations of mass sentiment into a constructive weapon to fight against the tyranny of the rulers. Actors, dramatists and playgoers - all became part of the larger national upsurge.”

In his play *Vidyaharan* (Theft of Knowledge), Khadilkar used a mythological episode to attack the increasing addiction to liquor in society, an evil effect of the influence of western culture. Another much talked-about play of Khadilkar is *Manapaman* (Honour and Dishonour), a *sangeetnatak* which dealt with the inequality between the classes. Staged in Mumbai on 12 March 1911, it was hailed as a glorious Landmark in Marathi theatre. Interestingly the play got praised by audiences and critics not for its dramatic merit but for its ingenious use of music on stage. Considered as a play, it is found inferior to Khadilkar’s earlier plays such as
Keechakwadh and Vidyaharan etc. Nemichandra jain comments that the great success of Manapaman gave rise to a phase in Marathi theatre in which the success of the classical Indian singing made acting and other dramatic aspects secondary in a theatrical performance. In this phase the audiences flocked to theatre more to hear music rather than to see a play.

The Maharashtra Natak Mandali was founded in Pune in 1905. Among the several young intellectuals attached to this company was Keshavrao Date, a distinguished actor. The company introduced many changes in the stage design and also used modern make-up for the first time on Marathi stage. Yeshwantrao Tipnis, a prominent actor of the company, formed his own troupe and staged a few historical and social plays. He produced Totayache Band (Revolt of the Duplicate) by N.C. Kelkar and Vadhu-Pareeksha (A Bride’s Trial) by Kolhatkar in addition to his own play Matsyagandha (Smelling of a Fish).

Though verse plays were being written on a large scale in Marathi since Kirloskar’s Shakuntala (1880), the music in these plays began getting an inproportionate importance since 1908. According to Shanta Gokhale, the Kirloskar Natak Mandali decided to bring the music accompanists - the tabla and harmonium players - out from the wings to the orchestra in front of the stage. This move marks the decline of the Sangeetnatak. A drama within drama of sorts was created as the lead singer-actors began competing with each other to exhibit their musical skills. Their improvisations started going out of hands. The audiences, however, thoroughly enjoyed this and so the trend continued to flourish. In the quest of commercial success, the playwrights and the company owners did not show much concern for the dramatic art. The fact that the Marathi theatre had two great singer-actors in Narayanarao Rajahansa popularly known as Bal Gandharva and Keshavrao Bhonsale
also prompted the playwrights to write plays which made the best use of their unique art.

Bal Gandharva had received his earlier training in the Kirloskar Natak Mandali. He formed his own company, the Gandharva Natak Mandali, with the assistance of Ganpatrao Bodas, a character actor and Govindrao Tembe, a musician. It enjoyed great success till the advent of the cinema. The company thrived on Khadilkar’s mythological *sangeetnatakas* written to suit the talents of Bal Gandharva. Gadkari’s *Ekach Pyala* (Just One Glass) provided both Bodas and Bal Gandharva with parts to their liking. The company introduced lavish sets and spectacular effects in its mythological plays. The sets were designed to offset Bal Gandharva’s movements, expressions, clothes and music. He used to climb down the specially constructed steps displaying the full majesty of his trailing sari. The singer-actors Keshavrao Bhonsale and Bal Gandharva became the rage of Maharashtra due to their skilful performances in female roles.

Ram Ganesh Gadkari, a disciple of S.K. Kolhatkar, also continued the tradition of Marathi verse plays. He wrote mostly social dramas which were highly appreciated by the public. Before dying at an early age of thirty-four due to ill-health, he wrote tragedies like *Ekach Pyala* (Just One Glass, 1917) and *Premsanyas* (Retirement from Love, 1912) and a comedy, *Bhavbandhan* (Bonds of Emotion, 1919). He had lived a turbulent life facing problems such as poverty, ill-health and an unhappy marriage. He gave a lot of importance to the purpose of the drama. He tried to play his part in the movements for social reform as well as freedom through his plays. His works bear the influence of both the Shakespearean as well as Sanskrit plays. According to Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni, ‘Othello’ was very much at the base of Gadkari’s mind while writing the social tragedy *Ekach Pyala*. There are striking
similarities between *Ekach Pyala* and ‘Othello’ with regard to their plot-construction and characterisation. *Ekach Pyala* tells the tale of the tragic effects of alcoholism on the life of a respectable lawyer, Sudhakar. The characters of Sudhakar and his wife are parallel to those of ‘Iago’ and ‘Emilia’. This play is still performed and continues to draw packed houses. In addition to depicting the tragic end of an alcoholic, Gadkari also questions the established set of values in society in this play. Shanta Gokhale comments that Gadkari had attempted a combination of Shakespearean tragedy and comedy in this play. She writes: “It was a Sangeetnatak in the best Kirloskar tradition, balancing natural dialogues with emotionally charged songs. It was a tragedy in the Shakespearean sense, with the ‘fatal flaw’ driving the hero to destroy himself along with his nearest and dearest, and it was a play of many rasas based firmly on indigenous examples from Sanskrit and folk drama.”

Shankar Kashinath Garge, a contemporary of Gadkari, wrote under the pen-name, ‘Diwakar’. He did not receive formal education in a college but was familiar with most of the important works in western literature. After trying his hand at some short plays (playlets) and translations, he began to write dramatic monologues in prose. Browning was his inspiration. These short prose pieces were called as *Natyachhata* (The Shades of Drama). Diwakar’s place in Marathi theatre is not significant but his experiment with language provided guidance to the later writers of
Marathi prose drama. His works showed how the poetic language in Marathi drama was getting ready to be replaced by a conversational contemporary idiom.

The Marathi theatre took recourse to realism under the influence of Ibsen in the post-World War I period. Bhargavaram Vitthal alias Mama Warerkar was one of the pioneers in bringing the realistic social drama on the Marathi stage. He depicted the problems and sufferings of the lower-middle class people on Marathi stage for the first time. Nemichandra Jain comments that the realistic prose plays of Warerkar helped in firmly establishing the western dramatic model in the Marathi theatre. According to Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni, Warerkar bears the influence of Ibsen and G.B. Shaw in his desire to use drama as a vehicle of social reform. He writes that the Ibsenian technique of dispensing with scenes in a complete act of the play was also transferred to the Marathi stage during Warerkar’s heyday.

Warerkar wrote his first play *Kunjavihari*, a *Sangeetnatak*, in 1908. The costuming of this play, with its genuinely provincial emphasis, was widely appreciated. In those days the *Sangeetnatak* was enjoying an immense popularity. The undue importance given to the element of music and the competitions between leading singer-actors were harming the dramatic art substantially. Keshavrao Bhonsale, a leading singer-actor had established a drama company Lalit-Kaladarsha. Realising the ill-effects of the contemporary tendencies that had crept in the *Sangeetnatakas*, he invited Warerkar to write prose plays for his company. Warerkar brought about changes in the themes as well as structure of the Marathi plays. He used his medium to bring about changes in the contemporary social, economic and political situation. Intellect, rather than emotion, reigned supreme in his mental make-up as a writer. In *Sanyashacha Sansar* (The Householding of a Monk), Warerkar dealt with the problem of enforced conversion by Christian missionaries in
India. In *Haach Mulacha Baap* (Here’s the Boy’s Father), he satirised the evils of the dowry system. Unlike Khadilkar who used to disguise the political message in his plays in allegory, Warerkar dared to put forward his message in a more straightforward manner. Having run into problems with the British administration which had banned the performance of his play *Majurancha Rajya* (Rule of the Labourers), he began taking certain precautions in his later plays. His play *Sonyacha Kalas* (The Golden Spire) dealt with the millowners’ exploitation of labourers. The playwright suggested to follow the Gandhian principles of understanding, co-operation and non-violence in order to promote better industrial relations. In addition to the bad millowner, he introduced the character of a good millowner in order to avoid controversy. He also submitted a copy of the script to the police department before the performance of the play.

During the staging of Warerkar’s plays by the Lalit-Kaladarsha company, the stage-design became more and more realistic. The artists like Baburao Painter and Anandrao Mistry brought about radical changes with their new approach towards stage-design. After Keshavrao Bhonsale’s death, Bapurao Pendharkar took the reins of the Lalit-Kaladarsha in his hands. His production of Warerkar’s *Satteche Gulam* (Slaves of Power, 1932) introduced box scenes and realistic properties after western models. His next play *Turungachya Darant* (At the Prison’s Threshold) was the first Marathi play to do without scenes.

In his career spanning over three decades, Warerkar made a significant contribution to the job of keeping the Marathi drama alive during the uncertain years between the coming of the cinema and the end of World War II. As a member of the Rajya Sabha in post-independence period, he continued his efforts for the promotion
of Marathi theatre. The first national theatre festival was organised in Delhi in 1954 because of his efforts.

The golden age of the Marathi Sangeetnatak had come to an end by 1920. The period unto 1945 is comparatively barren as far as the Marathi drama is concerned. The cultural and political environment in Maharashtra began declining after World War I. The middle class which had led the cultural and political scene so far felt lonely and sad. Most of the writers belonged to this class and so the reaction of this sorry state of affairs is seen in their writings. The glorious tradition of the verse play which had begun with Kirloskar’s Shakuntala had lost its vigour completely. The theatre companies were facing financial problems. The arrival of the talking cinema also contributed to the theatre’s decline. Most of the dramatic output in this period is mediocre with the exception of the plays of P.K. Atre and M.G. Rangnekar who managed to keep the Marathi drama alive.

In 1933, a new company, Natyamanwantar, was formed by a group of intellectuals and theatre enthusiasts. It staged Andhalyanchi Shala (School for the Blind) on 1 July 1933. It was an adaptation of the Norwegian playwright Bjornson’s ‘Gauntlet’ by Shridhar Vinayak Vartak. The author’s wife and Jyotsna Bhole, the wife of Keshavrao Bhole, the plays’s music composer, played the feminine parts. According to Shanta Gokhale, “Natyamanwantar was formed with the specific purpose of bringing modern drama to the Marathi stage”. The playwright made a lame effort to make the songs appear a part of the natural everyday conversation. A unique feature of the play was that it provided instrumental music at appropriate places to enhance the effect of the events on stage. It was an inspiration from the
cinema. The new class in the society which used to give itself airs on account of its familiarity with the English language and the western ways was represented in this play. The next three plays produced by Natyamanwantar did not get financial success and the company was closed down within three years of its formation.

The fate of other drama companies in Maharashtra was similar to that of the Natyamanwantar. Almost all the major companies, including Kirloskar Company, Bal Gandharva Company and Lalit-Kaladarsha closed down between 1934 and 1936. The rapidly increasing popularity of the cinema and the mediocrity of the Marathi plays of the period chiefly contributed to this calamity on the Marathi drama. The first few years of the fourth decade of the twentieth century can be termed as the worst time in the history of Marathi theatre. After the release of Ayodhyecha Raja Harishchandra (Harishchandra, The King of Ayodhya) in 1931 by Prabhat Films, the popularity of the cinema rose rapidly. The Marathi theatre had not been able to retain its earlier vigour. Many actors and technicians deserted the theatre and turned towards the new medium. The well-established drama companies had kept on repeating their earlier successes. The matters were not helped by the formation of new companies by actors who had quarreled with their companies. Many of such new companies had to be closed down because of the lack of professional managers with good business acumen. Actually other regional language theatres in the country such as the Telgu, Tamil and Kannada theatres also faced the same fate. The Marathi drama was too deep-rooted, however, to be completely destroyed. Along with Varerkar, Atre and Rangnekar’s plays continued the tradition of the Marathi drama even during this period.

Pralhad Keshav Atre, a disciple of Gadkari, created a tradition of social comedies in Marathi theatre. He had the knack of catering to the audience’s taste
successfully. His plays were produced by Balmohan Natak Mandali. He had done a lot of preparation before entering the arena of playwriting. As Chandra Bhan Gupta has suggested, Atre used to give an excessive pleasure to the audience, though sometimes of a third-rate order to get financial success. In addition to Gadkari, Atre was also influenced by the comedies of Moliere and Noel Coward. A complicated plot with an emphasis on misunderstandings, witty dialogues and farcical humour are the characteristics of his plays. There is a blending of humour and compassion in his plays. He was a thoroughly professional playwright who understood the psyche of the theatre audience clearly. While writing in the naturalistic mode, he gave prominence to emotion over thought as he firmly believed that humour and sentiment were sure ways of winning the hearts of his audience. Some of his notable works are To Mee Navhech (I Am Not That Person), Sashtang Namaskar (Total Prostration), and Gharabaher (Out of the Home). He earned a place of pride for humorous plays which had earlier been looked upon as plain entertainment without a certain viewpoint about life. After the Balmohan Natak Mandali’s closure during the World War II, Atre turned towards film making.

Another important contributor to the Marathi stage during the difficult years between the advent of cinema and the end of World War II is Motiram Gajanan Rangnekar. Beginning his career as a journalist, he founded his own theatre, Natyaniketan. While working as a journalist, he had come into close contact with the drama companies. He had seen the drawbacks of setting up a residential company in which staying together all the time used to give rise to jealousy, rivalry and backbiting among the actors. He successfully avoided all these things in the thirty-two years of Natyaniketan’s existence. He realised that the Marathi plays needed to be short, light and entertaining in order to survive the onslaught of cinema. He tried to
give the audience what they were looking for. Plots dealing with domestic problems, creation of a pleasant atmosphere, verbal wit and clever imagination are the characteristics of his plays. Some of his notable works are Kulavadhu (Bride of a Respectable Family), Ashirwad (The Blessing), Kanyadan (Daughter Given Away), Wahini (Sister-in-Law) and Maher (Father’s Home). His play Kulavadhu (Bride of a Respectable Family, 1942) dealt with the problems faced by a working woman. There are shades of Ibsen’s ‘A Doll’s House’ in it. Keeping the taste of the audience in mind, Rangnekar placed songs in this play but saw to it that they do not obstruct the flow of the narrative. Angered by the unjust treatment given to her by her husband, Bhanumati, the heroine of Kulavadhu, leaves him at the end of the play. The shock of Bhanumati’s deserting her husband is lessened by her decision to return to her husband’s parents’ home. Unlike Ibsen, Rangnekar did not wish to create a sense of disturbance in the minds of the play-goers and so made his unconventional heroine to stick to her duties as a daughter-in-law. Rangnekar also experimented with joint presentation of his one act plays such as Satra Warshe (Seventeen Years) and Farari (The Fugitive) but did not get much success.

The Little Theatre run by Parshwanath Altekar came into being in 1942. Altekar staged some of Warerkar’s most novel social plays. The company had to be closed down due to heavy financial losses. The Indian National Theatre (I.N.T.) was founded in 1944. It was an all-India organisation with branches in different provinces. It sponsored and produced plays in Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi and English. The I.N.T. enabled the Marathi playwrights to get away from the dominant melodramatic trend and to write about the common man and his daily problems. The I.N.T. productions gave rise to new types of plays and techniques of productions.
An important director-actor associated with the I.N.T. was Atmaram Bhende. He staged the translations of plays by modern western playwrights such as Pristley, Kapek and others. He made innovations like having scenes changed in blackouts rather than behind dropped curtains and making a revolving stage revolve in full lights. Later, Bhende set up his own group called Kalakar and produced many farces. His production of Baban Prabhu’s *Zopi Gelela Jaga Jhala* (The Sleeper Awakens) became quite famous. Earlier farces were frowned upon by the serious theatre-lovers as being frivolous plays. Now it became an established genre in the Marathi theatre.

Another cultural institution which played an important part in the development of the Marathi theatre was the Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh (MMSS). It showed its commitment to the resuscitation of the Marathi theatre by reviving some old classics as well as the production of many new plays. It celebrated the centenary of the Matrathi theatre in 1943 with a fourteen-day festival of plays beginning with Warerkar’s play *Saraswat*. In all, forty-one drama groups participated in this festival. Approximately 8000 people turned up every day to watch the dramas being presented on an open-air stage in Mumbai. The yearly drama festivals organized by the MMSS from 1944 to 1947 gave a new direction to the Marathi theatre.

The modern era in the Marathi theatre may be said to have begun after the end of World War II in 1945. In the post-war period, the life in the western countries had become alarmingly insecure. The uncontrollable greed and ambition of the political tycoons combined with the invention of deadly nuclear weapons had shaken the very foundation of human existence. Despair and a sense of alienation was haunting the humanity. The faith in god and religion and traditional values had become meaningless terms. It was natural that this state of chaos was reflected in the
western drama and literature. Even the Marathi theatre felt the impact of these conditions. The new schools like existentialism, the theatre of the absurd, the theatre of cruelty and the Brechtian theatre etc. also influenced the Marathi drama.

One of the chief translator-adaptors of this period is Madhav Manohar. His adaptations include Karel Kapek’s ‘Mother’ as Aee, J.B. Pristley’s ‘Sleeping Serpents’ as Zoplele Nag, Cliford Odet’s ‘Waiting For Lefty’ as Davarechi Wat and V.P. Katayev’s ‘Squaring the Circle’ as Sanyashachi Shinge. Anant Kanekar adopted a number of plays including Goldsmith’s ‘She Stoops to Conquer’, Galsworthy’s ‘Strife’ and Barrie’s ‘What Every Woman Knows’. A number of other playwrights also applied themselves to translating contemporary playwrights from Europe and the U.S. All these plays did not, however, fit the social and cultural environment of Maharashtra. As a result, their popularity was limited.

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, launched an inter-collegiate one-act drama competition in 1955. The Maharashtra State drama competition also began around the same time. These competitions encouraged the budding playwrights. The theatre audience showed a lot of interest in the festivals of plays organised by the sponsors of these competitions. The Progressive Dramatic Association (PDA) in Pune and Rangayan in Mumbai were established in the sixties. Prof. Bhalba Kelkar and Vijaya Mehata led these groups respectively. These theatre groups dared to stage plays which were different from the mainstream trends.

The Awishkar theatre group was founded by Arvind and Sulbha Deshpande. It has produced over 150 plays in the last forty-three years, most of them being experimental plays. It has provided a valuable platform for numerous directors, technicians as well as budding artists. It has been conducting various workshops for amateur artists. It was the advent of cinema that had initiated the decline of Marathi
theatre in the thirties. The sixties witnessed the decline of Marathi cinema. The middle class people reverted back to the theatre. The new audience expected a treatment of its life and problems in the plays. The prominent playwrights from 1955 to 1985 displayed an awareness of contemporary reality and dealt with the problems of human relationships in a fast-changing society.

After getting independence in 1947, modernity and industrialisation began sweeping rapidly through the country. A new nation was being built. A new society with new sensibilities was coming into being. It was against this background that Vijay Tendulkar’s play *Shrimant* (The Rich) appeared in 1956. Unfazed by the initial failures, he continued to write plays with an amazing regularity for almost four decades and enriched the Marathi theatre considerably with his innovations in the form as well as the content of his plays.

To sum up, it may be said that the Marathi drama has had an impressive and continuous tradition since its beginning in 1843 with Vishnudas Bhave’s plays. Due to the presence of a professional stage and encouraging box-office prospects, the playwriting tradition has flourished in Maharashtra. The Marathi theatre took great strides from 1955 onwards because of the efforts of Vijay Tendulkar and his contemporaries such as Vasant Kanetkar, P.L. Deshpande, C.T. Khanolkar, V.V. Shirwadkar, Ratnakar Matkari, Achyut Vaze, G.P. Deshpande, Satish Alekar and Mahesh Elkunchwar who continued the tradition of entertainment-cum-edification of their predecessors. The changing conditions in the social, political and cultural spheres of Maharashtra in the post-independence times are adequately mirrored in the works of these dramatists. Their plays are characterised by realism in theme, structure, dialogue and setting. Their main concern is the presentation of contemporary life. Thus the Marathi drama has succeeded in regaining the glory
which it had lost in the period between the two Great Wars. Tendulkar is one of the major contributors towards the resurgence and spectacular success of Marathi drama in the second half of the twentieth century.
REFERENCES


