CHAPTER – IX

Conclusion
The contemporary Marathi theatre has been one of the most fertile grounds for the expression of modernity. It represents tremendous changes in the preoccupations of the playwrights, in the relationship between experimental theatre and professional theatre. These remarks, it must be stated at the outset, do not encompass all forms of theatre in Maharashtra, such as folk theatre or Tamasha, street theatre, and so on held in various urban and non-urban centres of professional theatre. Most of the discussion is restricted to the experimental theatre.

"The experimental theatre during this period represents an attenuation of creative impulses as well as continuation and accentuation of certain tendencies observed in the earlier period." Since Marathi theatre has been dominated by the supremacy of the written world, the text, it is the playwrights that one has to consider as the most important element in the development of theatre.

G.P.Deshpande is one such playwright. He wrote his plays in the cultural ethos in post-Independence India. His plays are political plays primarily because they are about politics and people in politics. For him reality is not an absurd amalgamation of diverse and illogical forces. It is structured by a complex interlocking of economic, social, political and cultural forces. All his plays define politics in terms of power structures that emerge out of class, caste and gender divisions in society. They create relations of inequality between people, based on exploitation of workers, low castes, women, etc., who are
subordinated in various ways. This also means that there are movements of resistance which try to overthrow the yoke of these oppressive structures. Literature is vitally engaged with the living situations of men and women in society. This view is a Marxist one; it does not view society from outside or above, but from inside. “Deshpande’s plays represent politics as not merely a representation of interests but as the constitution of interests.”\textsuperscript{2} They address themselves to the contradictions that emerge within the forces that challenge the hegemony of values, beliefs and practices established by those who own the means of production. Deshpande’s plays do not present discussions of abstract issues though course, the plays are essentially ‘discussion plays’ in that discussion often emerges as the form of action, intellectual action at times. The action is located in the lived experiences of individual men and women involved in revolutionary struggles and their highly complex relationships with each other, and also with the power structures around them. Deshpande’s characters are individuals, not types. Yet these individuals constitute and are constituted by the political forces around them. They are essentially actants in the dialectical process of changing the world. They are participants in the struggle between opposing forces - forces of hegemony and forces of resistance which challenge them. While laying bare the politics of control and manipulation, it is not merely the establishment that Deshpande exposes. He lays bare the contradictions within the very forces that seek to challenge and overthrow the oppressive power structures. In this sense, his plays provide us
with a far more disturbing understanding of contemporary Maharashtrian society than any other playwright in Marathi. The plays address themselves to the task of unfolding the processes that create specific forms of power and influence, domination and subordination. More importantly, they are concerned with the contradictions within the forces that challenge the hegemony of values, beliefs and practices established by those in power. This is not achieved through a discussion of abstract issues, of course. His plays deal with the lived experience of individual men and women and their highly complex relationships with each other and with the other power structures around them. Deshpande believes that these individuals constitute and are constituted by the political forces around them. They are essentially active participants in a dialectical process which is shaped by their dynamic interaction with the complexly constituted reality in the form of the politics of control, manipulation as well as resistance. And in doing so, they expose the contradictions not only within the hegemonic power structures but, more importantly, within themselves, and also within the forces that seek to challenge that hegemony. In this sense, his plays provide us with a far more political understanding of society and individual men and women living in it.

“For the first time in Marathi, G.P.Deshpande's plays sought to analyze the complex interlocking of social, political and cultural forces in the pre-and post-Independence Indian, or specifically, Maharashtrian society”3.
The 'action' in his plays, therefore is the 'action of thoughts'. It is not constituted by a chain of events or action in the established theatrical sense of the word. The drama lies in the clash of conflicting ideologies. His characters are rooted in them. The dramatic tension is created through characters that hold specific beliefs and values that arise out of their political convictions as well as political convenience. Many of his plays show people in the revolutionary movements caught at some turbulent points in the flux of history and the play shows or discusses their journey to their inevitable doom. More often than not, his plays are concerned with the process of 'defeat of the eagles' trying to change their world.

"Deshpande's A Man in Dark Times brought to Marathi theatre a new vision and language which defeated would-be spurious emulators, in order to discover the beginnings of the concerns that had long preoccupied Deshpande." First and foremost, one must note that A Man in Dark Times despite its formidable tags of 'political' and 'experimental', became very popular. In the play, the outcome of the enquiry against Kulkarni depended to some extent on whether he could force them to confront the complex truth of the matter they were discussing rather than condemning him due to simplistic political equations. In an emotional flash back scene Kulkarni is seen arguing with his uncles. He had the profoundest love and respect for his father, so profound that it sliced through their political differences. Father, death, filial love, memory, sentimental attachment to objects, tears on Kulkarni's side, and
a cruel lack of feeling for his grief on the part of his uncles, draw sympathies for Kulkarni. His uncles lash him out for having opposed his own father in the political field. Kulkarni stands between the ascetic, self-repressive ideology of Saraswati and the indulgent, self-expressive freedom of Madhavi. He has loved both women, but has not allowed that love to interfere with his commitment to his liberal left ideology. We become involved with Kulkarni on all levels, emotional, spiritual intellectual. P.Y., once his co-runner who later ran away from the field, now sits in judgement over him. It is a cruel moment. Kulkarni, the Marxist intellectual has used all the wit and presence of mind at his command, side-stepping every direct hit, giving away as little as possible to avoid the final moment of submission. Yet, the moment is upon him P.Y. absolves himself of all responsibility in the matter.

Kulkarni’s son is a symbol of the future of all liberals. The last lines of the play are suggestive of mental confusion and disintegration. Despair is reinforced by the playwright’s description of Kulkarni at the end. His ideology has been shattered.

Deshpande’s Past One O’ Clock, the title is taken from Mayakovisky’s last poem written shortly before he shot himself. The play revolves around the seventy-fifth birthday party of a CPI leader with a Naxalite son who interrupts the party. Nana’s children assemble at Nana’s residence on the occasion. They represent different strands in their fields. Almost all of them have not ingrained
Nana's liberal attitude towards politics except his youngest son Uddhav. He is the only person on whom Nana hopes to see the movement being carried over. Tension erupts in the family as one-by-one starts interfering in the matters among themselves. It reaches a peak state with Uddhav's polemic protest against Kulkarni. This shows how the family itself becomes a hurdle for a leftist to carry on his ideology.

A Passage to Darkness is generally held to be Deshpande's most complex, mature and successful play. The representative of 'parallel living' in the play is Vasundhara, the protagonist. One of her two lovers, Shripad, and her student, Ashwath, who is like son to her, represent the conflicts within the left movement. The winner in the struggle, the one who knows how to benefit by the inherent weaknesses of these three conflicting modes of thought, is Vasundhara's other lover, Daulatrao Rajemane.

Vasundhara's married life with Parikshit is a tragedy. She has left Parikshit, but has refused to marry Daulatrao. She wishes to live a life of non-involvement. In keeping with this resolution, she later refused Shripad, the Marxist University lecturer who proposed marriage. Son-like Ashwath on whom alone she had hopes of creating a new 'Sankhya', gets killed in the police encounter. Shripad is jailed. Vasundhara has lost everything she had lived and hoped for. Now her cycle of suffering is complete. Her experiment of a parallel existence has failed.
Vijay Tendulkar had remained the representative of the contemporary modern drama, not only in Marathi but on the Pan-Indian level for a long span of the last thirty-seven years. He is a prolific Marathi playwright. A journalist by profession, Tendulkar had tried his hand at various genres during the last forty years as a creative writer. These include articles, short stories, one-act plays, dramas, Screen-plays and dialogues, literary criticism and translations. Though he has been successful in whatever he has tried but his forte remains drama. An excellent wielder of the pen, he has won the Sangeet Natak Akadami Award, the Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay Award and the Padma Bhushan.

Majority of Tendulkar’s plays became the most controversial, mostly from ex-dramatic point-of-view. His plays not only disturb our peace but even shock us. Focusing the viewer’s attention on the cynical philosophy of life, he leads his audience to believe that man is ‘base, Villainous and cruel.’ His plays are documents on the innate cruelty in man. He flings his plays as bomb shells on the complacent society and let it shrug its shoulders with shamefacedness at its own horror-striking atrocities.

Tendulkar’s Ghasiram Kotwal unravels the spectacle of cruelty that remains embedded in politics, sex and religion. Nana Phadnavis of Poona exploits Ghasiram’s ambition for power over his offenders. Humiliated by the Brahmans of Poona, Ghasiram becomes a slave to his passion and pledges
revenge on them. He can gratify his thirst for revenge through only power and he struggles hard for the whip of Kotwal. When a congenial situation comes handy to him, he holds on to it. He stoops low to conquer power. He presents his daughter, Lalita Gauri, as a bait for the salacious Nana Phadnavis and emerges as the Kotwal of Poona. His rude and revengeful exercise of power straightens all the curves of the Brahmans of Poona. He cleanses Poona of corruption and licentiousness. But he goes too far in his passion for revenge to be tolerated by the Brahmans for long.

Nana Phadnavis uses Ghasiram as a talisman against his political opponents. Later after the disposal of Lalita Gauri, he realizes the invalidity of Ghasiram and orders happily the beheading of the latter on the demand of the furious mob. Ghasiram raises no resistance against the mob as his dreams about his daughter are dashed to the ground by the tidings of her death. But her premature death dispels all his dreams and he becomes easily subdued by the artful viles of Nana. With the promptings of Nana Phadnavis he becomes more revengeful and more blood-thirsty and invites his doom. When the wrathful mob surrounds him and stones him to death, he welcomes that sort of breath taking death for having sacrificed his beloved daughter at the altar of Nana Phadnavis' lechery.

By making Nana Phadnavis court Lalita Gauri in a temple of Lord Ganapati, Tendulkar has superbly manipulated the co-mingling of politics, sex and religion exposing the hypocrisy and Machiavelian selfishness of man.
Encounter in Umbugland is a purely political play. It unfolds the cruelty of political game where each politician conspires to suppress and supercode others. King Vichitravirya desires to rule Umbugland for thousand years though he is already old and on the verge of death. However he reprimands his cabinet for a similar aspiration. After the death of the king, the cabinet ministers out wit each other in their struggle for power. As they fail to arrive at an agreement among themselves, they install their late king's daughter, Vijaya, as their ruler. Vijaya's adolescence and inexperience attracts them. They resolve to make her their pawn. But the moment she is enthroned, she turns to be more than a match for them, she rejects their restrictions and asserts freedom in the administration with her independence of mind. As a consequence the cabinet ministers get disheartened and deny cooperation to her. This strife for power launches them on an encounter.

As it happens usually in a political game, one of the cabinet ministers belonging to Kadambas supports the queen and both the parties use the public to establish supremacy over each other. The race for power thus goes on. The cabinet’s plans are to burn the palace and to dethrone the queen with succor of the mob. However, the queen proves to be the stranger and more powerful in diplomacy and defeats their plans with the guidance of her servant, Prannarayan, and the cabinet minister, Bhagadanta. She manoeuvres to turn the tables against them by inciting the mob against them and easily subdues them to her authority. She starts governing them autocratically like her late father. In
their race for power they forget all their affection and turn cruel to one another. That is, resort to treachery to grab power. He emphasizes this idea through the momentous comments of the cabinet ministers and Prannarayan a man of third sex.

Girish Karnad is India’s leading playwright and one of the most outstanding practitioners of performing arts. He is among the foremost media persons of our time. He has directed feature films, documentaries and television serials in Kannada, Hindi and English. An actor-director, art-critic and film star Karnad is a man of many achievements. He has represented our country in foreign lands as an emissary of Indian art and culture. Karnad’s achievements as a playwright have received widespread national and international recognition. His creative abilities have brought him a number of awards and rewards. Hayavadana (1971) won Kamaladevi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh for the best play of the year in 1972. In 1992 he was awarded Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the most creative work of 1989 for his play Naga-Mandala (1988).

Though a multi-dimensional personality, Karnad is at his best in playwriting. He accepts “I have been fairly lucky in having a multi-pronged career. You know, I’ve been an actor, a publisher, a film-maker. But in none of these I felt quite as much at home as in playwriting” Karnad grew up in Sirsi, where he had his first hand experience of the indigenous folk theatre. He was
exposed to two theatre forms, “plays and staged by troupes of professional actors called natak companies and the more traditional Yakshagana performances” acted in the open air. Karnad, in course of his study, read the plays of the Western dramatists including the great masters of dramatic art in ancient Greece. Karnad’s plays include Yayati(1961), Tughlaq(1964), Hayavadana(1971), Nittina Hunja(1980), Naga-Mandala(1988), Tale-Danda(1990) and Agni Mattu Male(The Fire and the Rain, 1995). His five plays Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Naga-Mandala, Tale-Danda and The Fire and the Rain have been translated into English, the first two by Karnad himself.

Karnad’s Hayavadana is richly symbolic and spectacular. The main-plot, the story of a love triangle between Devadatta, Kapila and padmini, is drawn form the Kathasaritsagar, an ancient collection of stories in Sanskrit. The original story, a part of the Vetalpanchvimsarthi, narrated by Vetal, a ghost, to Vikram, an adventurous Indian King, poses a moral problem, whether the man with Devadatta’s head or the man with his body be regarded as Padmini’s real husband. And the solution is given that the head being the best part of man, the man with Devadatta’s head is her real husband. Thomas Mann, the great German writer, in his reworking this story in The Transposed Heads ridicules the body. Mann believes that the human body is a complex creation of nature for the fulfilment of human destiny and the transposition of the head does not liberate one from his physical nature. Karnad draws heavily on
Thomas Mann’s story, but he uses the story to explore the theme of human identity in a world of tangled relationships and struggle for perfection.

Devadatta comely in appearance, unrivalled in intelligence, a born poetic genius, the only son of a Bramhin, marries Padmini, the best among the size types into which Vatsyayan classified all women. Devadatta’s friend Kapila, dark and plain to look at, having no equal in physical strength, is the only son of an ironsmith. Devadatta and Kapila are the closest friends, ‘one mind, one heart’ as the Bhagavata describes them. But Padmini is attracted to Kapila’s body and he to her beauty. The complications ultimately lead Devadatta and Kapila to sacrifice their heads to Goddess Kali. However, on Padmini’s entreaties the Goddess asked her to put their respective heads properly on their bodies to bring them back to life, but in confusion, Padmini put Devadatta’s head on Kapila’s body and Kapila’s head on Devadatta’s body. Padmini expected to get the best of both; Devadatta’s head and Kapila’s body, but the results were unexpected and disastrous. The close friends became the worst enemies and the demands of nature changed their physical features. The confusion of identities in the plays reveals the ambiguous nature of human personality. At last they kill each other in a duel and Padmini performs Sati ending life.

“The sub-plot of Hayavadana the horse-man, deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it on a different plane”7.
Hayavadana, the son of a Gandharva, who was born as a horse for Kuber’s curse, and a beautiful princess of Karnataka, was left alone by his parents. He was born a horse-headed man. In order to get rid of the horse-head and become a complete man, he visits many holy places, tries magic and mantras and gets blessings of holy men, Gods and Goddesses but finally becomes a complete horse. The animal nature triumphs over the head, the best in man. Hayavadana represents the aspirations of human beings for the unattainable in the Brechtian terms.

In Naga-Mandala, Karnad weaves together two Kannada folk tales, which he had heard from A.K.Ramanujan several years ago; the first reveals the paradoxical nature of oral tales and the second tells the story of Rani whose predicament reflects the human need to live by fiction and half-truths.

The play is about Rani, the queen of long tresses, whose hair tied up in a knot looks as though a black king cobra lies curled on the nape of her neck. Rani’s husband Appanna, proud and jealous, ill-treats her, coming home only for lunch and staying away with a concubine at night. Kurudavva, the best friend of Appanna’s mother, gives Rani a piece of root to give it to her husband to win him over. As the first piece fails, Kurudavva gives Rani the second piece which she grinds into a paste. When the paste prepared from the root is boiled in a curry, it turns red as a brook. Rani horrified at the sight of the food throws it into the ant-hill and the king cobra, who lives there eats the food. Enamoured
by the charm, the cobra enters Rani’s room at night and takes, as he can, the form of Appanna. Their meetings at night continue; Rani cannot understand why Appanna so nice at night is rough and rude hissing like a stupid snake during the day. Appanna gets furious when Rani is pregnant. The village elders sit in judgement and Rani swears that she has not touched anyone except her husband and the cobra, nor has she allowed any male to touch her. “If I lie, let the cobra bite me”. The cobra does not bite her, but slides up her shoulder and spreads its hood like an umbrella over her head. The crowd is stunned, while the Elders declare her a devi, a divine being. Appanna, too, asking her forgiveness takes her fondly into his arms. Rani gives birth to a beautiful son, but Appanna is aware that he is not the father of the child. The cobra, unable to bear separation, ties a stress on Rani’s hair round its neck and strangulates itself to death hiding in her hair. The dead cobra falls to the ground when Appanna combs her hair. Rani, who now understands all about the cobra, wishes him to be cremated by their son and rite to be performed to commemorate the cobra’s death. Appanna agrees to the wishes of Rani as he regards her the goddess incarnate. Events have meanings only in relation to persons. In Naga-Mandala, the human and non-human worlds enter into one another’s lives to reveal the playwright’s visions of reality.

Theatre is one of the media in the service of man’s genuine attempt to comprehend the world around him. And the playwrights like G.P. Deshpande, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad contribute their own variety of expression
to theatre. Deshpande’s plays are experimental and political. His forte is not to please the audience but to make them self-introspect over the bitter realities of life. He openly discusses how and why ‘activists’ fail to succeed in implementing their ideologies. He delves deep into the negative side of the politics and traces the reasons for the failure of political movements: may it be insistence for parallel living, or lack of strength to stick on to their ideologies as a result siding away with some position in the ruling party, or the internal differences in the opinions making things worse for themselves leaving room for the enemies to catch them separately and finish off. Deshpande is successful in focussing this tendency in politics through his plays. Vijay Tendulkar’s plays emerge as documents on the tendency of cruelty inherent in man. He appears to be more interested in exposing hypocrisy and cruelty in politics than in trying to analyse the complex situation he has presented in his plays. Girish Karnad explores the potentiality of themes from myths, legends, folk-tales and history, but his approach is modern. His plays with their rich touch of Indian culture have given a new height to the modern Indian theatre.
REFERENCES


