had already been conferred upon by the Government of India Awards since 1952, by granting them the “Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar” and a purse of one lakh rupees each in November 1990. Besides appreciation of art, the objective behind was to show that art did enjoy State patronage, although royal patronage had come to an end.

When all is said and done, a true artist takes his connoisseurs in a higher veneration, as if the audience is his deity, rather than the patronage of anybody else, whether royal or State. It was not for nothing that Balgandharav used to adulate the audience and address them as “Deva” (god) in a highly excited voice. Every Indian musician bows with the highest reverence, virtually renders the obeisance to the body of listeners with folded hands. However, great a musician might be; he touches the dias, with reverence before ascending on it and then expresses his deep reverence to the listeners. After every Cheeze he accepts their appreciation respectfully and at the end of his recital he renders his obeisance and bends in humble reverence before the audience. And the audience too applauds the artist with an excited adulation and so to say, acknowledge the sublime experience which it had during the recital. This sublime happiness can better be experienced than expressed in words although the musician may not come up to the expectations due to deviation of mood in a particular concert, the connoisseur looks at him with reverence. Indeed music is one such area, where the bonds of language, caste and religion disappear. There dawns blissfulness arising from the identity of sentiments (Advaita) between the musician and the connoisseur. This is indeed the Indian culture.

A good many concepts and phrases in the area of music unfold the context of culture. The words like Gandharva, Gurukul, Guru-shishya parampara, Gharana, Gandabandhan, Khalifa, Mehfil, Keertan, Bhajan, Khayal, Dhrupad unfold the variegated characteristics of Indian culture. A good many cultural aspects are revealed and enunciated through them.

III. Marathi Theater*

Marathi theater indeed adores a place of honour in the panorama of fine arts in this land. Nay, drama theatre has profusely contributed to the enrichment of the art heritage of Maharashtra. What the Maharashtrians lost in the sphere of the art of painting during the mediaeval and Maratha times, it gained on the colourful drama stage from 1843. It is true that Maharashtra failed to nurture the art of miniature paintings, Kangra paintings, Tanjavar paintings and many other art forms, while they traversed through this land from North to South or vice a versa. But Maharashtra more than compensated this loss by evolving and developing the drama theater as an independent genre of performing art. Verily Marathi theater and particularly the musical stage known as Sangeet Rangabhoomi, has no precedent or

* The write-up on Marathi Stage has been contributed by Dr. K. K. Chaudhari.
A Sangeet Natak is by no stretch of imagination an 'Opera' musical drama as understood in Western countries. It is neither an opera bouffa of the eighteenth century or an opera seria of France, or an opera comique or a grand opera of England. Sangeet Natak, bears some semblance to the music drama, a form of opera introduced by Wagner in which the relations of music and drama have been reformed. However, it differs considerably from this form too in many essentials. It is a performing art form with an independent identity in the saptakalas (seven arts) as it combines a fusion of dialogues with semi-classical Indian music.

Sangeet Natak or musical drama theater has indeed blossomed not merely as an independent performing art but has developed into an institution. But for the ebb and flow, its popularity has not dwindled over the past one and a half century. Nay, a Marathi man loves this art form so much so that he is enamoured of it. Over the years the theatre has become an integral part of the cultural milieu of Maharashtra. In the present times drama enjoys profuse publicity and appreciation in the print media as well as the electronic media and it is a recipient of great honour and decoration as the national level as well as in cultural conventions. Today an actor or actress suffers no indifference or neglect. On the contrary they are honoured and conferred with decorations and awards by Government. The theater did, reform movements during the pre-Independence era. It occupies an honourable status in the contemporary social and cultural movements also. The Sangeet Natak Academi at the national level or the Cultural Affairs Department at the Statelevel encourage the artists by granting awards, medals, honorarium, stipend and special reservation in the grant of concessional Public housing schemes. Grand drama festivals are organised by Government or aided institutions. It should however, be noted that the theater or an actor did not enjoy such social recognition at the dawn of Marathi theater during the 1840. An actor was not, then an honourable entity. As compared to the actor the singer enjoyed a recognition, a higher status in society just as a priest. A singer in a temple was taken to be a servant of God. Music was a sanctified art form in a temple as in the royal court. Although, women singers did not enjoy social esteem, the 'Buwa' musicians were venerated. In fact a 'Nat' or satirically called a Natakya was looked down upon and underrated. This might be due in part to the current values accepted by society and in part to the behaviour of a section of artists.

Veritably the fatherhood of Marathi theater rightfully goes to Vishnudas Bhave of Sangli. His dedication and zeal to evolve the theater turned out, in the course of history, to be a significant social as well as cultural endeavour unprecedented not merely in Maharashtra but in the entire Indian Sub-continent. This endeavour
had its beginning in the inspiration and help of the Sangli Chief Chintamanrao Appasaheb Patwardhan, who was himself a connoisseur and an appreciator. After seeing the unartistic, boisterous and coarse performances of the Bhagwat Mandali (troupe) from Karnataka in Sangli, he instructed Vishnudas Bhave to present dramas on mythological themes, which have the dual objective of entertainment as well as promotion of virtue and good behaviour in society. Bhave took the cue and created a novel style of dramatic performance and thereby gave birth to the Marathi theatre. Bhave enacted the first performance of his own script of Seetaswayamvar at Sangli on 5th November 1843 with the material help of Partwardhan. It is for this reason that the glorious history of Marathi theatre is conceived to have commenced from this date. The grand centenary of Marathi theatre was celebrated over ten-twelve days from 5th November 1943 on the sands of Mumbai's Choupati as well as in Pune, Sangli, Nagpur, Amravati, J algaon, Bhusawal, Kolhapur and several towns in Greater Maharashtra. This marked the beginning of celebration of the anniversary of Marathi Rangabhoomi on 5th November every year.

For many years till Bal Gangadhar Tilak, society in general looked upon the profession of drama theatre merely as an instrument of entertainment and aggrandisement of mythological episodes. The very thematic content of practically every drama was mythological or based on Hindu epics, while there was no social import whatsoever. Besides Sæetaswayamvar, Bhave presented many other dramas on the stage and laid the foundation of the profession in the real sense of the term.

It is true that Chintamnnrao Patwardhan encouraged and helped Bhave throughout his lifetime. But after his demise (1851) Bhave was denied royal patronage. Hence, he was forced to arrange his performances in other towns for survival of the theatre so painstakingly created by him. All the co-artists in his troupe were Konkanastha Bhrahmins from Sangli. Now that his theatrical troupe had to resort to itinerant performances, he developed a form of touring theatre, which shortly became the practice in the profession. Eventually, many artists from his troupe established their own troupes and earned a name.

In this itinerant phase of the theatre, the companies received material help from the Chiefs of Kolhapur, Kurundwad, Aundh and Jamakhind in South Maharashtra as also from Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda, Shivajirao Holkar and Sawai Tukojirao Holkar of Indore and Madhavrao Shinde of Gwalior. But when all is said and done, popular patronage was the real support from the people. The owner had to bear the loss, the help of the Chief was minimal. Hence, the troupe had no alternative but to move from place to place for the performances. Within a few years many enthusiasts took the inspiration from Bhave and established several theatrical companies in Maharashtra and eventually the Marathi stage developed far and wide.
‘Modernity’ in all walks of life dawned first in Mumbai from the 1820. Mumbai was metamorphosed, as a progressive modern metropolis. It was an era of renaissance, an allround development in educational awareness, enlightened journalism, administration of justice, occidental studies and arrival of English literature and fine arts. The pioneers of the new renaissance were enlightened men like Jagannath Shankarshet, Balshastri Jambhekar, Atmaram Pandurang, Paramanand, Vishwanath Narayan Mandlik, Sir Jamshedji Jeejeebhai Batliwala, Dr. John Wilson, Muhammad Ibrahim Mukha and Mahomed Ali Roghay. The seats of occidental learning such as Elphinstone College (1827), Grant Medical College (1845), Wilson College (1861), University of Bombay (1857) and St. Xavier’s College (1869) and Asiatic Society contributed towards the emergence of the renaissance. The first four illustrious graduates of the Bombay University Mahadev Govind Ranade, Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Bal Mangesh Wagle and Vaman Abaji Modak were followed by youths of great initiative Pherozeshah Mehta, Kashinath Tryambak Telang and Rahimtulla Muhammad Sayani. These leaders of the Intelligentsia became the leaders of public opinion, and they devoted themselves to the renaissance in Indian society. That period is indeed worth recalling and introspecting upon even now. Learned men like Balshastri Jambhekar, Naoroji Furdunji and Dadabhai Naoroji were disseminating learning from the dias of professorship in the Elphinstone College. Shortly Mahadev Govind Ranade joined as Professor of English literature, while R. G. Bhandarkar was teaching oriental languages in the Elphinstone, Bal Mangesh Wagle was adoring the professorship in the Poona College (now Deccan College and Post Graduate Research Institute). Jambhekar, the pioneer of Marathi Journalism, and U. N. Mandlik were enlightening the reading public through modern newspapers. Jagannath Shankarshet was protagonist of the synthesis of oriental and occidental learning and he very infently tried for enrichment of indological studies and female education. Dadabhai Naoroji too was a product of the renaissance and one of the inspiring spirits of the times.

The endeavours of these enlightened Indians received not merely a good response but an encouragement from Westerners such as Sir Alexander Grant, Dr. John Wilson (who became one of the greatest Sanskrit Scholars), Dr. Dugald Mackichan, Prof. William Wordsworth, Justice James Gibbs, Sir Raymond West, every one of whom was a lover of English literature and a thinker. During this period itself several lovers of English literature and a generation of eminent occidentalists came to the forefront. The plays of William Shakespeare, Moliere which have universally been appreciated for their great literary value and a deep impact on human mind, reached this land. They were played on the stage in Mumbai and large cities and towns in India. There was an influx of English drama, poetry, novel, literary
criticism and philosophical works. Simultaneously, Western thought and modes of Western art made an impact on the Indian way of life and various art forms except Indian classical music. The stimuli of renaissance spread from Mumbai to Pune, Nagpur, Amravati, Kolhapur and then to Nasik and Khandesh. The new precipice spread gradually to towns in the State, which had a startling impact on growth of awakening with far-reaching results.

It was but natural that the renaissance should have made a deep impact on Marathi drama and literature. While accepting the Western mode, the Intelligentsia realised that it was essential to effect a thorough change in the mode of indigenous arts, theatre and literature. They also perceived the inherent power and force latent in the theatre as an effective medium for bringing about a desired social and cultural change. They argued that Marathi drama should possess a social content and a purpose, besides literary values. It should have an intentness, a meaning and an aim for regeneration of a better society. College teachers in Mumbai and Pune did create an awareness amongst the youths in this respect. The outcome of this was that many thinkers in Mumbai and Pune gave a stimulus to reorientation of drama themes, which would suit the needs of the changing socio-political scenario. Meanwhile leaders of public opinion in Mumbai including Dr. Bhau Daji Lad, Jagannath Shankarshet and Sir Jamshedji Jeejeebhoi argued that it was their duty to extend all possible help to professional drama companies for development of this art, particularly because the theatre was a medium of full manifestation of many arts. They became the friends and supporters of Vishnudas Bhave during his very first sojourn in Mumbai.

History must record that the great scholar of oriental studies and a nationalist leader of the eminence of Bhau Daji had used to personally sell the tickets for the performances of Bhave's dramas on all the four occasions between 1853 and 1862 in Mumbai. He also used to write down the accounts of expenditure and income of every performance meticulously. This was indeed very significant. A man of Bhau Daji's stature was exerting so much for selling tickets and encouragement to theatre. This had a definite impact on other leaders of public opinion too, who were active in assisting the performances.

Lokmanya Tilak too realised the importance of the theatre as a means of achievement of many goals. He was convinced and he convinced others that theatre was a confluence of several other arts such as literature, histrionics, music, painting, dancing, folk arts etc. Tilak was instrumental in giving a new orientation to the implied and hidden meaning in the drama theme along with the explicit one. He inspired leading playwrights of the day to take recourse to metaphorical manifestation of an implied meaning on the stage so as
to implant a nationalist spirit in the societal psyche and to create unrest against the British. Tilak impressed upon the playwrights that the theme of a drama could be mythological or historical but it should have a definite Nationalist and anti-British import. In the course of time a certain political content came to be implied in Marathi plays. Besides Nationalism, many important aspects such as satire on social customs and a powerful attack on orthodoxy and a contempt for and denunciation of social evils too found their echoes on the Marathi stage. Eventually the social content in Marathi plays became more explicit than ever before. An average reader of a drama book could rarely realise the hidden content. However, the implied or hidden meaning did not fail to be realised by the audience, while listening the dialogues accompanied by histrionics on the stage. Naturally Marathi stage gained a higher status and dramas became more and more content or purpose orient. Along with the orientation towards social reforms and Nationalist thought, many dramas with an intrinsic dramatic value and realism started appearing on the stage.

In this history of Marathi theatre it may be essential to have a look at the period prior to Vishnudas Bhave. Exactly 67 years prior to Bhave i.e. from 1776 the Bombay Amateur Theatre used to stage English plays on the pattern of the stage in London. This was intended to satiate the thirst of Englishmen to see the dramas in the English language. A glimpse into the form of the English stage is afforded by the reviews in contemporary newspapers such as the Bombay Courier, Bombay Gazette and Iris. Some British officers took an initiative in establishment of the Play House Ripon Theatre, Victoria Theatre and afterwards the Opera House in Mumbai, on the pattern of the theatres in Piccadley in London. These theatres virtually monopolised the staging of English dramas, particularly Shakespearean ones, in Mumbai educated Indians too were attracted to the English stage. The Parsee stage, which emulated the English counterpart, was by far the first modern Indian stage. It was from the middle of the nineteenth century that Sanskrit, Gujarati and Marathi dramas began to be staged in Mumbai. Amongst the theatrical troupes established in this metropolis between 1875-1885, “Neeti Darshak” (Gujarati), “Hindusthani” and “Parsee Natak Mandali” earned greater patronage. It was around this time that the Indian Fiddle Sarangi came to be used for accompaniment to singing instead of the Western harmonium.  

Bhau Daji Lad’s symbolic gesture in selling tickets and maintaining the accounts of drama performances had behind it a foresight that the actors should also be granted the social status which was showered upon the English plays. This brought home a realisation to the enlightened Maharashtrian leaders and a few connoisseurs too, about the literary qualities as well as the thematic content of plays. It was during this period (1862) that the ‘Ichalkaranjikar Natak Mandali’
staged the drama Thorale Madhavrao Peshwa written by Vinayak J anardan Keertane. This was by far the first Marathi drama with written dialogues, but no music at all. This Mandali served Marathi stage ceaselessly for 40 years. One of the principal reasons for the success was that a great thinker like Krishnashastri Chiplunkar was its mentor. It certainly was significant in the context of the emerging new society in this land. The ‘Aryoddharak Natak Mandali’ floated by Govind Ballal Deval, Shankarrao Patkar and Vaman Bhave in Pune in 1880 certainly deserves to be recognised as a ripe form of the movement of the educated gentry in the sphere of theatre. This company performed the valuable job of acquainting the Marathi audience with the English as well as Sanskrit plays.

However the credit for evolving the great artistic tradition of Marathi musical stage, better known as Sangeet Rangabhoomi, goes undoubtedly to Balwant Pandurang Kirloskar, popularly known as Annasaheb. Verily he transformed the character of Marathi stage and effected a revolution in this sphere. He was inspired with the idea of a drama with prose dialogues and songs appropriate to the theme, from the Indrasabha staged by Parsee Natak Mandali of Mumbai. He translated into Marathi the Abhijnana Shakuntalam of Kalidas, the most precious gem in the rich treasury of Indian classics. The Marathi Shakuntal appeared on the stage on 31st October 1880 under auspices of the Kirloskar Natak Mandali floated by the playwright himself. It was replete with music and songs based on genres of music such as Thumari, Dadra, Tappa, Chaiti, Kajari, Hori, Keertan. This was a great landmark and indeed the dawn of the tradition of Marathi Sangeet Natak. Kirloskar became a pace-setter, and is hence rightly recognised as the father of the musical stage. If Vishnudas Bhave was the father of Marathi stage, Kirloskar fathered the Sangeet Natak. It was for this reason that the centenary of the musical stage was celebrated all over Maharashtra and in Greater Maharashtra in 1980. Kirloskar and his virtuous disciple Govind Ballal Deval bestowed the stage with several artistic features of classicism, connoisseurship and an innate musicality. That the Maharashtrians were enchanted by Shakuntal, is quite true. But even British military officers like General H. S. Hewett too applauded it with a full threat. He wrote to Kirloskar.

"विनायक साहेब द्वारा रचित जनरांतर केंद्रीय धार्मिक नाटक पेशवा लिखित नाटक " (1880) " दंपत्ती करिलकर नाटक मंडळ " ने कोरकेत यांचा " विनायक मुख्य नाटक " यांनी रसायन अस्तित्व आहे. अर्थात यांनी वास्तविकता आणि संगीताच्या ज्ञानाची शक्ती. विनायक मुख्य वास्तविकता आणि संगीताच्या ज्ञानाची शक्ती. विनायक मुख्य अस्तित्वाची ज्ञान " (Vishrabdha- Sharada, Volume II, PP. 19 ).
The unprecedented popularity of Shakuntal naturally boosted up the self-confidence of the playwright. He set himself to writing an independent musical play, unlike the translated Shakuntal. The new creation was Saubhadra, based on a mythological theme but highly musical in character. The titles Shakuntal and Saubhadra bore a similarity, although not in thematic contents. These titles afford an insight into how Kirloskar was influenced by the style of Kalidasian drama. Of course no playwright worth a name could do away with the Riti (literary style) of the great Kalidas. Annasaheb Kirloskar was so much excited by his success that he planned to stage the maiden performance of Saubhadra in Mumbai. However, his well wisher Mahadev Chimnaji Apte, a famous Advocate in Bombay High Court, advised him that the same should not be staged in Mumbai unless it was appreciated by the stage lovers in Pune. Apte had cautioned him particularly because many dramas of their playwrights, who had been attracted to the musical stage due to the grand success of Shakuntal had met with unforeseen failures. Shakuntal was crowned with success because of the full manifestation of variagated Rasa (sentiments), which had absorbing romantic plot, melodious songs and powerful singer-actors of the day. However, pathos generated of separation was the only predominant sentiment in the original script of Saubhadras. A success of a play could hardly be expected without a manifestation of a variety of Rasa. Hence, Apte suggested several changes in the script. Certainly there were stage lovers in Mumbai, but their number, excluding the migrants from Pune and South Maharashtra was limited. Hence, he instructed Kirloskar to carry out changes in the original script and to arrange the maiden performance in Pune instead of Mumbai. It was always deemed advisable that the reputation of any new drama should spread from Pune to Mumbai. The number of audience was higher in Pune than in Mumbai. The learned Brahmins group in Pune was indeed a worshipper of Saraswati and was endowed with a heritage of learning. Hence, their appreciation and support to the new creation was desirable. Therefore, it was rewarding to successfully stage any drama first in Pune and then in Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra. After such suggestions Annasahed suitably changed the script and enacted the first three acts of Saubhadra in Pune on 18th November 1882. The complete drama with five acts came on the stage in Pune in March 1883. It is remarkable that it won more popularity than the Shakuntal from the very beginning, for many obvious reasons. Its popularity has never declined during a span of 112 years. Saubhadra has several distinguishing features such as melodious semi-classical songs, satire, dialogues a scheme of characterisation. It is by far the only Marathi play alongwith Manapman, wherein eminent actor or actress from every generation played a role in this play.
Lokmanyatilak desired that the society should respond to the classical form of dramatics and the artistic virtues introduced by Kirloskar on the stage. It was out of this desire that the hand-bills of Kirloskar Natak Mandali bore the signatures of eminent men like Tilak and Prof. Kerunana Chhatre. Tilak’s commitment to drama and stage is also obvious from his patronage to the Aryoddharak Mandali of Govind Ballal Deval and Shakarrao Patkar. Tilak had honoured this company by accepting the managership of Othello staged by it in March 1881. Mahadev Govind Ranade, the leading light of the nationalist organisation, Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, also took a deep interest in matters relating to stage and Marathi literature. The first conference of Marathi writers was convened in the hall of the Sabha on 24th May 1885. Besides nationalist aspirations, societal patronage and expectations about literature were ventilated on this occasion. Many leading lights including Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Mahadev Moreshwar Kunte, Neelkanth Janardan Keertane graced the occasion. It means that the leaders of society were encouraging both the stage and literature as important media for public awareness and enlightenment (However, the great playwright Kirloskar could not attend this historic event as he had been in Nagpur due to previous commitment).

Kirloskar was himself an educated actor and a refined playwright, and he was a votary and connoisseur of classical music. While pioneering classical art music on the stage, he was extremely keen to keep it conducive to the rising action of the drama. For maintenance of the balance of music and the theme he selected singer actors such as Balkoba Natekar, Moroba Vagholikar and Lakshman Bapuji alias Bhaurao Kolhatkar. Verily Natekar was himself a classical singer and a sitarist of great repute. Vagholikar had the penchant for lavani. Bhaurao Kolhatkar, however, did not confine himself to the strict mould of Ragadari music, but made his songs luscious, harmonious and effective through a mixture of various genres of music. Even the eminent actors and actresses in the subsequent generations emulated the style of Bhaurao Kolhatkar. It is highly remarkable that an eminent actor like Dattatraya Vaikunth Deshpande (stage-name Dattopant Hallyalkar) proudly acknowledged to have emulated Bhaurao.

The songs (pad) in Shakuntal, Saubhadra, Ramrajyaviyog were really based on Chhota Khayals, Kértan, Lavani, Dadra and Tappa. Cultured and sophisticated persons also took a special interest in this adoption of classical music on the stage. They comprised politicians, legal luminaries and Western educated men such as Tilak, Ranade, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, Justice Kashinath Tryambak Telang, Sir Mahadev Chaubal, Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar and Dr. Tryambak Bhalchandra Bhatawadekar. This was indeed an important factor in increasing popular patronage to the musical stage.
Bhaurao Kolhatkar (affectionately known as Bhavadya), a very good looking and scintillating singer, indeed accomplished the stabilisation of the musical stage created by Kirloskar. His role of Shakuntala and Saubhadra gained tremendous popularity in entire Maharashtra. Those were not the days when drama performances were degenerated into a profession or business. Great artists were not business like. There was no strict discipline and continuity. Many of the artists did not possess the art of business. Hence, there was hardly any permanency or guarantee of income. However, Shakuntal and Saubhadra would draw a good income, but not more than 300/350 rupees. After the demise of Annsaheb Kirloskar (2nd November 1885) the ownership of Kirloskar Natak Mandali vested in Bhaurao Kolhatkar, Moroba Vagholikar and Rambhau Kinjawadekar. Govind Ballal Deval was the playwright, director and music composer of this repertory company. In fact Deval is honoured as the first creative director-cum-teacher in the history of Marathi stage. He created a tradition of his own. Generally speaking 1882-1900 is considered a period of the Kirloskar Mandali and Deval and Bhaurao Kolhatkar. Deval wrote the plays Vikramorvashiya (1889), Shapasambramo (1894) and Sharada (1899), for this repertory company, while his Mrichhakatik was also staged by the company in this period. It can thus be seen that this was a period which gave birth to many good classical Marathi dramas.

Sharda indeed deserves the distinction of being the first highly effective drama, which is replete with literary and artistic qualities as well as great social purpose. This content-oriented drama throws a flood of light on the despicable and hateful custom of marriage of a girl in her early teenage with an old man. It delineates the heart-rending pang and pathos of the child-bride. Hypocrisy in society, helplessness and debasement on account of poverty, the shameless sensuality and sexual lust of an old man move our heart. Thinkers and social reformers like Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar and B. M. Malabari came forward to wage a war against this social evil. That was indeed a period of social reformation in the sensational matters such as tonsure of widows, widow remarriage and the age at marriage of girls before puberty. There was a strong demand for as well as a scorching criticism against the Age of Consent Bill. This Bill sought to prevent a man to have a sexual intercourse with his wife before she attains puberty. There were hot arguments and scathing criticisms on the public platform, in newspapers, the legislature and even in streets. The leaders of society in Maharashtra, particularly in Pune and Mumbai were lined up into opposite camps. In this social setting the pathetic grief and helplessness of child-bride Sharda ripped open the hearts of millions, in Maharashtra. This author feels that playwrights like Ram Ganesh Gadkari and Bhargavram Varerkar of the next generation took inspiration from the plot of Sharda.

Social ostracism and shameless sensuality of men about women prevented ladies from appearing on the stage. Hence it was a matter of dire need that man had to play female roles. Shankarrao Mujumdar
was performing the role of Shakuntala, but he did not sing. Then came good looking Bhauro Kolhatkar on the stage in the role of Shakuntala, who not merely looked like Shakuntala but also sang her songs. Afterwards he adorned the roles of Subhadra, Manthara (Ramrajaviyogi) Urvashi (Vikramorvashiya) and Sharda. But after some years he admitted that age had rendered him unsuitable for female roles, and he opted for male roles. The void in female roles was filled in by Krishnarao Gore, Chintopant Gurav and Rambhau Davari all of whom admirably played female roles. But when all is said and done female roles were adorned beyond measures by Balgandharva and Dinanath Mangeshkar in the years to come.

Ganapatrao Joshi was Bhauro Kolhatkar’s contemporary and a luminary even in subsequent period. Indeed he excelled as a hero in prose dramas. Joshi hardly had a parallel in this sphere of acting. He formed Shahunagarvasi Natak Mandali in about 1881. A good many Shakesperean dramas were translated into Marathi. Ganapatrao played the roles of Shakespearean hero’s in Marathi version with a supreme power and dexterity. The emergence of Shakespeare in Marathi had far-reaching results, it elevated Marathi drama to a new height. There by the horizons of drama themes expanded considerably. Amongst the dramas, which pictured the visual image of the Shakespearean world of drama, a mention must be made of Gopal Ganesh Agarkar’s Vikarvilasit (Hamlet), Shreepad Krishna Kolhatkar’s Mativikar (Hamlet) Govind Ballal Deval’s J hunjharrao (Othello). Shivram Mahadev Paranjape’s Manajirao (Macbeth) Vasudev Kelkar’s Tratika (Tarning of the Shrew). These dramas opened up the vistas of Shakespeare’s analysis of the human mind, Fathoming the depth of human sentiments, poetic rendering of the values of life, psychic disorders as also the sublime heights of human life. But for these dramas, this golden treasure would have remained the reserve of only a few who understand the English dramas. Ganapatrao’s name has indeed been immortalised by his roles in the translated dramas. Besides, he evolved a new style of manifestation of the intent of the role through the “throw” of a long a reaching and bullet-like voice. Unfortunately however, hardly any other actor who had the range and pitch of voice comparable to him, succeeded him.

Meanwhile classical music maestro Balkrishnabuwa Ichalkaranjikar tuned the songs of the plays staged by Dongre Sangeet Mandali, floated in 1881. This was another landmark in the history of the musical stage. This eminent Khayal singer gave tunes to the songs which were based on Ragadarari. They not merely earned popularity but elevated the status of Marathi stage in the world of performing arts.

Kashinath Trimbak Telang too, like his contemporary Dr. Bhau Daji Lad, used to urge that the status of drama and stage should be elevated as an effective medium of social renaissance. Drama was channelised as a powerful means of public reforms in Europe. It should be accorded a similar role in this country too. But it could be utilised as a means of
social renaissance, only if the existing public bias against drama theatre was eradicated. The people should be convinced that the medium of this art has a potentiality to impart education and enlightenment. They should be made to realize the import of the couplet of Kalidas. It was through this angle that Govind Ballal Deval skilfully integrated the element of social purpose in drama with the Kirloskarian tradition of the Musical stage in his Sharada. Notwithstanding the fact that Sharada is an art play, its central theme, throws light on the despicable evil of marriage of a teenaged girl with an old sensuous man, assumed a historical importance. This is particularly important because it had its origin in contemporary social conditions. Its theme had not only been sprouted from the social issues of the day, but it stands bound to the future also. Deval’s was indeed a novel attempt directed at social renaissance, and its success appears to have no parallel even in the subsequent period. Those were the days when eminent social reformers such as Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Beharamji M. Malabari were waging a war against the current social evils of child marriage, a ban on widow remarriage, the age of consent for sexual intercourse and the pangs of widowhood during teenage. It was during this uneasy period that Sharada sprouted from Deval’s pen and appeared on the musical stage. Hence, its great importance in social history of Maharashtra. Thousands of child wives of the day were physically and mentally tortured and afflicted by the right of men to have sexual intercourse with immature wives. This was an evil of a male-dominated society and early marriage. The conscience of the entire Indian Sub-continent was shaken by the death of an innocent girl due to the savage intercourse by her so-called husband. This was one amongst hundreds of such cases which were not debated on the public platform. It was to mitigate this evil that the Age of consent Act was enacted due to the efforts of Baharamji Malabari in 1891. Accordingly a husband was legally prohibited to have an intercourse with his wife below 12 years of age. Unfortunately however, the net outcome of the enactment was not much due to the very nature of Indian social structure. Even then it was a leap forward and an essential one too. Prior to the enactment of this statute and even in the subsequent period also, there was a bitter controversy and severe reactions for and against the Bill in Maharashtra, but more particularly in Pune and Mumbai. Against this background the social implication of Sharada was of paramount importance.

Although Sharada, Sanshayakallol and Mrichchhakatika of Govind Ballal Deval pursued the tradition of musical stage, he maintained the balance between music and the unity of plot. In subsequent days Shripad Krishna Kolhatkar (1871-1934) gave an uppmost importance to music by introducing songs, many of which had no relevance to the plot of the drama. His songs were based on various Ragdari compositions. He discarded mythological themes and disregred the elements of seperation and love which had found an expression in classical Sanskrit drama and poetry. On the complicated plot of the Shakespearean romance, he grafted the satirical comedy of Moliere with some elements from the romantic Urdu drama. Thereby he started
another major movement in Marathi drama. His satirical comedy and subtle humour and the glitter of language won him an applause from the readers as well as from audience. He has introduced typical characters just for the sake of subtle humour. Some of his plays ostensibly advocate the cause of social reforms. Veritally his attempts at throwing light on social issues through romantic themes are important in the cultural context. His Sahacharini, Parivartan Premashodhan became quite popular on the stage in those days.

Indeed Lokmanya Tilak had realised the intrinsic value of drama theatre for the pursuit of his nationalist political strategy. This is obvious from a typical example of Tilak's advice to Narayan alias Nana Saheb Joglekar, who was studying Law in his Law Classes. Tilak instructed Joglekar to discontinue the study and join the Kirloskar Natak Mandal. Joglekar took the hint and stepped on the stage. Another example, is that Tilak conferred the honorific title 'Balgandharva' on young Narayan Shripad Rajahans and used his good offices to get the budding artist an entry into the Kirloskar repertory theatre (on gurudwadashi day of 1904). Govind Ballal Deval, who was a teacher-cum-director of the musical drama par excellence, trained Balgandharva in the role of Shakuntala. And Balgandharva's debut on the stage at Miraj left the audience spell bound (1904). He surpassed all previous artists who had been playing the role of Shakuntala. It is quite significant that Prof. Chintaman Gangandhar Bhanu, who held views similar to those of Tilak and was himself a leader in the social and political movement of the day, was the mentor of the Maharashtra Natak Mandal. This repertory staged the plays of Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar such as Kanchangadachi Mohana (1904), Sawai Madhavravancha Mrityu (1906), Keechakvadh (1907), Bayakanche Band (1907) and Bhaubandaki (1909).

The playwrights in the period from 1897-1910 were much under the influence of National Movement and Tilak. Plays like Shiva Chhatrapati Vijay and Bandhavimohan fired the spirit of the Indians against the foreign rule despite the British repressive measures against them. As many as 31 dramas were banned during 1897-1913 under some or the other provision of law and 16 of them were prescribed. The popular amongst them were Swadeshi Natak and Bhatji Bovachi Sankrant of Ganesh Ballal Phansalkar of Satara, Prithviraj Sanyukta of Ganesh Dhunddev Kane, Vanga Vadh by Purushottam Sathe, Maharana Pratapsing by Anant Barve, Samarth Ramadas and Bhimrao by Laxman Narayan Joshi, Swadeshi Chalwal by Ismail Yusuf alias Babaji Bhaladar, Sangvat Bhatuklica Khd by Dhonde Ramchandra Kamarkar, Vijay Teran of Ramchandra Mahadev Mahiskar, Rana Bhimdev jointly written by V. R. Shirwalkar and V. T. Modak, and the most conspicuous of them all were Sawai Madhavravancha Mrityu, Kanchangadachi Mohana and Keechakvadh of Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar.

Khadilkar (1872-1948) was indeed honoured as the greatest playwright of the day for his deep insight into dramaturgy and for setting novel ideology as also his ardentness and sensitive imagination. He was a faithful interpreter of Tilak and one of the first three class associates of the father of Indian Unrest, the other two being Ganesh
Shrikrishna Khaparde and Narsimha Chintaman Kelkar. He was taken in very high esteem as a journalist, politician as well as a playwright. In fact the editorials in the Kesari, for which Tilak was deported to Mandalay, were from the powerful pen of Khadilkar. He had ventured to establish a factory in Nepal for manufacturing bombs for the militant nationalist movement. Had the Nepal conspiracy been proved, Khadilkar would have been hanged by the British.

Khadilkar’s first three prose dramas on historical themes reveal a very fine instinct for dramatic art and the influence of Shakespeare. They set a new pattern of dramaturgy and a certain nationalist ideology. They left a deep impact on Marathi stage by virtue of the novel ideology and the playwright’s insight into dramaturgy. Sawai Madhavravancha Mrityu presents image of Hamlet and Iago, both of which have so very effectively been characterised by Shakespeare. Bhaubandaki, with the faint echoes of Macbeth, is one of the most powerful plays in Marathi. Its intense situations and dynamic characterisation have enhanced the effectiveness of the drama. Keechakvadh possesses a high pitched drama and a political symbolism. It was crowned with great success and with its prescription by Government. British officers saw high treason in the popular identification of Keechak with Viceroy Lord Curzen and Bheem with Lokmanya Tilak. Some among the audience identified Keechak with Collector Jackson, who was murdered in Nasik by Anant Kanhere.

Keechakvadh indeed gained great popularity ever since its maiden performance in March-April 1907. A Police Officer too admitted that this play was the talk of the town. There was virtually no other talk about than this play in Pune. A respected gentleman was said to have told the police that after seeing it one was bent to murder Government Officers. This atmosphere coincided with the historical, but most unfortunate, Congress Session at Surat (1907). The Surat split and pandemonium by Tilakites were generally perceived in Maharashtra as the triumph of Extremism. The Tilakites saw the Keechakvadh in Mumbai in the presence of Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh. It was played again for the benefit of the Punjab Fund in the presence of Lala Lajpat Rai. But these things made the Government more suspicious about all dramas as well as secret militant groups such as Shivaji Club, Belapur Swami Club, Peshwa Club and the Khed Club.

Keechak symbolised Lord Curzon and Draupadi as partition of Bengal. Its nationalist implications were obvious, but they became more glorifying after Jackson’s murder in a Nasik theatre. Assassinations of Jackson and several British officers alarmed the Government. To these were added an unsuccessful attempt to throw bomb at Viceroy Lord Minto and Tilak deportation to Mandalay. Against the entire back drop of terrorism and Government’s measures to suppress Tilak, Keechakvadh gained a phenomenal popularity. It was not merely natural but inevitable. Hence, Jackson’s friend Charles Kincaid, District Sessions Judge too saw its performance. He wrote four articles in the Times published from London, when he had been to England
on leave. He argued therein that this play was veritably an allegory on Lord Curzon’s regime as Viceroy of India. Kincaid wrote that no Englishman would forget in his lifetime the anger and turbulent expressions on the face of the Marathi audience, while watching the deeds of Keechak on the stage. The pathetic entreaties of Draupadi would draw profuse tears from the ladies in the theatre. These effects were indeed unmistakable and unforgettable. Hence Kincaid suggested punitive measures and throttling of every freedom of expression through legislation, which alone could save the lives of British officers in India. He did praise Khadilkar as a “talented” playwright, but argued that the play stimulated high treason and sedition. Although, the police argued that the playwright did not call for prosecution, Government thought that he was the most dangerous of the extremists on account of his long stay in Nepal. Hence Keechakvadh was officially banned on 27th January 1890.

Meanwhile William Lee Warner and Valentine Chirol, like Kincaid, were demanding for stern measures to suppress the manifestation of Indian aspirations through the stage. As a consequence, the Press Act of 1910, which totally gagged and throttled the media in the most ruthless manner was enacted. A piece of performing art like Keechakvadh fell a victim. It was retrieved after along time when hostility of the Government against Tilak was softened down. The retrieval came at Amravati when the C. P. and Berar Government’s special committee found it advisable to lift the ban. 58

Before the prescription of Keechakvadh Khadilkar wrote Bhaubandaki (1909) on the background of deportation of Tilak which delineated the powerful character of Ramshastri. This was in keeping with his determination of content-oriented dramas. But this play too invited criticism from the Dnyanprakash periodical that the Tilak group had the habit of attacking the opponents. But the District Magistrate misconstrued the opponents to be Government, and declared Bhaubandaki as objectionable by the end of 1910.59

The mythological themes of Khadilkar’s dramas in the later period did contain some nationalist implication but it was rarefied and less perceptible. Even then the audience read more nationalist politics in the contents than was intended by the playwright himself.

Manapman, Swayamvar, Keechakvadh, Bhaubandaki, and Vidyaharan, all of which excelled one another, won the sobriquet Natyacharya to Khadilkar. Manapman, Swayamvar, Vidyaharan became immortal due to their music, which has had no parallel then or after. Khadilkar introduced the mode of music from the compositions of the opulent Rag corpus of various Gharanas. Over and above that composed the songs keeping in view the genius of the contemporary singer-actors like Balgandharva and Keshavrao Bhosale. Consequently the performance of Swayamvar, Manapman, Vidyaharan, Draupadi assumed the form of musical concerts. After Kirloskar’s Saubhadra no other drama had appeared on the musical
stage which could rival the music and popularity of Manapman (12 March 1911). The songs in this play were tuned by Govindrao Tembe. A harmonium reciter par excellence and a disciple of both Alabdiya Khan and Bhaskarbuwa Bakhale. From this time an ornate and luscious art music emerged on the Marathi stage and established its supremacy. A great musician of the calibre of Bhaskarbuwa Bakhale was the mentor of Balgandharva, Master Krishnarao Phulambrikar, Govindrao Temple and Jagannathbuwa Pandharpurkar, who dominated the stage, it was this mentor who moulded the harmoniums tunes (chali) for the dramas of the Gandharva Natak Mandal established by Narayanrao Rajahans in 1913. This celebrated repertory virtually revolutionised the mode of music and stage-craft, and also elevated the status of this art form, in the cultural milicy of Maharashtra. Bakhalebuwa revolutionised the genre of Natya Sangeet through a savory art music, particularly in Vidyaharan, Swayamvar, Draupadi. The rather elementary tunes used by the Kirloskarian tradition until then were given up. The classical strain which Bakhale implanted in stage music proved so powerful, that it has remained intact since then likewise a great musician Ramkrishnabuwa Vaze too made a luxuriant contribution to the world of Music in Maharashtra through his musical moulding of the songs in the dramas staged by Lalitkaladarsh (1908) and Balwant Sangeet Mandal (1918). The credit for grooming up of the phenomenal singer actor Keshavrao Bhosale as well as of Bapurao Pendharkar and Haribhau Ghangrekar goes indeed to Vazebuwa both the maestros brought classical music within the reach of the common music lovers by adopting gay and playful styles. Both took Natya Sangeet nearer to classicism. But the styles of both were district having characteristics of their own.

The tremendous success of Khadilkar’s plays lay in his ardent and pithy creation as well as in the music of actors like Balgandharva and a music director like Bakhalebuwa. But it was also attributable to the exquisite skill of the playwright himself to direct the actors in the performance of their role. He himself used to take the rehearsals and to teach the artists. Balgandharva has recorded what Khadilkar did for his own formation as well as of Nanasaheb Joglekar.65 Dramas such as Draupadi, Menaka, Savitri, Savatimatsar, Tridandi Sanyas written, during the second period 1920 to 1932 however, do not exhibit Khadilkar’s earlier uncommon prowess of dramaturgy. They lack in building up an edifice of a drama. This may perhaps be attributed to the changing political scenario and social awareness, the instability in economic and cultural spheres, and a conflict in his own mind. Besides, the other reason may also be the compulsion of circumstances under which he had to leave the Kesari. Not withstanding the lacunae these plays too were highly appreciated by music lovers due to the semi classcial songs and singer actors like Balgandharva and Govindrao Tembe.66 Manapman turned out to be the most popular, which was followed by Swayamvar (1916) and Vidyaharan (16 May 1913). Of course all the three plays were the fruitful result of his acumen and ardent musicality.
Marathi drama as a performing art had made deep inroads into the cultural life of Maharashtra. However, there was no magazine devoted to this art. This void was sought to be filled by Shankarrao Mujumdar by starting the monthly Rangabhoomi in 1907 and by establishing a small printing press for the purpose. Another endeavour in the interest of the stage and artists was the imparting of education to the less educated youths. Many a youth had appeared on the stage after quitting their school education halfway. Hence, the Kirloskar Natak Mandali arranged for their education and appointed a luminary like Ram Ganesh Gadkari for the purpose. This was an endeavour towards open school teaching rather than the traditional formal one. Gadkari did an excellent service in this endeavour. Eventually however, he severed his relation with it due to maltreatment meted out to him by Shankarrao Mujumdar. Those were the days when Marathi stage was enjoying popular patronage. Pune was the motherland of Marathi theatre. There was however, no auditorium even in Pune city. It was also felt necessary to raise a befitting memorial to the memory of the father of musical stage, Annasaheb Kirloskar. Unfortunately the company did not possess the financial resources to erect an auditorium. Hence, it had to enter into partnership with a wealthy jeweller for completion of the project. The agreement for the same was prepared by no less a person than Narsimha Chintaman Kelkar. The auditorium was inaugurated on 29 August 1909 by the Home Member of Bombay Government, Sir Machnzie Muir. Kirloskar’s Shakuntal was staged therein on the occasion. This shows that many high ranking English men used to take an interest in Marathi drama.

It is noteworthy that Balgandharva, Keshavrao Bhosale, Nanasaheb Joglekar, Govindrao Tembe, Ganapatrao Bodas, Dattatraya Vaikuntha Deshpande (Hallyalkar), Rambhau Kundagolkar and Master Dinanath Mangeshkar were leading luminaries among the singer actors of the day, while those in prose dramas included Keshavrao Date and Chintamanrao Kolhatkar. It were those singer actors which gave Natya Sangeet the status of a genre of music.

The pedal harmonium which embellished Natya Sangeet was first used for accompaniment since 1885. But actors like Balgandharva brought splendour and opulence to the genre by taking the organ with bass reeds for accompaniment to singing from 1909. This reformed instrument came to be known as the organ on account of the deeper tone. The use of organ was a landmark in the progress of the musical stage.

Eventually, there arose differences of opinion within the Kirloskar Natak Mandali. There upon Balgandharva, Ganapatrao Bodas and Govindrao Tembe deserted it and the trio established the Gandharva Natak Mandali on 5 July 1913. Many other repertories too were thriving in Maharashtra in those days. It was during this period that the Mahalakshmi Prasadik Natak Mandali of Dattatraya Deshpande was also functioning. Rambhau Kundagolkar alias Sawai Gandharva of the Kirana Gharana of classical music attained a phenomenal popularity
in the role of Subhadra (Saubhadra) on the stage of Natyakala Pravartak Mandali belonging to Lele brothers. It was this repertory which brought the Sant Sakhu of Hari Narayan Apte (Novelist) on the stage in 1911. This drama attained popularity due to the melodious songs of Rambhau Kundagolkar. It helped the emergence of Krishna Ganesh Phulambrikar alias Master Krishnarao as another celebrity on the musical stage. Another bright star, Keshavrao Bhosale emerged as an outstanding singer actor through his performance of the role of Sharada brought on the stage by Swadeshahitachintak Natak Mandali of Janubhau Nimkar in 1902. It should be noted that Keshavrao Bhosale rivalled Balgandharva and in fact excelled the latter in some respects. He established the Lalitkaladarsh Natak Mandali of his own in 1908, and staged the Rakshasi Mahatwakanksha of Vaman Gopal Joshi alias Veer Vamanrao. Veritably this turned out to be a very effective play. Lalitkaladarsh achieved a good deal of progress through the performances of this powerful play. Maharashtra Natak Mandali had a great name in the field of prose dramas. Yeshwantrao Tipnis and Madhavrao Tipnis from this company established the independent Bharat Natak Mandali and staged Totayache Band of Narsimha Chintaman Kelkar in 1912. The very first play of Ram Ganesh Gadakari, namely Premasanyas also appeared on the stage in 1912. It helped the emergence of Keshavrao Date as a formidable actor. Chittakarshak Natak Mandali and Lokmanya Natak Mandali which staged prose dramas, were also remarkable in their own right. It were those reportories which brought on the stage Hach Mulacha Bap written by Bhargavram Vithal Varerkar. The remarkable feature of this play was that it strongly attacked the evil practice of dowry prevalent in society of the day.

After establishment of the Gandharva Natak Mandali in July 1913 a good many highly meritorious dramas, such as, Swayamvar, Sanshayakallol, Manapman, Vidyaharan, Saubhadra, Shapasambahram, Mrichchakatik, Shakuntal, Sharda, Ramrajyavijog, Mukanyak, Premashodhan, Ekach Pyala, etc. were staged by it. This period in the history of Marathi stage Indeed witnessed the phenomenal rise of Balgandharva. His popularity rose so high that everything which came from him was lovingly accepted by the audience. But it will be far from the truth to say that Balgandharva had no equals or rivals, Keshavrao Bhosale, who never had an opportunity to perform on the stage of Gandharva Natak Mandali, was his equal in many respects. In fact Keshavrao, through his small span of life, surpassed Balgandharva by virtue of his scintillating and sonorous voice. He had his tutelage under a dynamic and versatile Guru like Ramkrishnabuwa Vaze. In fact Keshavrao wanted to learn music from Ustad Karim Khan, but the Ustad directed him to Vazebuwa as he was adept in Natya Sangeet. The Gandharva Natak Mandali had under its repertory two more disciples of Bhaskarbuwa Bakhale, namely Master Krishnarao and Jagannathbuwa Pandharipurkar, both of whom also were the leading singer actors in this repertory. All these giants were joined in 1922 by Vinayakrao Patwardhan, the distinguished disciple of the great Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. Ganapatrao Bodas too was yet amongst them till 1919.
Govindrao Tembe established the Shivraj Natak Mandali after he deserted Gandharva Natak Mandali in 1915. Tembe had his tutelage under the great Maestro Ustad Alladiya Khan. It is rightly claimed that he was one of the greatest harmonists India has ever produced. He would be remembered for ever for his contribution to the musical dramas in Marathi. Sawai Gadharva, who was fortunate to learn classical music from another great maestro Ustad Abdul Karim Khan from 1900 to 1907, left the Ustad’s discipleship to join Shivaraj Sangeet Natak Mandali. These were the days when the stage was more lucrative than a concert of art music. He won the sobriquet “Sawai Gandharva” at the hands of Dadasaheb alias G. S. Khaparde, but lost a Guru par excellence. He also floated his own drama company, namely, Nutan Sangeet Mandali, which staged many musical plays. But after a compunction of remorse and repentance he abandoned the stage and returned back to classical music. Like Sawai Gandharva, Shankarrao Sarnaik too had abandoned art music and lodged himself on the musical stage at the instance of Bapusaheb Kagalkar. He too was a singer actor of great prowess.

Kirloskar Natak Mandali was divided for the second time in 1918. Consequently Chintamanrao Kolhatkar, Master Dinanath Mangeshkar and Krishnarao Kolhapure floated the Balwant Natak Mandali. They gave performances of powerful plays such as Ekach Pyala, Bhavabandhan, Ranadumdubhi (1927) and Sanyasta Khadga (1931). The Aryavart Natak Mandali of Tipnis staged Chandragrahan (1917), which was by far the first powerful play on Shivaji Maharaj. Samarth Natak Mandali too staged prose dramas and elicited popular interest in the history of Maharashtra.

That indeed was the Golden Age in the history of Marathi stage, particularly of Sangeet Natak. Maestros like Bhashkarbuwa Bakhale, Ramkrishnabuwa Vaze, Govindrao Tembe and Master Krishnarao were the music composers of the day. A good deal of credit for the embellishment and popularity of Natya Sangeet should go to their music composition, besides the genius of the singer actors. The sobriquet Gandharva was bestowed upon many other artists, more out of imitation rather than verity. Actually modern India has indeed produced only three Gandharvas namely, Balgandharva, Sawai Gandharva and Kumar Gandharva. The first two of them belonged to that golden age of Marathi stage. That was the time when highly skilled directors, such as Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar, Govind Ballal Deval, Ganpatrao Bodas, Trimbakrao Karkhanis and Chintamanrao Kolhatkar used to give instruction in the art of histrionics and take rehearsals of the actors and actresses.

Indeed Balgandharva was at the zenith of his popularity around 1920, while Keshavrao Bhosale was his formidable rival. Bhosale’s sonorous voice won an unprecedented popularity to his saubhadra and Manapman, which were staged by Lalitkaladarsh. This repertory won phenomenal popularity to its Hach Mulacha Bap and
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Sanyashacha Samasar. In the midst of such an atmosphere, thousands of connoisseurs desired that the two great luminaries, Keshavrao Bhosale and Balgandharva should act jointly in at least one performance of Manapman. This demand was aired in meetings as well as in newspapers. After hesitations and apprehensions this demand was agreed to. And it was decided that Manapman should be presented jointly by Gandharva Natak Mandal and Lalitkaladarsh with Balgandharva in the role of a heroine and Keshavrao Bhosale as a hero. It was decided that the income earned in this performance should be donated to the “Tilak Swaraj Fund” raised by Mahatma Gandhi. These were the days when Gandhiji’s Non-co-operation Movement was at its full swing. This performance known as “Samyukta Manapman” was staged in the Baliwala Theatre in Mumbai on 8th July 1921 in the presence of eminent Congress leaders, citizens, donors, critics and connoisseurs.

Keshavrao Bhosale avenged himself on Balgandharva in the grand show. Ordinarily Balgandharva was quite a match for Keshavrao but in this particular play Keshavrao had more scope to shine in a male role than Balgandharva in the female role. This thrilling event in the history of Marathi stage remains unsurpassed to this day. This was also the highest pinnacle of the grandeur and popularity of the Sangeet Rangabhoomi. Indeed this was the first glorious event and also the last. Blessed was that stage and blessed were the connoisseurs who could enjoy the occasion.

Keshavrao Bhosale shone in male roles as much as in female roles. He was the greatest actor. But Destiny had willed it otherwise. After the grand performance Keshavrao Bhosale was caught by typhoid. And as Destiny would have it, this “Sangeet Surya” set for ever.

The performance of Samyukta Manapman also marked the highest pinnacle of the supremacy of music in Marathi drama. Even in those days when the value of rupee was quite high, the historic performance yielded an unprecedented sum of Rs. 16,600. This gives an idea of the love of the audience for music. However, Balgandharva, Keshavrao Bhosale and other singer actors were not the only factor in the supremacy of music on Marathi stage. Playwrights like Khadilkar and Kolhatkar, and the exponents of Ragadari music like Pandurang Gopal Gurav alias Pandoba Yavateshwarkar of the Waikar Sangeet Mandal, were equally instrumental in imparting supreme importance to music in drama. Particularly Pandoba rendered the songs within the discipline of classical music and used many heavier Ragas and maintained their purity. He also adopted Dhrupad, tarana and Sargam in such Ragas and increased the tempo of rhythm for enhancing the effect of the songs. The connoisseurs of the day were also equally responsible for the supremacy of music in drama. For them enjoyment of music meant the enjoyment of a Sangeet Natak. With this equation in mind they used to exclaim “once more” and the singer actor had to comply twice or even thrice.
Marathi stage did reveal the unusual beauty of Natya Sangeet. In addition to the social, cultural and nationalist content. As said earlier, Khadilkar's plays preached the gospel of nationalism. Although his themes were apparently historical or mythological, certainly there was a nationalist import. In later days Veer Vamanrao Joshi, Bhargavram Vithal Varerkar and V. D. Savarkar too developed the nationalist theme. Ram Ganesh Gadkari did not emulate Khadilkar, but he did introduce into Marathi drama some of the external and internal peculiarities of the Shakespearean tragedy. Special qualities of the Shakespearean style of dramatics, such as, building up of the plot, sharp dialogues, the scheme of alternating seriousness with humour, the poetic subtlety between characterisation and soliloquy, a deep insight into human life and a language conducive to the contents of the play which are replete in Gadkari's plays. Besides, he unfolds the value judgements and ideals of Indian Culture. His dramas exhibit the cultural traditions of Maharashtrian middle class, wherein the own formation took place. He studied the life of middle class quite in depth. Even his very first drama Premasanyas itself exhibits innate literary beauty, while Ekach Pyala unfolds the tragedy of an ideal Indian woman and a proud intellectual husband, who felt a victim to a tragic sense of existence. It was Ekach Pyala which introduced tragedy, as a literary genre into Marathi literature. Contemporary critics regarded it as a drama wholly of the evil effects of drinking. However, this is by no means true. In fact Gadkari points out to the conflict between men's consciousness of his self-respect and his sense of existence. His Sindhu in Ekach Pyala is an ideal of selfeffacement of the highly cultured Indian womanhood. This is indeed the Psyche of most of his heroines. The only exception is his Latika in Bhavabandhan, who is a buoyant modern girl. No other playwright before Gadakari had ever presented such an analytical picture of the life in Maharashtra. Gadakari depicted it with a powerful pen. He gives a full vent to the contemporary ideas about remarriage. Not only his characters are representative of the contemporary society but they also tend to be universal. Both his Punyaprabhav and Rajasanyas won great applause. Truely the Marathi stage assumed a set pattern after Gadakari and a good many new dramas were staged on it, although the individuality of that master creator remains unsurpassed.

Vaman Gopal Joshi alias Veer Vamanrao was an extremist revolutionary in his earlier years after which he chose to be a colleague of Lokmanya Tilak. And later he accepted the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. But he was a brilliant playwright too. All of his three plays Rakshasi Mahatwakanksha (1913), Ranadumdubhi (1927) and Dharmasimhasan (1929) give a full vent to his staunch nationalism and pride for India. He propounds higher principles of human conduct. In the first there is a conflict between loyalty and disloyalty, in the second between arrant selfishness and patriotism and in the third the Divine Right of Kings and Democracy. These conflicts have been painted effectively and they are almost unparalleled. The first two of his plays became very popular due to the attractive delineation of
events, a language arousing patriotism and an understanding of stagecraft. In fact the very image of Balwant Natak Mandali was brightened by this drama. Songs sung by Master Dinanath Mangeshkar in this play were once on the lips of connoisseurs. Rakshasi Mahatwankanksha staged by Keshavrao Bhosale was so very popular that it matched with the success of Swayamvar. But when all is said and done, Veer Vamanrao’s dramas became effective more due to the brilliant and dazzling characterisation, the melodious songs of Keshavrao Bhosale, Bapurao Pendharkar and Master Dinanath.

Bhargavram Vithal alias Mama Varerkar was by far the only Marathi playwright who wrote plays for such a long period as from 1914 to 1960, and that too without any interruption. He was deeply influenced by the progressive thought of the Prarthana Samaj. In keeping with the philosophy of it he tried to re-interpret the meaning of the Vedas and the Puranas. His perception of modernity owes its origin to the study of Bengali literature and stage. It was through this perception as well as through the Gandhian influence that he set social realism as the goal of his dramas. He strived to free Marathi dramas from the clutches of romanticism. The Indian Freedom Movement as well as several social reform movements were in full swing during Varerkar’s time. The nation-wide movements made a deep impact on his sensitive mind. It can also be said that he was a product of his time. And naturally the contemporary social, economic and political turmoils found their echo in his drama themes. He was branded as a propagandist, but he did not care for it. Because his preoccupation was with thematic values rather than literary values. In 1914 one teenager girl Snehalata had to commit self-immolation as she was badly shattered by the evils of dowry. Entire India was deeply agitated due to her tragedy. The issue was widely discussed all over Maharashtra. Mama could not remain a silent spectator. Hence he based his very first play Hach Mulacha Bap (1916) on the tragedy of Snehalata, and strongly attacked the dowry system. This play proved that Varerkar was a distinctly different type of playwright. He took inspiration from the teaching of Swami Ramteerth and Swami Vivekanand and his mind was drawn towards the noble work of the Hindu Missionary Society to reclaim those who had strayed away from Hinduism and to effect their reconversion. He wrote Sanyashacha Sansar (1919) with this theme in his mind.

Varerkar was deeply influenced by Gandhism and the Non-co-operation movement of 1920-22. Mahatma had exhorted all lawyers to boycott Government courts as a part of non-co-operation with the colonial Government. Even then a majority of the lawyers clinged to their profession, which meant disregard towards the national cause. Varerkar chose such an Advocate as a hero of his drama Satteche Gulam (1927) and poured great ridicule over the legal profession. The entire theme of this drama is around Gandhian nationalism and non-co-operation. Intellectuals as well as lovers of drama highly appreciated
it, both from the point of view of music and its theme. Ramkrishnabuwa Vaze had given tunes to the songs in this brilliant play. It was so very successful that it helped the rebirth of Lalitkaladarsh twice. Varerkar's drama themes were drawn from the current problems of society and obviously he intended to propagate the Gandhian movement in society at large (Bahujan Samaj). His Turungachya Darat condemns Hindu society ridden over by castes and sub-castes and their evil effects. Another famous play Sonyacha Kalas (1932) had its theme in the perpetual conflict of interest between capitalists and labour. It was for the first time that the working class found a place on Marathi stage. This drama and the later jiva-shivachi Bheti (1950) gave birth to the working class drama stage. Indeed this stage has been acknowledged to be the gift of Mama Varerkar to Maharashtra. He wrote Swayamsevak mainly to draw the attention of society as well as of the Government towards the oppressed class of bonded labour. The Congress Ministry, which assumed office as a part of Provincial Autonomy in 1937, implemented the policy of prohibition in the then Bombay State. Varerkar was so much impressed by this progressive social measure that he wrote Koradi Karamat for enlightenment of society.

Khadilkar launched an attack on British colonialism and fostered the cause of the nationalist movement through mythological themes in his dramas. Likewise Mama Varerkar also promoted the cause of India's freedom with the help of Japan on the background of the Second World War in his Singapuratun (1944). This drama refers to the revolutionary activity of Subhash Chandra Bose and contemporary political controversy on the issue. He also exhorted the nation to answer to the call of patriotism through the play Chala Ladhayila. While probing into the mind of Sita and Urmila, Varerkar advocated the right to freedom and equality to women in Bhoomikanya Sita (1950). There are reasons to believe that Urmila is a Mouth piece of the playwright himself. The playwright launches an attack on the ego and hypocrisy of man in his dealings with women. Mama's women came forward to launch an offensive against conservatism in Indian society. This was altogether a new phase on the Marathi stage. Mama was charged to be a propagandist. He was also criticised for his disregard for literary aesthetics. But it should be admitted that two of his dramas Udati Pakhare (1945) and Saraswat (1942) stand testimony to his superiority as regards literary craftsmanship too. Even his critics have acknowledged the literary virtues in these plays. Varerkar's Kunjavihari (1908) too had been very popular once upon a time. His name will always be remembered in the history of Marathi theatre both as a playwright and reformer with a progressive outlook.

Vinayak Damodar alias Swatantryaveer Savarkar was a protagonist of militant nationalism as well as social reforms. His three dramas Ushshap (1927), Sanyasta Khadga (1931) and Uttarkriya (1933) gave vent to his aspirations and policies. Ushshap is rather of a propagandist nature. But it presents a pen-picture of superstition and
wrong perceptions in society, emancipation of the untouchables and purification of the converts back to Hinduism as well as the injustice perpetrated on women. His Sangasta Khadga was once very popular. His Uttarkriya aims at avenging defeat of the Marathas in the battle of Panipat in 1761.

Four dramas of N. C. Kelkar, namely, Totayache Band, Krishnarjunyuddha, Chandragupta and Veervidamban were played on the stage in those heydays. Of these Totayache Band became quite popular.

Love of Maharashtrians for the drama theatre is too well-known for over a century and a quarter. It was, therefore, natural that this profession should receive encouragement and popular patronage. It was not that this profession was always lucrative or that the earnings were assured. But it can be said with certainty that this performing art got a good deal of popular support and there developed a tradition of this art ever since 1880. Hence, many plays besides these mentioned in the above narrative, appeared on the stage. Amongst them Shivasambhav of Vasudevshastri Khare, Sant Tukaram staged by Rajapurkar Natak Mandali, Chandragrahan of Aryavart and Shahashivaji of Lalitkaladarsh earned a good name. Madhavrao Patankar wrote as many as 24 dramas, many of which were presented on the stage. Municipality (1925) of Madhav Narayan Joshi became very popular. Although the dramas written by Sadashiv Anant Shukla, such as, Swargavar Swari, Sadhvi Meeraabai, Sakshatkar, Simhacha Chhava, Satyagrahi had mythological themes, they aver to the political issues of these times. Vishnu Hari Aundhakar’s Bebandashahi (1924), Aagryahun Sutaka (1930) certainly deserve a place of honour amongst the popular plays. Several plays were written between 1920 and 1935 on social questions and their trend was progressive in general.

In the 1930 a section of educated enthusiastic playwrights in Maharashtra were attracted towards the dramaturgy of their Norwegian counterpart Ibsen. They felt that Marathi drama should be liberated from the clutches of Shakespearean romanticism and that it should emulate the realism, rationalism, idealism and social commitment of the dramatist as enunciated by Ibsen. Some of them even said “enough of romanticism.” They denounced Shakespeareism and launched a movement of “Ibsenism”. In 1933 they started an organisation in Mumbai, namely, Natyamanvantar for the pursuit of their goal. The objective of this body was to introduce the modern intellectual play of Europe to Marathi theatre. This organisation indeed aroused many hopes of revolutionising Marathi dramatics as well as theatre, and to establish Ibsen as their ideal. But these hopes could not be fulfilled by the new dramas which apparently purported to follow the European ideology. Hence the organisation could have only an ephemeral existence of two years. The reason was that the Maharashtrian audience could hardly digest the pragmatism, logic and social idealism as enunciated by Ibsen. The romantic fancy for art,
which had been cultivated in the established tradition of Ram Ganesh Gadakari, could not stand to the weight of extreme realism, at least in the near future. It was only Andhalyanchi Shala (1933) of Shridhar Vinayak Vartak, which was patronized by Natyamanvantar. It really became popular. But this popularity was more due to the melodious songs of Jyotsna Bhole, the female role played by Padmabai Vartak and the powerful role played by Keshavrao Date than to the influence of Ibsenism.

The period from 1933 to 1943 in Marathi theatre is characterised as the “Atre Era”, Pralhad Keshav Atre wrote many dramas, the famous amongst which were:— Sashtang Namaskar, Gharabaher, Udyacha Samsar, Jag Kay Mhanel, Lagnachi Bedi, Bhramacha Bhopala, To Mee Navhech, etc. All of them appeared on the stage. To Mee Navhech is enjoying popularity even today. Since, all his plays were stage-oriented, they could be played easily even by troupes of amateurs. M. G. Ranganekar was the first person to bring stability to this profession through a practical and professional approach. He was not merely a playwright but an owner of a drama company and its director. His Kulavadhu often compared with Ibsen’s Doll’s House, was very successful as well as popular. But critics argued that the success of this play on the stage was attributable to the stage-craft, skillful music direction of Master Krishnarao and the extremely melodious songs sung by Jyotsna Bhole and not to the intrinsic qualities of Ranganekar’s drama. Its popularity was also due to the female roles being played by females. This was indeed a new phase in Marathi theatre. The songs of Kulavadhu were akin to songs in cinema films, and hence they had their own identity in the genre of Natya Sangeet.

Agryahun Sutaka became very popular because it dealt with the thrilling historical events in the life of Shivaji Maharaj. Maharathi Karna (1934), which delineated the tragedy of Karna and Kunti of the Mahabharata and the motherhood of an unmarried girl however, did not earn popularity. The dramas written by Sadashiv Anant Shukla, namely Swargavar Swari, Sadhvi Meerabai and Satyagrahi too were staged in yesteryears, Govind Sadashiv Tembe has already been paid tributes above as a musician, an eminent singer actor as also a harmonist par excellence. But this versatile artist won fame and success as a playwright too. His dramas Sangeet Patwardhan Tulasidas and Vatsalaharan were highly applauded in those days. In Sangeet Patwardhan he advocated the use of Indian cloth which was a current slogan in the swadeshi and boycott movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. Gramophone records of the melodious and fascinating songs in these dramas are listened with interest even today. Vishram Bedekar advocated the cause of unmarried girls who fell victim to the lust of deceitful men. Such victimised girls had to suffer not merely misery but the pangs of social ostracism. Bedekar’s attempt at throwing light on social problems through the medium of mythological stories was highly appreciated.
In the thirties and forties of this century the following dramas too enjoyed popularity in the Marathi theatre. Gokulacha Chor of G. R. Shiraguppikar, Vidhilikhit and Amritsiddhi of Vasant Shantaram Desai; Kanhopatra (1931) of N. V. Kulkarni, Nandkumar of V. S. Gurjari, Devamanus of Nagesh Joshi, Gharakool translation of Doll's House of Ibsen (1943) of Anant Kanekar; DooracheDive (1946), Dusara Peshwa (1947) and Vaijayanti (1950) of V. V. Shirawadkar; Sashachi Shinge of Madhav Manohar; Swairini (1943) of T. S. Karkhanis; Rayagadala Jevha Jag Yete and Yethe Oshalala Mrityu of Vasant Kanetkar; Goda Gondhal and Usana Navra of N. D. Tamhankar; Aroonodaya and Saraladevi of V. V. Bhole; Chandragrahana, Shahashivaji and Shikkakatvar of Yeshavant Narayan Tipnis etc. V. G. Deshpande's historical tragedy Umaji Naik was an effective stage-play depicting the story of the noble and generous Umaji Naik. It was remarkable for superb characterisation.

Like every human creation Marathi drama too had to go through pains and pleasures of ebbs and high tides. The onslaught of cinema initiated the decline of Marathi theatre in the thirties and forties of this century. Cinema was more lucrative while the theatre was not. Audience too found cinema cheaper than the drama theatre. Hence, there ensued a stage of stagnation, a decline of the theatre. Those were also the days of the world-wide economic depression and the ominous clouds of the subsequent Second World War (1939-1945). Fortunately however, there ensued a state of revival and then a high tide in the field of drama and theatre between 1950 and 1970. A good many playwrights and their plays revived popular interest in the theatrical art and strove to bring back its glorious tradition. The names V. V. Shirawadkar, Vasant Kanetkar, Vidyadhar Gokhale, P. L. Deshpande, Bal Kolhatkar, Purushottam Darawhekar, Madhukar Toradmal, P. B. Bhave, Gopalkrishna Bhobe, Vijay Tendulkar, P. K. Atre are representative of the new class of playwrights. In this period the following plays earned great popularity in the Marathi theatre:—Kounteya, Maharani Padmini, Yayati Ani Devayani, Rayagadala Jevha Jag Yete, Panditraj Jagannath, Matsyagandha, Suvarna Tula, Swar Samradni, Tuze Aahe Tujapashi, Duritanche Timir Javo, Natasamrat, Himalayachi Savali, Jay Jay Gourishankar, Mandarmala, Meghamalhar, Katyar Kalajat Ghusali, Vahate Hee Durvanchi Judi, Ashrunchi Zali Phule, Ethe Oshalala Mrityu, Varhadi Manase, To Mee Navhech, etc. (It should be borne in mind that these names are only symbolic and the list is by no means complete).

It is now time to take a bird's-eye view of the splendour and high and low tides which Marathi stage experienced during the later period. Right from the dawn of the Gandharva era upto 1930 a Natak was considered as a festive occasion, full of joy and enthusiasm in middle class Maharashtrian households. It was something like a ritual which was celebrated with mirth. Even those employed in clerical work used to buy tickets and go to the theatre dressed in special garments. It was indeed a symbol of social esteem to go to a drama theatre.
However, in spite of the high esteem enjoyed by Marathi theatre, the appearance of even meritorious female artists from respectable families on the stage was denounced by society. A stage was a taboo for women of high status. In the days of Bhaurao Kolhatkar one Sheshasani had ventured to organise a theatrical troupe of her own. She was extremely beautiful and adept in singing. But society did not appreciate her bold attempt. Consequently, her theatrical career came to an end. Two more companies, namely, “Belgaumkar “ and “Manohar Stree Natak Mandal” were established to feature women artists. It is noteworthy that even male roles were performed by women in their performances. However, they were not successful in earning either popularity or income. The male roles by women were also not deemed artistic. It was an established convention that men and women should not co-act on the stage. Hence, there was no theatrical troupe consisting of both men and women. Consequently, male artists were compelled to perform female roles as a matter of compromise right from the dawn of theatre in 1843, upto 1929.

Hirabai Badodekar indeed defied the convention and ventured to act on the stage. She was a pioneer of ladies and the novel attempt of ladies performing female roles. This celebrity of the Kirana Gharana used to recite Natya Sangeet in open concerts of classical art music. Hirabai’s pure classicism, her case in presentation and her extremely melodious voice were unquestionable. She never undermined the discipline of Khayal Gayaki. She kept up the tradition of her Gharana and followed the gayaki of her illustrious father Ustad Abdul Karim Khan. But she looked upon Natya Sangeet as an independent genre of music. It is not that the conservative elements in Maharashtra spared her in criticising for her appearance on the stage along with male artists in the initial period. But her piousness and innocent demeanour and extremely gentle behaviour watered down the sting in criticism. She was teaching classical music to pupils of the Nutan Sangeet Vidyalaya established by her mother Tarabai Mane. (Hirabai, her brothers Sureshbabu Mane and Papa, and her sisters Kamala and Saraswati Rane were the progeny of Ustad Abdul Karim Khan and Tarabai Mane who were lawfully married). The Vidyalaya did not last long, and was finally converted into a theatrical company, namely Nutan Natya Mandal in Pune around 1929. Hirabai, Sureshbabu, Kamalabai and Saraswati Rane all together ventured to present Samshayakallol on the stage with the respective roles played by them for the first time. This was veritably a great venture in those days. Thereby Hirabai emerged as a champion of co-acting in the theatre and of enhancing the artistic effect of female roles performed by women themselves. After this historical event she presented Saubhadra in collaboration with Sawai Gandharva and performed the role of Subhadra in 1930. Her melodious songs and championship of womanhood on the stage won her phenomenal popularity, in Mumbai. Eventually, the audience increasingly favoured co-acting. It was Hirabai who paved the way for women from respectable families to act on the stage.71
Following the lead given by Hirabai, Jyotsna Bhole made her debut on the stage. Jyotsnabai and Padmabai Vartak also won popularity for their female roles in Andhalyanchi Shala (1933), which had been acknowledged by the natyamanvantar as a play emulating Ibsenism. This drama earned popularity, among other things, due to Jyotsna Bhole's songs and her own role.\textsuperscript{72}

With an advancing age Balgandharva used to say from 1931 that he should not perform female roles in future. That was quite natural. Notwithstanding his own feelings, the audience was oblivious of his age and they wanted him to continue in the female roles. His popularity had yet not declined. The audience had not come out of the spell of his female roles even at the age of 47. Hence, he continued to perform these roles till the age of 60-65 more due to the demand of the audience than anything else. Even after his role of a hero in the movie named Dharmatma, he acted again as a heroine in dramas. Indeed Balgandharva raised a monument of exquisite female roles.

Master Naresh is rightly said to be the last in the tradition of consummate artists who performed female roles. Many other tried their hand in it, but not with much success. Against this background Jyotsna Bhole reached the zenith of her popularity after Kulavadhu, which was staged in August 1942. While Marathi theatre was going through the phases of prosperity and depression, many theatrical companies emerged and submerged. It may not be possible to furnish the history of all of them due to paucity of space. However, Lalitkaladarsh, which is in existence even today, deserves at least a cursory look. This theatrical company of the consummated artist Keshavrao Bhosale became feeble after his untimely demise in October 1921. It was given a rebirth by Mama Varerkar’s Satteche Gulam and the lively and melodious songs tuned by a celebrity like Ramkrishnabuwa Vaze. This play had aroused a new hope of dynamism and realism on the Marathi stage. Lalitkaladarsh thrived very well under the spell of Venkatesh Balvant alias Bapu Rao Pendharkar as under Keshavrao Bhosale. But again it became almost defunct after Pendharkar’s sad demise in 1937. It was given a rebirth for the second time by his illustrious son Bhalchandra Pendharkar with the performance of the same Satteche Gulam. The credit for the resurrection of Lalitkaladarsh goes to this play and the music therein.

When all is said and done, theatrical performances was not lucrative profession. Even in cities like Mumbai and Pune an income of Rs. 1,200 for a musical play was regarded to be an excellent achievement. The average monthly income even of the Gandharva Natak Mandali from 1921 was around Rs. 15,000. This was certainly much higher than the income of other companies. But then its expenditure too was much higher than that of others, particularly because of Balgandharva’s insistence on precious costumes and lavish stage-craft. Balgandharva’s liking for expensive sets, dazzling garments perfumes and allied
extravagance lodged him in debt. Despite indebtedness he spent lavishly on the set of Draupadi displaying the scene of Mayasabha. This scene was, in fact, insisted by Draupadi herself to exhibit the dazzling splendour and affluence of the Pandavas over the Kauravas. Even a meritorious drama like Vidyaharan could fetch a mere sum of Rs. 350 in July 1931. Indeed this was a grim reality. The usual income of a Saturday or Sunday show in Mumbai ranged from Rs. 400 to Rs. 500, while that on rest of the days of a week it was around Rs. 300. Even in the face of meagre returns Balgandharva insisted that the set of the temple in Kanhopatra, should faithfully display the replica of Pandharpur temple of Lord Vithal. The consequence of such luxuriance and indulgence for the sake of artistry was indebtedness. And this compelled Balgandharva to wind up the Gandharva Natak Mandali in December 1934. This also forced him to set his foot, most unwillingly, on the cinema screen, for livelihood and sustenance. 73

The rise of cinema in the 1930 was highly detrimental to Marathi stage as a profession. Bapurao Pendharkar was the first to leave the stage in favour of cinema, while great Keshavrao Date and Shankarrao Sarnaik followed him. Balgandharva left the stage after them. Within the onslaught of cinema more and more stage artists such as Ganapatrao Bodas, Nanasaheb Phatak, Master Dinkar, Gangadhar Meghashyam Londhe, Hirabai Badodekar, Jyotsna Bhole, Chintamanrao Kolhatkar, Master Dinanath Mangeshkar and many others deserted drama stage to appear on the movie screen. Theatrical companies one after another vanished from the scene due to the mortal blow of cinema from 1933-34. The attraction of stage lovers as well as actors too waned away. Under such adverse circumstances Sashtanga Namaskar (1933) of P. K. Atre came on the stage. Indeed this gave some stimulation and encouragement to Marathi theatre. On the other hand Balgandharva's role of the hero in V. Shantaram's movie Dharmatma, in December 1935, attracted the patronage of multitudes at cinema houses. But his shifting of abode from the stage to the screen was disliked by his co-artists on the stage as well as the connoisseurs of musical plays. There ensued a searching of hearts and an introspection over the damage to theatrical art. And this prompted most of the artists to return back to the stage which was by then in a ruinous condition.

Under such conditions of unstability and uncertainty Gangadhar Meghashyam Londhe ventured to revive Sangeet Rangabhoomi (1939). Londhe was probably the last of the celebrities belonging to the Kirloskarean tradition of resplendent Natya sangeet. He was distinguished for his lively style and an extremely melodious voice, which only a few were endowed with. Unfortunately no other singer actor comparable to him appeared on the stage after him. This too was a misfortune of Marathi theatre. The glamour of old dramas was fading away, while no new drama, which could attract the audience,
came forward. But Londhe was aware of the inherent qualities of Premasanyas as a play. Its original script by Ram Ganesh Gadakari did not contain songs. It should be noted that this was Gadakari’s only play which was devoid of songs. Hence, G. M. Londhe got some songs composed for the drama (obviously many years after Gadkari’s death). The songs were given musical tunes by the able Master Krishnarao. In 1939 Premasanyas was staged as a musical play. Londhe’s Premasanyas in the embellished form again created a lively interest in the Kirloskarean tradition of musical stage. He also performed a few other dramas. This revival of the theatre during critical times was most welcome, but shortlived. The tempo could not be sustained due to the sad demise of both the virtuoses G. M. Londhe and Dinakar Kamanna in 1944. And there was no one to fill the void.

This review would remain incomplete without mentioning Sundarabai Jadhav, who had thrilled Maharashtra with her Ghazals, Lavani, Natya Sangeet and Bhavageet. Her songs and compositions, particularly for Ekach Pyala, were highly appreciated by the common man also wizards like Bhaskarbhuwa Bakhale and Balgandharva. She was one of the very few who strived to popularise All India Radio amongst the artists of her days.

Marathi theatre completed hundred years of its life in 1943, while the pace of its decline had set in 1931. Hence, enthusiastic stage-lovers decided to celebrate the century in a befitting manner. The classical stage was really in a dilapidated condition. But the indomitable efforts of ardent organisers and the innate love of Maharashtrians for the stage resurrected it, at least for a while. Celebration of the centenary was inaugurated on 6 November 1943 at Sangli, where Marathi theatre was born a hundred years ago. Reputed old artists from various traditions came together and jointly performed Sharada of Govind Ballal Deval. This was indeed an unforgetable event in the social and literary history of Maharashtra. The centennial celebration in Mumbai was organised by Amrit Narayan Bhalerao, who was known for his ardentness and skill at organising dramatic performances. Balgandharva adorned the presidentship of the festival. Virtuosos like Balgandharva, Hirabai Badodekar, etc. enacted Saubhadra, Swayanwar, Ekach Pyala, Sharada, Manapman and other classical dramas. This was indeed a grand feast for the younger connoisseurs who could have a glimpses of the former glory and splendour of Sangeet Rangabhoomi. The festival lasted for ten days on the sands of Girgaum Chaupati with an audience in thousands. This was indeed a thrilling experience and blissful joy. The celebration in Mumbai and Sangli was emulated in many of the towns in Maharashtra.

Performance of Samyukta Manapaman was indeed the highest pinnacle of the popularity and splendour of Marathi theatre. But the Samyukta Sharada enacted at Sangli marked a happy conclusion of
the centenary of the theatre. The delightful monuments and charming aspect of the old stage enabled stagelovers to have glimpses of its former grandeur. It was indeed the sprightly twilight at dusk. But the crowd of stage-lovers gathered around the theatre at centenary did not disperse, it swelled again. Veteran actors and actresses enlivened and awakened the stage, and handed it over to young actors and playwrights in the emerging era.

The centennial celebration of 1943 showed that popularity as well as social need of the stage would last forever. The only thing was that it was inevitable that the character and manifestation should undergo changes keeping pace with the times. Accordingly, the theatre coined a new path for itself from 1950. Meanwhile Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh established its own drama wing under the leadership of Anant Narayan Bhalerao. This wing opened new vistas for the performance of plays new as well as old.

From 1950 to 1970, generally speaking, several new playwrights came up, who kept up the glorious tradition of Marathi theatre. V. V. Shirawadkar, Vasant Kanetkar, Vidyadhar Gokhale, Madhusudan Kalelkar, Bal Kolhatkar, Purushottam Daravhekar, Madhukar Toradmal, P. B. Bhave and P. L. Deshpande are some of the distinguished names. All of them produced plays which provided healthy amusement to urban as well as rural audiences. Shirawadkar’s DooracheDive (1946) has been based on Oscar Wilde’s Ideal Husband. Its main theme is to establish that ideals are like distant lights and they have to be admired only from a distance. His Vaijayanti, Rajumukut, Dusara Peshwa (1950), Kaunteya (1953), Yayati Ani Devayani (1968), Vej Mhanali Dharatila, Natasamrat were all popular on the stage. Yayati Ani Devayani has earned formidable success on the musical stage, while Natasamrat is a powerful prose drama.

Vidyadhar Gokhale, a journalist and playwright, wrote excellent musicals such as Panditrāj Jagannath, Jayjay Gouri Shankar, Swara Samradnye. Swarna Tula, Mandarmala, Meghamalhar. Gokhale indeed revived the Kirloskarean and Bal Gandharvean tradition of Natya Sangeet and made a strong impact of his own on the theatrical art of Maharashtra. The first drama narrates the biography of Jagannath Pandit, who wrote the famous Gangalaharee. The songs in all his plays are based on Thumari, Kajari, Chaiti, Hori as also on Khayal genres of music. Vasant Kanetkar’s Rayagadala Jēva J ag Ye, Lekure Udanda J halee, Vedyache Ghar Unihat, Ashrunchi J halee Phule, Ethe Oshalala Mrityu, Rat Rani, Tuza Tu Uddharee Raja, Mala Kahi Sangayachay, Himalayachi Savali have become very popular on the stage. Madhusudan Kalelkar’s Diva J alo DeSaree Rat, Padari Padale Pavitra J hale, Abol J halis Ka, Dilya Gharēe Tu Sukhee Raha, Aparadh Meēch Kea, Asavari, He Phool Chandanache are all social plays. Bal Kolhatkar’s Vahato Hēe Durvanchēe J udee, Lahanapan Dega Deva, Sēmewaroon Parat J a, Vegale Vhayache Mala earned
success on the stage. Purushottam Darvhekar made a name both as a playwright and director. Ghanashyam Nayanee Ala, Varhadi Manase, Katyar Kalajat Ghusalee, Nayan Tuze Jadugar are quite popular of his plays. Katyar Kalajat Ghusalee is a great musical play and hence popular. S. N. Pendse's Sambhusachya Chalea was successful at the box office. Atre's Preetisangam and To Me Navhec are still popular. Madhukar Toradmal's KaleBet Lal Batuee Bhovara and Gopal Krishna Bhobe's Tansen are also quite notable. P.B. Bhave's Saubhayga, Allauddin Ani Padmini also attracted attention of the audience. P. L. Deshpande's Tuz Aahe Tuja Pashi, Amaldar, Asa Mee Asa Mee, Tee Phularanee, Batatyachi Chal earned a phenomenal popularity and appreciation.

The drama wing of Murnbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh encouraged theatrical performances. Thereby veteran stage artists such as Balgandharva, Chintamanrao Kolhatkar, Keshavrao Date, Ganapatrao Bodas, Nanasaheb Phatak, Hirabai Badodekar, Master Krishnarao, Vinayakrao Patwardhan, Bapurao Mane, Sundarabai, J yotsna Bhole, J. G. Pendse, Durgabai Khote could guide the budding artists. It was through these efforts that Meenakshi, Jayamala Shiledar, Goharbai, Nirmala Gogate, Ram Marathe, Shrpadrao Newarekar, Bhaldhandra Pendharkar, Saudagar Nagnath Gore (Chhota Gandharva), Vamanrao Sadolikar, Bhargavram Acharekar, Anant Damale, Raghuvir Savkar, Prasad Savkar, Vasandrao Deshpande, Kanhopatra Kinikar, Ramdas Kamat, Krishnarao Moreshwar alias Daji Bhatavedkar, Master Vinayak, Master Dattaram, Jyaram Shiledar, Datta Bhat, Chittaranjan Kolhatkar, Prabhakar Panashikar, Shriram Lagu, Suhasini Mulgaokar etc. emerged as highly meritorious stage artists. Suhasini Mulgaokar's Ekapatri Saubhadra was crowned with success and popularity. C. G. Pendse, Bhakti Barve-Inamdar, Sulabha Deshpande, Damodar Kenkare, Vijaya Mehta, Jabbar Patel and Ashok Padamsi too have contributed to Marathi stage. (It should be borne in mind that this list of illustrious names is only symbolic and not complete). 75

Government of Maharashtra has also been encouraging the dramatic talents in all branches of the theatrical art since the creation of the State. The Directorate of Cultural Affairs after its predecessor, the Recreation Committee has been organising annual competitions of dramatic troupes in several centres of the State and a final competition from amongst the winners at Mumbai. This has given considerable encouragement to amatuer troupes of actors. Previously too and even now, connateur troupes used to stage the plays made popular by professional repertoires with considerable ability in various festivals. Much of the talent thus trained later passed into the professional theatre. Among the working class centres too, enactment of plays has become a pet hobby. In such an encouraging setting theatrical art has been thriving in Maharashtra, in spite of the mortal blows given by cinema and television.
Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosale, the illustrious daughters of Master Dinanath Mangeshkar, have earned tremendous reputation for their melodious film songs. Great applause has been showered upon them even at the national level. Both of them have made at least a small contribution to Marathi theatre also. Lata Mangeshkar made her debut on Marathi stage at an early age, while Asha Bhosale produced a few gramophone discs of Natya Sangeet sung in the style of her father.

Popularity of Natya Sangeet prompted great maestros like Ustad Abdul Karim Khan, Ustad Alladiya Khan, Baskarbuwa Bakhale and Ramkrishnabuwa Vaze to sing at least one song from the classical plays even in the concerts of pure Hindustani classical music. This tradition has remained unbroken. Moreover, the songs from those plays have found a new appreciation from 1970. Those old dramas are rarely staged now due to the absence of good singer actors. But the new generation of music lovers has taken fancy for Natya Sangeet. Virtuosos like Suhasini Mulgaokar, Kumar Gandharva, Bhimsen Joshi and Jitendra Abhisheki have brought into limelight the songs of Balgandharva. Indeed Hindustani art music manifested itself in a particular form on the stage from the days of Annasaheb Kirloskar. Likewise Natya Sangeet popularised classical music in Maharashtra. This is no small an achievement. Hence both these manifestations of music occupy a place of honour in the history of art and culture of Maharashtra.

**Editorial Note:** Along with classical music, natya sangeet, sugam sangeit have occupied an important place in the field of music. These various forms of music have not only entertained the people of Maharashtra but also exercised great influence on their minds. The stalwarts of Indian music like Master Krishna Rao, Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosale have contributed to the richness of Indian music especially light music. Maharashtrians are rightly proud of their Gankokila Lata Mangeshkar. She is recipient of “Bharatratna” the highest civil award of Government of India. The list of famous singers of sugam sangeit would run serveral pages. To name the few, Late G. N. Joshi, Gajanan Vatave, Late Manik (Dadarkar) Varma, Malati Pande, Late Sudhir Phadke, Janaki Ayyar, Mohantara Ajinkya, Dasharath Pujari, Suman Kalyanpur, Yashwant Dev, Ravindra Sathe, Shreedhar Phadke, Arun Date, Suresh Wadkar, Asha Bhosle, Usha Mangeshkar, Padmaja Fenani-Joglekar, Ranjana Joglekar, Anuradha Poudwal deserve mention.

**Street Theatre:** To create awareness among the people, street Theater Movement was effectively used. Originated in Vidarbha, this movement rapidly spread in western Maharashtra and soon became popular all over the State. In the beginning, the group of young poets of the organization, Lalit Kala Bharti, under the title Muktangan performed some street plays. Some of their plays like J adugar, Garudi and Shengadana became quite popular. Social elements like Panther Theater took advantage of this movement to bring awareness among the people.

**Dalit Theatre:** The concept of Dalit Theater or Dalit Stage was crystallised in the 60s and 70s of twentieth century. The young
generation inspired by the ideology and thoughts of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar gave rise to this movement. Dalit Theatre is also known as Movement of Social Reformation. In the initial stage, people like Kisan Fagoji Bansode, Prabhakar Jivne, Kamalakar Dahat, Amar Ramteke and in Marathwada, Dr. Gangadhar Pantavane gave impetus to this movement. Dr. Bhalachandra Phadke has written a book on Dalit Theater.

When we speak of theatre, drama, music or any other art in the context of Maharashtra, the regional variations play an important role. The regions like Vidarbha and Marathwada have preserved and developed their own cultural and local trends in these arts.

Chhatrapati Shau Maharaj (1894-1922) of Kolhapur gave royal patronage to the sportsmen, play writers, stage artist and artist of other multiple arts. His benefaction eventually led to the growth of these arts.

Taking into consideration the limitations of this topic, the particulars given in the above paragraphs are only representative in nature and not extensives.

Performing Art*

Maharashtra does not have a tradition of classical dance. All the same the province is replete with folk-dances and folk-performances. Gathasaptashati, the ancient literary work of Hala provides us some information about the proficiency of the courtesans. Though we cannot ascertain the actual forms of their dance they appear to be well-accomplished in the performing arts like dancing and music. The period of the socio-cultural life as reflected in these Gathas may be extended to the fifth-sixth century A. D.

The cultural tradition of Maharashtra may include also some dramatic dances. They are described as below:—

Dashavatara: This is a presentation of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. It is also called ‘bohada’. The roots of Dashavatara may be traced to the period of Gathasaptashati because the themes of entertainment then included Amrit-manthan, the stories connected with Vishnu and Lakshmi, Bali and Vaman etc. From many centuries, this form of entertainment appears to have been fitted in the religio-social cultural framework of the villages. Dashavatara is a presentation of dance and dramatics and hence may be called the folk-ballet of Maharashtra. Even in celebrating the heroic deeds of the incarnations of Vishnu the deities Ganapati and Sarasvati are invoked by the Sutradhar (director) at the beginning. The artists enacting them are the first to appear on the stage. The Sutradhar narrates the ten incarnations of Vishnu which is cannoted and suggested by the dancers through their movements and gestures. This is peculiarly a Maharashtrian phenomenon. This crude form of entertainment had been popular in Konkan and Goa in

* This chapter has been contributed by Dr. Varsha S. Shirgaonkar.