

Interview of Prof G P Deshpande

Ashok Da Ranade

(Published in Facts & News, No 10, NCPA, Theatre Development Centre, Mumbai, September 1988)

Excerpts from the TDC audio interview of Prof. G.P. Deshpande

Interviewer: Dr. Ashok Ranade

Once while discussing *Andharyatra* you said that you have achieved something different in it.

If we look at political movements and their position in Maharashtra life as a problem, the historical significance of it is what I have been trying in various ways to catch theatrically. . . The historical significance of political movements and their positions in our social life has been ably projected in *Andharyatra*, more effectively than in any of my earlier plays. . . I am of the opinion that, the ruling class and its nature, social movement and its nature, these in their ideal form (I use the word 'ideal' here in its Hegelian context,) their natural influences on the emotional state of a person: all these I have tried to encompass in *Andharyatra* to an extent greater than elsewhere?

By Hegelian, do you mean 'model'?

The one which retains its abstract form while retaining its concrete form.

In Marathi creative literature on the whole, politics, political schools, or political happenings do not have a tradition. . . Why then do you feel like giving it a try?

The simplest reason is that I have been interested in politics on both the activist's and the theorist's level. In a way, my family environment is responsible. My home and my entire family have grown up in a political environment. Though I am not a political activist myself, I have seen political activists from very near. . . When I saw the way in which politics was depicted in our literature, my dissatisfaction and annoyance grew day by day, not only because the depiction was incomplete, but because it was distorted. . . Marx calls it 'rising from the concrete to the abstract'. This is

important. . . If we are to understand politics, if we want to get an idea, then this has to happen. If you leave aside a theorist and a creative person like Marx, this give and take of 'rising from the concrete to the abstract' and 'rising from the abstract to the concrete' is possible more in the case of a creative person than in the case of a theorist. I felt, that contemporary literature is not doing it, I must do it myself. . . I must show that one can understand politics by 'rising from the concrete to the abstract'. Till such time we will not understand the true meaning of politics. This is not limited to Hegel and Marx. . .

There is a word bhootarthavada in our tradition - vastavvada, or in Hindi there is an incorrect word yatharthavada. Actually it should be bhootarthavada, meaning 'to fathom the meaning of what has happened'. Only that which has happened is not vastavvada or realism. This peculiar concept exists on the one hand in our political tradition: while writing on the novel, Rajwade reiterated that our novelists do not understand this vastavvada. Things have not changed much since Rajwade wrote this . . . I wanted to see whether, with 'rising from the concrete to the abstract' on the one hand, and the past, what has happened, its meaning, by probing into its political and intellectual view-points on the other hand, I could fathom the meaning of social and political happenings, organisation, streams, thought processes. . .

Why did you choose theatre as a form?

My development as a writer may be responsible for that . . . Like all others I started this journey as a poet. But that failed. Most of the poems I wrote in college came back! That was a good thing in a way, as it had no sense. The poems were bad. They lacked the intrinsic music they required. The construction was very bland . . . Then for some days I tried to write stories. I think some of my stories are good. But even then I do not think I was involved in that form. When I took up writing *Uddhvasta Dharmashala* I had thought of writing a novel. When I wrote the first drafts I realised that I am not able to handle the form. Then one day I realised, as Buddha under the Bodhi tree, that this could make a very good play! These are two different streams 'What I am saying', the reaffirming behind it, and 'how I am saying it', are two different but parallel journeys.

There is conflict in politics and there is conflict in drama. Do you feel you came to this form through some bridging between the two?

While writing *Uddhvasta Dharmashala* I was looking at some published documents of inquiry of the U.S. Government, and while doing so I realised it. I realised

a tension in them. Should I dramatise this tension? That is what came in mind. In *Uddhvasta Dharmashala* there are two forms. Out of four scenes, two are in flash-back. In one scene he speaks to himself. The fourth scene is after the enquiry when he speaks to his son. These four scenes have been written independently, and the enquiry scenes have been written independently. The joining was done later. Thus there are three forms. But I had not thought on the lines suggested by you, but it is possible to answer that way.

Your political ideology is based on a larger philosophy, what can be called a life-philosophy. But you are thinking on these lines i.e. politically. Do you think this is contradictory? Or do you feel that in spite of it the original meaning remains unchanged?

Two or three things will have to be considered here. What I have to say and whether it is successful or not has nothing to do with this . . . I also do not feel that these two things have influenced the language of my plays. I insist, on the other hand that, under the guise of realism, naturalism has acquired a very important but unjustified place in our society. And therefore, today, the moment I am writing, I want to take a position against naturalism. If you want to move from the concrete to the abstract, why would a Marathi political leader not speak in Brahmin Marathi? Because you ultimately want to take it to the abstract level and if so, a standard written language is of much use. . . Secondly, it is not that the layers in everyone's language are not varying. I insist that in *Andharyatra*, though Daulatrao's language is bookish, one sees a turn of phrase in it. The use of words do nevertheless show his character. He says 'amchyachyana sudhrat nahi'. Vasundhara or Shreepad do not use this expression. This is not Brahmin Marathi. My Marathi is bookish. Bookish language is necessary for the give and take of ideas. I am not interested in naturalism. I am against it.

Can one then say that there is an extra-dramatic complex of ideas controlling you? For example, take the anti-naturalism, or the movement front the concrete to the abstract. If you use the form of theatre thus, then it would seem that the current practices of naturalism, realism, the presentation of the character through half-spoken words are not totally acceptable to you.

That I do not totally accept them is correct. And therefore my bookish Marathi. (For example in *Uddhvasta Dharmashala*, P.Y.'s Marathi and Shreedhar Vishwanath's Marathi idiom is totally different.) However what you call extra-dramatic

is not so in my opinion, because ultimately all art-forms work in some historical framework. I say that of the society which has become culturally decadent, for political reasons let's say. This is especially true of Indian languages. The original strength of the bhakti tradition; or the original strength of the bakhar prose; we have lost it today. Those on whom imperialists have ruled, they have to pull back their old languages. Is this extra-dramatic? If you look at it in a general way, it is. But if you consider the details, it is not. Because these are ultimately verbal forms. Probably in music it might be different, and in music this question did not arise.

This was because the colonial interpretation possible in case of other phenomena was not possible in music. But in the other arts it has definitely happened. If one has to consider the internal form of a play, these extra-dramatic elements cannot be lost sight of. And hence I say that, whether good or bad, I want to and I am striving to retrieve language. I want to keep this Marathi. Because if it crumbles, our verbal art-forms will not survive. I have said in my preface to my unsuccessful play *Ek Vajoon Gela*, that I do not agree with the criticism people make about my Marathi, because we must learn to differentiate between the historical and the difficult.

When you specify, as in Andharyatra, the raga, the music form or the particular song, what is your exact position?

The position is that way unscientific. What do I do? When I listen to a raga it has a particular impact on me and its effect remains. In *Mantaka Pandavaschaiva* I have done it. I had used mama. This marva I had heard some time for an hour and a half. I do not understand the science. The effect remains on the mind, it does not mean anything more. Now I will not be able to recollect the form of marva. But I realised, while listening, there was some feeling, that if this is to be transformed into a psychological state, then the feeling would be of floating in space. Whether there is any science behind it, I do not know. The boy in *Mamaka Pandavaschaiva* has not found his moorings. There is no billiards table in the play! Throughout the play the boy is playing with a tape-recorder. I have not yet seen the play, but it would have been better had the table not been there, because it has no significance. The music has significance. So three patterns have been used, two music patterns and one recollection pattern. 'Sapadla tula tuza shadja tar bagh' is the sentence, which means 'see whether you find your moorings'. That is the impression in one's mind. Secondly, one has very generally realised something. We do not even remember what we have heard in our childhood, but the impressions are there. I had realised that the stage song 'Vada jau kunala sharana ga' and lavani had some connection. I do not think I had done this consciously. This is

collective individual unconscious. I must have read this sometime, it is there at the back of my mind. The other day (Bhaskar) Chandawarkar asked me why I chose this song. I said I do not know, but I realise a connection . . . He then pointed out that a prototype of this song is in a lavni. So I choose this – individual's unconscious. Now, why did I choose *marubihag*? Probably because I like to listen to it. I cannot tell you very specifically. I only say that the realisations are unscientific, but it corresponds to what I was saying. Art is seen as art when it is a part of the post-imperialist period, where you see an attraction for western things, or at least a hybrid. I feel very sorry that I cannot intone a note! I feel bad that the reason is political, because this is the most pure art, and that I do not know it. . .

Till now had you had written with the politics of Maharashtra at the centre. If these plays are translated, what happens to your insistence in using the bookish Marathi?

Vasant Deo has used a mixture of colloquial language for Daulatrao while translating *Andharyatra*. I did not feel while reading that it is rigid, governmental, or a bookish language. Many people realised this when I read it in Delhi. Will this work out? How effective will this be? The typical Satari touch in Daulatrao's speech, (in the style of Yashwantrao Chavan) but for stray phrases he is speaking a chaste Marathi! I maintain that I have seen Congress leaders of the region together, in 1940. I have seen them from very near, and that I have also seen the district level leadership from very, close. They used to speak the bookish Marathi very well. We feel as we do because of the Marathi leadership portrayed in Marathi films. The bookish language is not as bookish as one imagines. I will give you a simple example, the use of *mya* in Marathi. The *mee* becomes *mya* only in the causative, but our writers never make this distinction. In fact, I raised this point last year in the Theatre Academy workshop, that *mya* is not used as commonly in rural Marathi as you think. A person stood up and said 'that may be so only near Satara! With us it is different'. . . I say that in adaptation the adaptor should have a historical perspective. My language takes a historical and political standpoint, and if the adaptor and the actor understand this, then what you call extra-dramatic, will not appear so. That I think, is adequate.