

Interviews of Shahir Sable, Mohan Tondwalkar

Ashok Da Ranade

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Shahir Sable

Bio Data

Name	Krishnarao Ganpatrao Sable
Date of Birth	3 September 1923
Address	H 27, Ambekar Nagar, Ambekar Road, Parel, Bombay 400 012.
Place of Birth	Pasarani, Wai, Satara
Education	Up to 7 th Standard
Profession other than theatre	Millworker (Till 1945 in Swadeshi Mill, Kurla)
Honours and Awards	1984: Sangeet Natak Akademi Award 1988: Shahir Amar Sheikh Puraskar 1990: President, 70th Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Natya Sammelan, Bombay 1990: President, Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Shahir Parishad, Bombay 1990: Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar

Excerpts from interview of Shahir Sable by Ashok Ranade and Datta Ayre

Ranade: In what way did the folk music you listened to from your childhood influence you?

Sable: The way I remember I heard notes of music on my mother's lap. She used to hum while feeding me or putting me to sleep etc. In addition, in my native village Pasarani, the tinkling bells of the cattle or those bells sounding from the temples, or my mother singing ovi-s etc. permeated the atmosphere. This was followed by devotional music... bhajan, bharud, abhanga, gaulan etc. Little later I started understanding the meanings of the words and following what I had heard, started composing my own ovi. It runs thus in translation:

"Gandhi is my friend (sakha)
I will sing ovi to him,
and I will go to the jail
to win freedom."

As you know Jawaharlal, Subhashchandra, Nana Patil and other names followed when I composed a string of ovi-s.

Ranade: You changed the text to suit your content. It seems you also altered the tune.

Sable: But I took care not to disturb the character of the tune.

Ranade: It is not known that ovi-s too have different tunes. Will you please sing for us different moulds of ovi-tunes?

(Shahir Sable sang at least three different tunes of ovi-s each describing a different event)

Ranade: What other folk songs were you exposed to?

Sable: Work-songs of the farmers. Farmers help each other and many operations were carried out collectively. Apart from the work-songs dealing directly with a particular farming activity, songs with comments on daily life, songs expressing desires, ambitions and cravings were also sung. There were songs which teased others with humorous and satirical tone. And as you know even the work-songs had a devotional content.

Ranade: You have roamed all over Maharashtra. To what extent do the tunes differ?

Sable: You would not believe but the same work-song will have a different tune as one moves to Karad, Kolhapur etc... In fact tunes change 'per twelve miles' as we say in case of language.

(Here Sable sang a work-song in Kolhapur, Konkan and Khandesh styles.)

Ranade: When you began performing you used to play dholki and you were also the composer-singer. Did this fact affect your singing?

Sable: The fact is that I come from a santha (slow) sarnpradaya (school)! The gaulan-s or the bhajan-s I sang were slow in tempo. One of the first abhanga-s I composed and sang was on Sane Guruji, the man who fasted to ensure entry to harijans in the temple.

Ayre: You began as a shahir. Now there are three kinds of shahir-s. Firstly those who sing songs of valour and bravery to enthuse others engaged in wars etc. These are Veer Shahir-s. Secondly those who deal with the perennial theme of

contesting greatness of Brahma and Maya. As you know these are called Kalgi-tura Shahir-s. And thirdly there are those singers of love songs or erotic songs. These are Shringara Shahir-s. When you started your work in the textile workers' area how did you use the forms?

Sable: The truth is that I was educated with the worker-class. At Amalner where I took my education I stayed in a kamgar-chawl. When I came to Bombay to earn my living I went straight to Delisle Road. Vanyachi chawl, Hararawala Building and all these I am familiar with. I began my work of giving expression to the workers' agonies. I became a shahir influenced by the 1942 movement to sing the woes of the proletariat through poetry, tunes and rhythms. Ayre, Ram Mangeshkar, Raja Mayekar and others were impressed by my singing and joined me. They became my accompanists and colleagues.

Ayre: Shahir, it must be remembered that those were the times when bhavageet dominated the scene. Gajanan Watve, for example, was singing about "the loosened hair of Radha" and you came with your shahir-songs depicting village life... and that influenced us.

Sable: Gandhiji was advocating prohibition and we were acquainted with the ills that affected the proletariat. I, therefore, wanted to propagate prohibition. I presented a programme called *Darabarat Darudya* (a drunkard in a court). The court is of Chitragupta. The drunkard stands before Chitragupta and is asked:

"Why did you come up?"

"Because I did not have enough to eat."

"Then how did you have money to spend on drinks?"

"Because I did black marketing. The police caught me, robbed me of the grains and I died for lack of food." Etc., etc.

I commented humorously on all the social ills. During the same period the political shahir troupes were also functioning. Comrade Amar Shaikh, Annabhau Sathe, Gavankar, Vasant Bapat and Leeladhar Hegde were prominent. On the contrary I was without a political affiliation. I worked on campaigns such as prohibition, eradication of illiteracy, social reform etc. The irony is that even though I did not get a regular honorarium from the Government, I was branded as Government Shahir. I was fed up with this situation and decided to turn to the commercial stage because I needed a platform.

Ayre: To begin with, you performed for workers. How did you become popular in a more educated, elite audience?

Sable: Though I was presenting performances with a rural content I had a good voice and a judgement about what is good and bad. The middle-class audience struggles to live as does the proletariat, but it also has an intellectual approach. It is always sandwiched! We performed by sensing the woes of the middle-class.

Ayre: Your mukta-natya (free play) *Andhala Daltay* is a good example... in *Kase Kay Wat Chukla* you deal with corruption rampant in the society.

Sable: Yes in *Kase Kay Wat Chukla* I commented on rulers who have forgotten patriotism because of their lust for power.

Ayre: The credit for bringing mukta-natya in vogue goes to you. How did you think of it?

Sable: Lok-natya (folk play) is in fact tamasha. Tamasha may not require make-up, property etc. You can present it under a peepul tree! However the times have changed. The proletariat has been influenced by plays staged by Bal Gandharva etc. in Maharashtra. This form was exploited by the Kamgar Rangabhoomi. On this background I felt that the age of open-air tamasha has ended. The enclosed theatre-space with its lighting etc. is waiting to be exploited. By disciplining the folk play a little and by liberating the proscenium drama in equal measure I created my form of tamasha i.e. mukta-natya. This is different from both tamasha and the conventional drama.

Ayre: What about your activities as a shahir?

Sable: They continued. On the occasion of external aggression or at the time of Samyukta Maharashtra Movement I was active with all other shahir-s. At that time our individual political affiliations did not matter. All of us sang under the tricolor!

Ayre: A true shahir has his hand on the pulse of the common man. He knows his difficulties and he sings about them. This is why he is truly popular.

Sable: In my T.V. serial entitled *Maharashtrachi Lokdhara*, I have presented programmes in which the folk music of Maharashtra I know is presented entirely with young men and women as singers. In a sense I have passed on the heritage, I am aware of, to the next generation.

Ayre: What is the state of shahir-s today?

Sable: I feel sad that the shahir is pushed aside.

Ayre: Don't you feel that the contemporary street theatre is related to your shahiri?

Sable: To some extent. However a shahir essentially sings

Ranade: Who were the other shahir-s you found impressive?

Sable: When I went to Amalner the first shahir who impressed me was Shahir Seedram Basappa Mochate. He was imprisoned nearly for fourteen years for taking part in the freedom struggle. He was a forceful singer of povada-s. I used to accompany him and that made me listen to him carefully. He was extremely popular in villages... Shahir Mochate used only tuntune, the high-pitched instrument, and the boys' voices contributed the musical quality to Mochate's vigorous singing... On the other hand Shahir Khadilkar employed a slower tempo... Nanivadekar, the other shahir I heard, dealt with themes of social reform. For example, criticising bad habits which the Indians picked up from the British. Nanivadekar sang about the ill-effects of drinking tea! Tea-drinking was regarded criminal at that time... This was around the 1930s... Obviously these povada-s could not be sung as forcefully as those with a 'braver' content. But movements such as 'back to villages' etc. were thought to be a fit material for singing by the shahir-s... Then came on the scene Shahirs Gavankar, Amar Shaikh and Annabhau Sathe. Gavankar was a good poet but too decent a human being to sing like us performers! Annabhau was a poet who would compose on the spot. Amar Shaikh, my contemporary, was a genius... My relations with him were competitive and yet full of affection. I did not write anything significant after his death... Amar Shaikh was an inspired artiste and a dedicated person. He sang first and melody and rhythms followed him! Sometimes he used to miss both melody and rhythm and we made fun of the fact. But he never failed to reach the people and this I regard as more important.

Ranade: What about your exposure to lavani-singing?

Sable: I have not seen many tamasha-s. But I have seen Kausalyabai Kopargaonkarin and Radhabai Budhgaonkar. Kausalyabai was tremendously influenced by Bal Gandharva. I remember her singing in slow tempo, sweet, delicate and with an alluring abhinaya. I have also heard Manohar Gondhalee who used to perform with a tambora in tamasha... I also remember Rambhau Sonar from my native village. He would attend a whole night tamasha, come to the temple in the morning and

sing bhajan-s with tamasha tunes... All these I have heard and digested, though I have not learnt anything systematically... I always try to use the traditional material but modify it so that I can reach my audiences. I have followed this strategy in case of song-types such as koli-geet (fisherman's song), bhalari (farmer's work-song), abhanga and bharud. In bharud, which I have popularised, there are two types: bhajani-bharud and songi-bharud. The latter used to be presented with some enactment... I have also exploited the bhajan-form as well as the popular ovi. Very often phatka and katav also find a place in my performances as both these forms are useful to tell a story. Especially katav, employed by dangat performers to do a running commentary on an event taking place, has served me well.

Ranade: You have a good voice and an aptitude for music... Why did you not take to classical music?

Sable: My circumstances were such that I could not afford the luxury of having a systematic training!

Ranade: Mostly you have used your talent for propaganda. Do you feel you could have done better if you had not opted for propaganda?

Sable: I do not think so. Anyway I imposed the limitations on myself because I did not want commercialisation!

Shahir Sable: Performance Index

No	Name of Play	Playwright	Director	Music Director	Set Designer	First Performance	Total no of plays
1	Indrachya Darbarat Tamasgeer	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	-	1947	550
2	Chitraguptachya Darbarat Darudya	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	-	1949	125
3	Koyna Swayamwar	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	-	1950	250
4	Kodyachi Karamat	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	-	1952	100
5	Bapacha Bap	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	-	1955	2000
6	Nashib Phutke Sandhun Ghya	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	-	1957	550
7	Yamarajyat Ek Ratra	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Vyankatesh Kamble	16 January 1960 Amar Hind Mandal	600
8	Gyanbachi Mekh & Aaburavacha Lagin	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Manohar Shetye	15 October 1963 Rang Bhawan	700
9	Meech To Badshah	Pan. Tu. Patankar	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Manohar Shetye	13 March 1963 Ravindra Natya Mandir	135
10	Aandhala Daltay	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Shahir Sable	Manohar Shetye	13 August 1966 Ravindra Natya Mandir	800
11	Asuni Khaas Malak Gharacha	Shahir Sable	Suhas Bhalekar	Vishwanath More	Damoo Kenkre	12 October 1968 Shivaji Mandir	200

12	Makadala Chadhli Bhaang	Chin. Tryam. Khanolkar	Suhas Bhalekar	Shahir Sable	-	9 February 1969	75
13	Phutpayrichya Samrat	Vijay Tendulkar	Suhas Bhalekar	Datta Dawjekar	-	13 March 1970	50
14	Ek Tamasha Sundarsa	Sai Paranjpe	Suhas Bhalekar	Shahir Sable	-	1971-72	75
15	Kashi Kay Vaat Chukla	Shahir Sable (Idea: Baburao Marathe)	Suhas Bhalekar	Atmaram Morajkar	-	22 September 1973	1000
16	Kondu Hawaldar	Pan. Tu. Patankar	Suhas Bhalekar	Shahir Sable	-	1974	200
17	Ekach Nat Anek Samrat	Netaji Bhoir	Ram Mungi	Shahir Sable	-	-	75
18	Maharashtrachi Lokdhara	Shahir Sable	Charusheela Sable	Devdutt Sable	-	1 May 1984 Ravindra Natya Mandir	1000

Shahir Sable has acted in all productions except the last one. In most of the productions his co-stars were Raja Mayekar, Suhas Bhalekar and Vasant Ruke.

Kalavaibhav – Mohan Tondwalkar

Information sheet

Established in

1956

Proprietor – Managers

Mohan Tondwalkar

Languages of Performance

Marathi, Hindi, and Gujarati

No. of plays produced

57

Total no of performances

Above 6000

Interview of Mohan Tondwalkar by Ashok Ranade and Suresh Khare

Khare: You have been active in the field for 30 years now. You have introduced about 30 directors and 500 artistes through Kalavaibhav. You have also presented old-timers such as Nanasaheb Phatak, Master Dattaram, Shanta Apte and the new generation artistes such as Shreeram Lagoo, Nandkumar Raote, Vijaya Mehta. Satish Alekar, Waman Kendre and Dilip Kolhatkar are also associated with Kalavaibhav. Where is your birth-place, where were you educated?

Tondwalkar: I was born in Kalse, a small village near Malvan (Konkan) in 1934. After spending the initial six years in the village I came to Bombay to join R M. Bhat High School at Dongri. I could not pursue my education further than S.S.C. due to financial difficulties. I began searching for a job. Finally I landed with a fat-salaried supervisory post in an English firm, but could not get along with my superiors so left the job to join another.

My father was an actor-singer and used to take part in plays produced in Malvan. He also acted as a replacement at the eleventh hour, even in Bombay. In other words, the atmosphere in my home was conducive to my love for drama. I used to act but had realized early my own limitations. Basically I became aware of my deficiencies in speech.

Khare: When did you think of taking up theatre as a profession, which were your initial efforts?

Tondwalkar: While I held a government job, I had a lot of time on my hands. I did not know what to do with it. Some of my friends were connected with theatre. I watched them closely for over two years. I concluded that if it is run properly, producing plays may not be a bad proposition. It had a certain thrill about it. Though I was not well-off financially I was attracted to the profession. As a first step I put up a few shows in partnership with others, as a 'contractor'.

As you know for plays such as *Maanapman* and *Ekach Pyala* many artistes used to be 'ready' with their parts. To collect, to bring together such artistes and put up a show was to act as a contractor. I used to bring together major artistes and Narhari Satam would bring together other required players. These old plays were performed at night, running over six to seven hours of performing time. The professional actors we brought together know where and how to edit a play to suit the requirements... It is in this fashion that I staged *Ekach Pyala*, *Bhavbandhan*, *Lagnachi Bedi*, *Vidyaharan* as also some historical plays... Sometimes we used to earn a lot and sometimes we lost. There was only one play with a guaranteed income, *Ekach Pyala*, with Nanasaheb Phatak and Shanta Apte in the lead roles. A play with them on the board always earned. As a contractor I found that the plays which could not run in South Maharashtra, would do good business in Vidarbha. In the month of October with the cotton season successfully behind the Vidarbhis, we preferred to be in Vidarbha during the months of December, January, etc. We used to go with empty bags and come back with them filled with money. Vidarbha is known for its rich patronage. Unique. Konkan appreciated but . . .

Khare: When did you produce on your own?

Tondwalkar: I began with *Ekach Pyala* trying to stage it with Master Dattaram as Sudhakar and Shankar Ghanekar as *Taliram*. I tried this because Nanasaheb Phatak, who nearly monopolized *Bhavbandhan*, *Ekach Pyala*, *Hamlet* etc. was always busy. Master Dattaram had warned me that this might prove risky. But I wanted to try. All actors worked well but there was no audience... During the same period Sahitya Sangh had produced *Tuzhe Aahe Tujpashi* and Bhalchandra Pendharkar had put up *Duritanche Timir Javo*. Frankly speaking, these productions inspired me... In 1962 I saw *Prema Tuza Rang Kasa* in the state competition. I felt I should produce this play. Bhalba Kelkar's original production was good but I felt that a little more farcical touch would suit the play... I invited Atmaram Bhende to direct and to play the lead role. Others were Ramesh Deo, Seema, Sharad Talwalkar, Baban Prabhu, Mai Bhide and Lalita Desai (who later become popular as Ashoo). This was a top cast of those times. The play was not well-rehearsed and I was a bit nervous. And yet on the 13 October at 10 a.m. in the Birla Mathushri Sabhagriha, the performance became a hit. One of my friends said that this would be another *Lagnachi Bedi*.

We started doing this play everywhere. I remember one performance at Malegaon. Malegaon was riot-torn and people had advised us against putting up a show. We persisted. In that theatre, on the river bank, booking was about 200 in the morning. At night all tickets were sold, even the counterfoils. We brought back money in gunny bags and counted it only after reaching Bombay.

. . . of course, sometimes I failed. Then I would not go near the theatre for months together.

Khare: *Prema Tuza...* a sweet, little humorous play ran well. But this did not tempt you to produce a similar play?

Tondwalkar: True. I produced *Sowbhagya* by P. B. Bhave because I liked his language. I produced *Nayan Tuze Jadoogar*, this too was not a humorous play.

Khare: To have a fresh theme and to be impressed by it have been your criteria. You have always tried to keep up this tradition for the last 30 years. Did you ever think of reviving the music-plays?

Tondwalkar: No. I had seen many music-plays including one of Master Naresh. However, only one play, namely *Kaiyar Kaljat Ghusli* was a step forward. All other music-plays were stagnant. We did not have a playwright nor a music composer such as Jitendra Abhisheki. I put up, however, two music-plays during the centenary year.

Khare: You switched over to prose plays. You came in contact with Nanasahab Phatak, Shankar Ghanekar, Baburao Pendharkar etc. As persons, as artistes how would you assess them?

Tondwalkar: Nanasahab Pathak, Mama Pendse, Parshuram Samant and Master Dattaram represented a generation. Baburao Pendharkar came on the scene later... all of them were well-established. They were hardly 'professional' in their outlook. If they were told, "Tonight we have a performance in Pune at 9.30 p.m.", they would take care to reach Pune by the afternoon. Such was their sincerity. A contemporary artiste would reach at 8 p.m., if the show is at 8.30 p.m.! Phatak and others never cancelled dates, once given. For them there were no distractions such as cinema, T.V. serials etc. They were never arrogant. For outstation tours we did not have buses as we have today. These people used to pack their luggage after the performance, come to the S.T. stand and wait for the morning bus!... Nanasahab Phatak, a towering figure, had such a power in his voice that it would pierce the listeners' ears! In *Andhalyanchi Shala* we had Keshavrao Date, Mama Pendse, Nanasahab Phatak and K. Narayan Kale... four stalwarts of that time. The performance was at Rang Bhavan. The play opened but with little response. Nanasahab Phatak assured me that he would take an applause on entry, and he did! Such was their confidence. Master Dattaram had a child-like innocence about him. It was enough to tell him that he would be acting today in *Bhavbandhan* i.e. the role was not specified. On arrival he was told what the role was

to be and he could deliver the goods! He knew all the roles by heart. He was not good to look at but the muse of theatre had blessed him. When he was in his fifties he acted the role of Sawai Madhavrao. He used a wig and did his own make-up. Nobody could have guessed that he was nearly fifty. He looked a boy in his teens and spoke and moved like one. On stage he was entirely a different personality.

Khare: What about Baburao Pendharkar?

Tondwalkar: Baburao Pendharkar never spoke a Shakespearian dialogue. He always had cinema in his mind. On stage he walked gracefully, almost like a royal lion. I always tell actors that they should walk like Baburao Pendharkar. In *Othello* he used to walk with his arms on another character's shoulder... and that was sufficient to evoke a walk on the sea-shore.

Khare: The audiences then? What were their expectations?

Tondwalkar: Their expectations were modest. You should know the lines well. Music should be filling. They were not discriminating about acting. They expected a performance of four to five hours minimum to give them their money's worth!

Ranade: Do you feel that actors and the audiences in those times were in love with language?

Tondwalkar: From Gadkari we acquired a love for words. Audiences were hypnotised by the words. Gadkari's and Khadilkar's plays ran on them.

Khare: Did Phatak and others popularize language due to their diction?

Tondwalkar: Yes. For example in *Ekach Pyala* and in *Hamlet*, Phatak used to elongate the pronunciation of words such as sindhu (sindhoo) and aai respectively. Of course, Dattarambapu could not do this.

Ranade: Would you say that their abhinaya was not subtle' and that the audiences accepted the lack of subtlety and this led the actors to ignore subtlety?

Tondwalkar: Yes. There was no give-and-take in abhinaya at that time.

Ranade: Till what year this method was in vogue?

Tondwalkar: Till about 1970. When I did *Nayan Tuze Jadoogar* with Darvhekar, even he did not have these i.e. give-and-take, subtle abhinaya, taking pauses etc. After 1970 we had new actors coming through the dramatic competitions. Educated and

trained persons such as Dr. Lagoo came on the professional stage and they brought about a change.

Khare: Don't you think that there was a change in writing and presentation but we lagged behind in abhinaya and production?

Tondwalkar: Even in writing we remained backward. P. B. Bhave made an effort in *Vishkanya* but it hardly created any stir.

Khare: What are the basic criteria you use to select a play?

Tondwalkar: If I am able to read a play in one reading, I decide to think about it. I feel that if a play succeeds in involving me it can do the same to others! If in the second reading too I find the play interesting, I immediately write to the author that I have accepted the play. For all my productions, I have selected the plays and given them to the directors.

Khare: You are managing theatre as an impresario. When you like a particular theme do you think about its commercial possibilities?

Tondwalkar: I have produced plays which do not strike or appeal as 'commercial' at least initially. I have faith in my audiences. If I give them something different, I feel certain of their patronage. During 1973-75 I produced *Jasvandi* by Sai Paranjape. In that play two cats are characters speaking as humans. Everybody else rejected the play. I liked it on the first reading. I came to a firm conclusion in three hours. I only suggested that the name should be changed. The original name was *Manya, Banya ani Manasa*.

Ranade: Why the change of name?

Tondwalkar: The original name suggested a children's play... I also got the end of the play changed. Further it had forty blackouts, we reduced the number.

Khare: Did you feel that the end needed to have a relationship with our society?

Tondwalkar: I think that at least at that time our social morality had not gone down to the extent suggested by the original ending. In the original, the woman invites the driver to her bedroom! I thought she should suffer and feel lonely.

Khare: Is social acceptance of the play one of your criteria of selection?

Tondwalkar: The audience should feel that it is their own play... this is my first criteria. Secondly, casting should be faultless. I never bother whether a particular actor was a 'box office hit' or whether he was a well-known film actor. I had produced *Mala Uttar Havay*. That was the first play in which I had taken Vijaya Mehta. I had seen her earlier plays and had liked her acting. But the others who worked with her were new to the professional stage. If I would have taken experienced actors, the presentation would have suffered. At that time *Kachecha Chandra*, my other production, was also running. I had thought of using the same group for the new play. I had told them to see the play in the competition, but nobody liked it. They never thought it could be produced on the professional stage. A similar thing happened about *Purush*.

Ranade: To what extent does the director contribute?

Tondwalkar: I feel that director, author and the producer contribute equally. For example, in the play soliloquies came in a bunch. I wanted them to be distributed. The author agreed.

Ranade: Who does the casting, you or the director?

Tondwalkar: We suggest, but the final decision rests with the director. Sometimes the director recommends and suggests options. When we took *Kachecha Chandra* to the professional stage, a number of people suggested the name of Chittaranjan Kolhatkar because at that time he was established as a villain in films. However, I thought of Dr. Lagoo. With Kolhatkar it would have been a different play. Even during the rehearsals we purposefully made it a bit cinematic. For example, I felt that nobody would drag a drunken woman as if she were a piece of luggage. He would carry her on his shoulders. We tried this move and it clicked.

Ranade: But earlier the play was not successful. You changed the advertisement, mentioned the dramatic end etc. So you do not hesitate to resort to dramatic, cinematic gimmicks?

Tondwalkar: Yes. How people would be attracted to a play should also be a concern. Once a play attracted attention it went on for more than 500 performances.

Khare: However, you cannot guarantee success of a play even after doing all this. Hence as a producer what are the special cares you take to ensure a professional success?

Tondwalkar: Script and casting are the most important things. Wrong casting never succeeds. Sometimes one becomes aware of it at the stage of dress rehearsals. For example, I produced *Nala Damyanti*. I liked the play. Written by Vasant Kanetkar, directed by Vijaya Mehta and music by Bhaskar Chandavarkar. Thus nothing was spared. And yet at the time of dress rehearsals, I realized that the play was good visually but lacked life. I asked Vijaya Mehta and she also said she did not know why... The same thing happened in the case of *Kasturi Mrug*. As you know, the play was based on Hirabai Pednekar. I had cast Jyoti Chandekar. I requested the author to add some fictionalized portion.

He said it would be difficult because so many have written on her. I argued with him mentioning *Himalyachi Savli* in which we had shown Dhondo Keshav Karve to be a father of a daughter... Dr. Lagoo was the director. He suggested Rohini Hattangadi for the role. I had seen her *Changuna* in which she had done justice to the rustic role. However, she could not bring in the required sophistication. Her face failed to elicit sympathy of the audience. Hirabai Pednekar's sadness, her sorrows could never reach the spectators... with the director's permission I asked her "Why don't you cry more?" and she replied, "How can I shed false tears?"... this had come in one of her later interviews. When she acted in Attenborough's *Gandhi*, I asked her, "How can you cry now?" Obviously when she acted in my play she had just arrived from the N.S.D. She was taught not to cry 'falsely'! As a result, my calculations went wrong and the play failed... *Rao Jagdev Martand*, one of my later productions, enjoyed only six performances! In that play I had Amol Palekar, Dr. Lagoo, Jayram Hardikar and Asha Potdar. I thought that the play failed because the dialogues did not suit the actors. Perhaps because the author was new... whatever it might be we realized the weaknesses later. During the rehearsals I had suggested that some reported information should be converted into action on stage, but the director refused. . .

Khare: Can you think of any play which ran well mainly because of good casting?

Tondwalkar: My production *Shortcut* had Satish Dubhashi, Bhakti Barve, Sakharam Bhave and Narayan Pai. The play ran because of the casting and yet people did not like the third act treatment-wise. I have realized that a play, as it appears during the rehearsals, changes by at least 50% when it comes before the spectators. The audience-response and such other matters produce something unique.

Khare: To what extent advertisements contribute to the success of the play?

Tondwalkar: A great deal. An advertisement should compel the spectator to put his hand into his pocket! Advertisements must be well-planned... While producing *Kachecha Chandra* a copywriter brought to me the work... I saw the picture and I told him to give me the lettering only... I advised the newspapers to print the picture alone... The first show was full because of the block alone. What is essential is to arouse the curiosity of the audience. That compels the audience to see the play and this is followed by the 'mouth publicity'. In Maharashtra, it is said that people are theatre-minded. They say that we are mad about politics and theatre. Tell me what is the percentage of the playgoers? Hardly two percent! If ten percent would have seen plays, Marathi theatre could have been a rich theatre. Except at Dadar and such other areas nobody goes to theatre. At the most they watch plays staged in the Ganapati festival.

In London plans are sold in advance at least for the coming six months! We have to wait for at least four days to fill up the plan. All booking takes place on the last day. No advance booking...

The name of the play must be catchy, specially for comedies. Even if the name is (linguistically) a distortion it does not matter. For a producer that play is good for which plans are sold quickly. Otherwise how can he work?

Khare: Basically Gujarati theatre has borrowed heavily from the English and Marathi theatres. Why did you think of adapting plays from Gujarati into Marathi?

Tondwalkar: The first play which I adapted in this way was *Lapandav*. I had liked the play because of its skillful direction. The stage was undivided and yet two families, two telephones, two sets of furniture and two separate entries and exits. This was a challenge to any director... In that year Natyadarpan awarded the play for best direction. The entire play proceeded at two levels. Dialogues taking place in the house of one family would prove complementary to the story of the other family. The play was brought into Gujarati from English and I took it from Gujarati... Another play was *Lafda Sadan*. In spite of a suggestive name, the play had nothing obscene. This too was a director's play. The bungalow in the play had nine doors and the third act hypnotised entirely because of the actor's movements. There were very few dialogues – only entries and exits through the doors. The spectators were fascinated.

Khare: You have worked with many playwrights such as Kanetkar, Dalvi etc. All of them have individual styles, strong points and weak points. What is your assessment of them?

Tondwalkar: I do not impose my views on any playwright. I might make suggestions but then I move aside. I have realised that Kanetkar writes in such a pointed manner that no changes are possible. Dalvi is different. I approached him and said, "I want to have a play from you." He said, "I do not have any theme in my mind, but if you want me to work on any of my stories or novels, I would be ready. I cannot translate or adapt otherwise." I asked him to write a play on one of his novels, namely *Athang*. He said, "No play can be made out of that novel." I said, "I can tell you how to dramatize that novel, you write dialogues for me and we will finalize with the director." Dalvi agreed. However, whether Kanetkar or Dalvi, none have been rigid or uncompromising.

Ranade: Your concept of theatre, how has it evolved, have you come to any conclusions by your study of the audiences?

Tondwalkar: Till I passed my S.S.C. I had read everybody from Dandekar, Phadke, Khandekar, Kanetkar to Baburao Arnalkar... I have not read much about drama.

Khare: You have worked with directors of three generations. What differences have you noted?

Tondwalkar: The first generation, say Darvehkar upto 1967-68. He used to explain everything to the actor and tell him how to pronounce each word, each sentence. Then I saw *Tuze Aahe Tujpashi, Sundar Mee Honar, Vedyacha Ghar Unhat...* I felt the difference. Therefore, I selected different directors such as Nandkumar Raote, Vijaya Mehta. Raote was given to some gimmicks. Vijayabai relied more on improvisation. The earlier rehearsals were group rehearsals while Vijayabai had a different method. Only those involved in a particular scene were called for the rehearsal. The second generation directors were more specific and precise. From Vijayabai to Waman Kendre directors are more definite. Blocking today, tomorrow polishing the scene, day after rehearse again and then finalize... So far about thirty directors have worked with me and each director's method can be discussed separately. Once I tried to direct a play myself and produce it commercially. The script was *Katha Navya Sansarachi* by Baban Prabhu, with Ramesh and Seema (Deo) but I soon realised that I did not have the temperament required to direct. I wanted to direct even *Natigoti*. The script was with me for a number of years, but I admit I did not have the patience that a director needs.

Khare: You said that you suggested changes in your discussion with the author. Changes can be results of applying artistic criteria or is it because of commercial needs?

Tondwalkar: Not exactly because of the commercial needs. I suggest changes only if they agree with the nature of the play. I tell every playwright that our plays must be a step forward.

Khare: Some producers say e.g. "If you delete this scene I would save on the set. I can send my sets in a bus instead of a truck!"

Tondwalkar: I never follow this line of thought. On the contrary I suggest different sets even before an act ends. The people also see something different. And secondly if a drama has a number of set changes, unauthorized performances are difficult and this is to our advantage.

Khare: Do you feel that producers should have social commitment?

Tondwalkar: If I do plays which I like, automatically they will have social commitment because I am socially committed. I want to run a profession well and that is my social commitment.

Khare: Any comments on the contemporary actors?

Tondwalkar: Many of the contemporary actors such as Vikram Gokhale, Nana Patekar, Laxsnikant Berde have worked with me. Vikram has distinctive stage-movements. He can render a pathetic scene effectively with facial and eye-expressions with minimum use of words. Nana Patekar may not be good-looking in the conventional sense, but his voice and movements give a character a different rhythm. Bhakti Barve is, in my opinion, very good for comedy than for social or tragic plays because she is unique in the way she uses words and conveys them to the spectators to elicit a certain laughter. Reema Lagoo can give us intensity of dialogues and looks in a social play.

Khare: In the last thirty years the economics of theatre has changed considerably. Your assessment?

Tondwalkar: When I began doing theatre, admission charges were maximum Rs 5 and minimum Re 1. The actors used to get a lump sum and they never asked for raises as it happens today: "My serial is being screened" or "my film has been released so increase my 'night'!" An artiste like Nanasahab Phatak used to ask for Rs 100 as honorarium and Rs 10 for conveyance. Only for *Hamlet* he used to charge Rs 150. At that time advertising a play used to cost Rs 150 to Rs 190. Today the minimum expense in this respect is Rs 2,000 per performance. Theatre rental was Rs 400 in 1967, today it exceeds Rs 1,200!

Khare: What do you think about the theatre of the future? It is often said that experimental theatre is a laboratory of the professional theatre. What is your opinion?

Tondivalkar: It is true that it can serve as a laboratory for the professional theatre, but where is it today? Artistes who worked for the experimental theatre are working with us. Where is their commitment now? The contemporary experimental theatre does stereotyped experiments! For example, sadist relationship. Dubey used to have such productions but he suggested something else. Nothing of the kind happened in Marathi theatre. Arvind Deshpande tried but did not succeed in being really different. Those experimenting in the mofussil got a platform in Bombay (through Avishkar Movement etc.) but their distinctive quality was not looked after.

Khare: The newspaper reviews... how do you respond to them?

Tondwalkar: Reviewing is necessary. People come to know of the play. There are many people who do not look at the advertisement. However, reviewing with us merely means a retelling of the plot. It does not pay attention to the other important aspects. The author, the director and the producer etc. work over a script for six months and these reviewers deliver their judgments in just five minutes on a piece of paper! They do not analyse or look deep. They will say, "Acting was good, so and so acted well" or "Raghuvir Talashilkar's set was good". But they will not comment on the kind of set— was it an architect's set or a set-designer's set? Before writing reviews if the reviewers would care to see the play at least three times and not refer to the plot — it would be good for them and convenient for the spectators. The judgements of the reviewers harm the play if they are very critical. I personally feel, and I have said this many times frankly, that if the reviewers like a play it does not run! For example, Madhav Manohar did not like *Kachecha Chandra* with Dr Lagoo in it, but it ran well!

Khare: Have the television and the video affected booking in theatre?

Tondwalkar: Yes. People get everything in their home because of the television. Earlier using transport to come to theatre was easy, but it is not so today. Housewives are our real audiences. If they come to the theatre, the entire family would follow. Now the housewife finds entertainment ready at her home. Actors who used to honour their commitments with us deserted us since 1985 because they began acting in serials. Dates get cancelled at the eleventh hour and all this is having adverse effects.

Khare: Any future for Sangeet Rangbhoomi?

Tondwalkar: Firstly those who are staging plays of the Sangeet Rangbhoomi must discontinue their present mode of doing so. Most of the time there is a total miscasting— a character of 16 years is presented by a 60 year old. It used to be so even in the past, perhaps because the spectator was not very alert — he wanted to listen to music, and that was all. I remember Hirabai Badodekar used to deliver dialogues full of love sentiment from a distance of ten feet! But now things have changed. People will not accept this. When new authors wrote new music plays... what was new in them?... they never changed what they should have. For example why not have a play such as the *Pygmalion*? I mean the practice of having an actor-singer singing from the front of the stage and sets being changed in the background or an actor singing at the front and a heroine or a friend standing helplessly in a corner... all this should change. We have pop music now, the ever-changing music. Similarly why don't we have changes in theatre? In the early days of *Stoayamvar*, *Manapaman*... the circumstances were different. On account of the non-monopolistic conditions, different companies used to perform these plays and people used to get opportunities of listening to many actors doing the same roles. This did not continue. It is also true that we stopped having actors and actresses who can sing. If somebody writes a music-play in a different manner, producers would come forward and, perhaps, Natya Parishad would also provide grants...

The Marathi music-plays presented on the television have earned censure from others... It is said that the Calcutta stage is more advanced than the Marathi theatre. I do not agree. With some honourable exceptions, the stage in Bengal lags behind that of Maharashtra. I have also seen Kannada and Malayalam theatres. They are gaudy in a very peculiar way. They also have trick- scenes galore which attract the spectators. But the give-and-take of responses prevailing in the contemporary Marathi stage is definitely unique. I have not seen much of the English theatre and yet whatever I have seen compels me to say that the English stage in Bombay also lacks the give-and-take feature.

I do not have to refer to the commercial Gujarati stage, everybody knows what it is. I feel our theatre is of the first rank. To those who are interested in folk dance etc. in theatre, we will have to assure them that the present-thy theatre is not verbose and hence less boring. People use few words, more content and do that more effectively.

Khare: You have been in theatre for the last 30 years, did you ever feel that you should have your own author, director and actor etc.

Tondwalkar: That would have brought in monotony, not only to me but also to the spectators. It is also true that everytime authors and directors etc. cannot combine well. This is the reason why I am not stuck with one author or with one director. I may be wrong but I feel that after ten plays or so the authors tend to repeat their dialogues. I do not blame them, it may be happening unconsciously... Spectators are very perceptive. In the early days there were quite a few who would see us after the performance and point out the lines that were omitted or repeated!

Khare: Even though you are a producer, you are an artiste first. The artiste is never satisfied, he always feels that something more needs to be done. What do you feel?

Tondwalkar: My motto is to accept the challenge of change. My best play has yet to come. My dream is to put up a play in one theatre where spectators would flock to see it, as it happens in England and America. The advanced theatre that I think of would show everything extremely natural, as if something is happening really in front of the spectators' eyes. I would have music and problem-play brought together... We do not have songs which are common to all. I would like my plays to achieve this. I had tried my hand at this before but without success. I do not know whether I would really succeed!

Kalavaibhav: Performance Index

No.	Year	Name of the Play	Playwright	Director	No. of Performances
1.	1960	Lagnachi Bedi	Acharya Atre		30
2.	1960	Ekach Pyala	Ram Ganesh Gadkari		75
3.	1962	Prema Tujha Ranga Kasa	Vasant Kanetkar	Atmaram Bhende	180
4.	1965	Nayan Tujhe Jadugar	Purshottam Darwhekar	Purshottam Darwhekar	90
5.	1967	Saubhagya	P. B. Bhave	Madhukar Toradmal	160
6.	1968	Ek Hatti Mulagi	Vijay Tendulkar	Atmaram Bhende	65
7.	1969	Katha Navya Sansarachi	Baban Prabhu	Mohan Tondwalkar	55
8.	1970	Kachecha Chandra	Suresh Khare	Nandkumar Raote	515
9.	1970	Sakhi Shejarani	Suresh Khare	Nandkumar Raote	90
10.	1971	Mala Uttar Havay	Suresh Khare	Nandkumar Raote	178
11.	1971	Pappa Sanga Kunache	Suresh Khare	Nandkumar Raote	105
12.	1971	Eka Gharat Hoti	Suresh Khare	Nandkumar Raote	45
13.	1972	Himalayachi Savali	Vasant Kanetkar	Shreeram Lagoo	310
14.	1973	Nanda Saukhya Bhare	Sai Paranjape	Sai Paranjape	75
15.	1973	Rao Jagdeo Martand	Mangesh Padki	Amol Palekar/ Shreeram Lagoo	6
16.	1974	Sare Pravasi Timirache	Anil Sonar	Dilip Kolhatkar	45
17.	1975	Jaswandi	Sai Paranjape	Vijaya Mehta	185
18.	1975	Nala Damayanti	Vasant Kanetkar	Vijaya Mehta	36
19.	1975	Sobat Tava Preetichi	Ramesh Pawar	Ramesh Pawar	44
20.	1976	Kasturi Mrug	Vasant Kanetkar	Shreeram Lagoo	180
21.	1976	Lapandav	Suresh Piprodia	Arvind Thakkar	141
22.	1977	Mansala Dankh Maticha	Vasant Kanetkar	Arvind Thakkar	195
23.	1978	Jithe Phool Umalte	Ankush Sawant	Sakharam Bhave	10
24.	1978	Lafda Sadan	Suresh Piprodia	Arvind Thakkar	265
25.	1978	Jheri Dankha Vasani (Gujarati)	Vasant Kanetkar	Arvind Thakkar	22
26.	1979	Kopata Vastudevata	Priyadarshan Kanetkar	H. V. Sahasrabudhe	42
27.	1979	Shortcut	Madhukar Toradmal	Madhukar Toradmal	182
28.	1979	Mahasagar	Jaywant Dalvi	Vijaya Mehta	525
29.	1980	Connection	Vasant Sabnis	Shashikant Nikte	77
30.	1980	Parijat Baharala	Nanasaheb Shirgopikar	Nanasaheb Shirgopikar	75
31.	1980	Kadhitari Kothetari	Vasant Kanetkar	Sakharam Bhave	55
32.	1981	Baisaheb	Suresh Piprodia	Arvind Joshi	22
33.	1981	Laila 0 Laila	Suresh Piprodia	Shashikant Nikte	47
34.	1981	Savitri	Jaywant Dalvi	Vijaya Mehta	135
35.	1982	Chhoo Mantar	Vasant Kanetkar	Sadashiv Amrapurkar	110
36.	1982	Purush	Jaywant Dalvi	Vijaya Mehta	390
37.	1983	Pativrata	Nanasaheb Shirgopikar	Nanasaheb Shirgopikar	360
38.	1983	Mendhare	Anil Sonar	Ananda Nandoskar	11
39.	1984	Mukta	Jaywant Dalvi	Vinayak Chaskar	30
40.	1984	Paryay	Jaywant Dalvi	Purushottarn Berde	325
41.	1985	Karun Karun Bhagle	Anil Sonar	Bharat Tandel	15
42.	1985	Wada Chirebandi	Mahesh Elkunchwar	Vijaya Mehta	55
43.	1986	Mahima Bhakticha	Kumar Shahu	Kumar Shahu	25
44.	1986	Hurry Up Hari	Jaywant Dalvi	Dilip Kolhatkar	15
45.	1986	Kinara	Jaywant Dalvi	Madhukar Toradmal	125
46.	1987	Karti Shridevi	Vasant Sabnis	Arun Nalavade	100
47.	1988	Paoolkhuna	Jayant Pawar	Vijay Mondkar	60
48.	1989	Karti Kaliat Ghusli	Vasant Sabnis	Arun Nalavade	200
49.	1989	Dusara Samna	Satish Alekar	Waman Kendre	100
50.	1989	Natigoti	Jaywant Dalvi	Waman Kendre	275
51.	1990	Mee Rashtrapati	Jaywant Dalvi	Waman Kendre	18
52.	1990	Vat-un Sagale Sarakhe	Gangaram Gavankar	Liladhar Kambli	10
53.	1991	Mahayog	Manoj Mitra	Waman Kendre	4
54.	1991	One-Room-Kitchen	Adpt: Mangesh Kulkarni Gangaram Gavankar	Vinay Apte	97
55.	1992	Apoornank	Jaywant Dalvi	Rajeev Shinde	40
56.	1992	Gela Madhav Kunikade	Va Sant Sabnis	Rajeev Shinde	40
57.	1992	Bade Dilwala	Rajeev Shinde	Rajeev Shinde	1