

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Theatre and the Making of the Modern Indian Subject in late Nineteenth Century India

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in

Literature

by

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2013

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## **Dedication**

For my parents

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Chapter one, in part, has been submitted for publication of the material as it may appear in *Theatre Survey* (Cambridge University Press). The dissertation author was the primary author and investigator of this paper.

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## **Abstract of the Dissertation**

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Professor Rosemary George, co-chair  
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In my current work, I analyze gender, class, and aesthetic performance, resistance to particular forms of class-based aesthetic practice, and the political space that emerges in the struggles over aesthetic form. I interrogate the formation of subjectivity and popular culture in western India from 1843-1900, by locating those themes within Marathi musical theatre. My central concern is how the emerging practice of popular theatre intervened in the formation of a new Indian subjectivity, and dispersed the intellectual discourse of religiosity, secularism, gender, and Indian-ness to a broadly illiterate public.

Arguing that we cannot begin to think of subjectivity in colonial India without popular culture—specifically musical theatre—I divide my dissertation into three sections: a historiographic intervention into the periodization of Marathi drama, an exploration of the interconnections between translations of Sanskrit and English plays into Marathi, and their production of gender and subjectivity, and finally plays about

marriage. The translations I analyze in my second chapter—of *Shakuntala* as *Shakuntal the Musical* by Annasaheb Kirloskar and a play by Govind Deval entitled *Durga* (1886), based on Thomas Southerne’s *The Fatal Marriage* (1694)—are, I argue, simultaneously an act of bringing the past into the present, but also of creating an equivalent Indian modern subjectivity, equivalent to the liberal bourgeois subject of David Hume and Adam Smith. Finally, in the third chapter I suggest that women were the first “modern” Indians. My conclusion, and the direction of the dissertation, is to chart a trajectory of how popular culture created typologies for behavior and conduct, thus engendering the modern Indian subject in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Introduction: the New Theatre in Colonial India**

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the birth of the first mass popular culture in western India, itinerant Marathi language theatre. Itinerant Marathi theatre nurtured a climate in which discourses about modernity, reform, and subjectivity flourished in its productions, which successfully interpolated all strata of society. With low levels of print literacy, for example, and a rising literate intelligentsia supported by the colonial state's educational apparatus, this popular theatre needed to concurrently appeal to an audience for which education was important, but just one of many social divisions. Divisions between caste, class, creed, and then ideological divisions among traditionalists, reformists, in a colonial context, affected every aspect of a person's life. Yet, this popular itinerant theatre found ways to appeal horizontally across religions, as well as vertically within a religion, and also beyond its language base. In this dissertation, I explore the Marathi language theatre, its beginnings and changes from 1843-1900, and how, by privileging the visual, theatre was able to erase socially felt divisions, and constitute a new, modern Indian subjectivity. This new subjectivity took on a primarily aesthetic quality, in which an individual's ability to appreciate art, to feel, and experience emotion was fundamental to identity.

Theatre in colonial India possessed many attributes that print media lacked, especially its visually determined legibility, dominated by religious imagery, plots, and scene-types. It was able to reach audiences regardless of their educational background, and became, owing to its medium, a register of social change, whether explicitly or implicitly. From its commercially successful origins in the 1850s, Marathi itinerant

theatre became a battleground for discourses over reform and modern subjectivity, as religious stories became inflected with discourses of modernity. Underlying the entire discursive overlay, however, was the necessary framework of visual literacy, which foregrounded the legibility of plots, props, character, and religious iconography that was portrayed. The ability of the theatre to function as a site of contesting discourses depended solely on visual literacy. Unlike print media, the theatre appropriated and resignified a broad social comprehension of gesture, imagery, and religious tropes that were prevalent in the cultural imaginary and in daily life.

At the same time, despite visually legible religious material, the popular tradition of theatre that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century was wholly secular and commercial, unattached to any religious festival. It relied on the emotional moods generated by religious tropes to produce a shared understanding about the past (religious and historical), and by way of the performance, a shared awareness about the present. It is precisely because performances generated shared attitudes to mythico-religious or historical pasts and social presents, that the theatre became a viable space for formulating definitions of Indian colonial modernity. In many ways, the theatre reformulated the subject and modernity in India as simultaneously modern *and* Indian. By revivifying and recycling the past and collapsing it into the present, theatre created a haunting, but legible citationality, within a dense network of cultural understanding.<sup>1</sup> The visual was able to bridge divides between literate/illiterate on the basis of its embracing appeal— thus constituting a thoroughly Indian modernity accessible to all social strata. Within a commercial arena, the function of entertainment (and profit) ensured that no single group

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<sup>1</sup> For the many ways in which the stage can be "haunted" see (Carlson 1–15).

could entirely appropriate the theatre as a cultural form, without risking its commercial viability. This dynamic, in turn, enabled the theatre to function as a marketplace of ideas. Working with religious imagery and stories as allegory for society became central to the work of some playwrights.<sup>2</sup>

The commercial appeal combined with religious content is evident in various theatrical documents. Sudhanva Deshpande notes that by the 1860s, over three dozen theatre troupes circulated around parts of the Bombay Presidency, Madras Presidency, and the Central Provinces, which were large colonial administrative divisions that today encompass parts of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh (S. Deshpande 177). There was so much competition that managers of theatre troupes entered into contracts with their actors, so as to retain and cultivate talent without the insecurity of losing actors to other troupes (Desai 9–10). Some troupes advertised actors, and nineteenth century enthusiasts reported that people would go to see certain actors perform specific roles for which they were known (Kulkarnī 30; Naregal, “Performance, Caste, Aesthetics” 91).

The roles depicted, as with the plots, were predominantly drawn from religious sources, and involved some version of religious mythology, but also included historical plots and farces. Indian audiences would have known the plots from their own cultural background. The *Bombay Times* occasionally printed summaries of the plays for European patrons at the Grant Road Theatre, where the larger troupes performed in front of a mixed elite Indian and European audience. A glance at the plot summary, in

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<sup>2</sup> The most obvious example of the ways in which religious content was adapted for explicitly political ends can be seen in a 1907 play entitled *Kichaka-Vadha*, or the “Defeat of Kichaka”, by K.P. Khadilkar (1872-1948). For more on this play, see Rakesh Solomon (1994).

conjunction with other documents I speak about below, shows us that for Indian audiences, going to the shows was about experiencing different aspects of the play than the plot. They went, instead, to develop an emotional understanding of the play, as I explain below, following a plot summary of one of these plays. One of these plays, entitled *Indrajit Vadh*, or “The Defeat of Indrajit” is taken from the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*. In the play, Laxmana, who is the younger brother of the main protagonist of the *Ramayana*, Rama, defeats Indrajit in battle. Both Rama and Laxmana are viewed as incarnations of the god Vishnu; Indrajit is the son of Rama’s chief antagonist Ravana, a demon with supernatural powers who has also abducted Rama’s wife, Sita. The summary, from March 9, 1853, and the review, from March 11, 1853, both give us a sense of the aesthetics, patronage, performers, generic qualities, and various other attributes of this kind of theatre (and I quote at length):

The play commences with the appearance of a recitor and a clown (an imitation of the old Greek chorus), and the recitor, having described to the clown all the particulars regarding the play, Gunputtee and Sarasvatee; ‘the God and Goddess of Wisdom’ appear. They are soon followed by two angels, who by their performances [sic] endeavor to please the deities. The play commences with a battle between Luxuman, ‘the Brother of Rama’ and Indrajit the ‘son of Ravan, the giant King of Ceylon’ in which the latter being killed, his head is carried off to Rama by his monkey followers, while the arm of Indrajit, cut off by an arrow from Luxuman, flies through the air to the apartment of ‘Sulochana,’ the wife of Indrajit. The dead limb writes for the information of the lady of the sad fate of her husband, Sulochana resolves to burn herself on the funeral pile of her husband and goes, with her father-in-law Ravan’s permission, to Ramchandra for the recovery of her husband’s head. The monkeys around, to put her virtue to the test, request Sulochana to make the dead head smile. The head smiles and it is restored to her. A great many events that followed are omitted, and the next part of the play commences with the accession of Rama to the throne of Ayodhya after exile of Sita, his wife, to a forest on account of certain imputations cast upon her conduct... (Banhatti, *Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 394–5).

Two days later, the following review appeared in the *Bombay Times*:

The performance seemed to us very creditable, as far as we could judge—utterly ignorant as we were of the language used, which was Mahratta. The actors were all Hindoos—those of them who performed the chorus being Brahmins in their ordinary dress, and the others—the real actors—the representatives of Gods, Goddesses, demi-Gods and Monkey Soldiers being Khutrees. The clown was a leading character throughout the play, and thought nothing of standing on his head, or making a summersett [sic] while Rama or Ramchundra or Indrajit were delivering heroic orations. The God and Goddess of wisdom seemed quite at home, too, while sitting on chairs and couches, and the combat between Luxuman and Indrajit was carried on (the weapons being bows and combatants dancing fiercely round and round each other) in an English looking parlour. These things we mention, however, with no wish to detract from the merit of the performance, which was such, upon the whole, as agreeably to disappoint us [sic]. The grotesque feats of the clown amused even those who did not know even a word of what he was saying, and his jests and repartees were received with hearty laughter and loudly applauded by the native portion of the audience, [sic] The actor who represented Ramchundra bore himself with part and dignity becoming such a hero, and the two boys who performed the female characters, moved, spoke and lamented after the most approved fashion of eastern women. The various costumes were doubtless quite as appropriate... (Banhatti, *Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 396–7).

Ironically, few (if any) of these detailed plot descriptions appear in the contemporaneous Marathi language sources: the plots themselves would have been known to spectators, and even if they were unknown prior to the performance, they would have been comprehensible at the level of spoken language, Marathi, or cultural literacy if the audience member was from a non-Marathi speaking Indian community.

There are a few noteworthy things in these descriptions, some of which I will discuss in chapter 1. The focus on marvelous, grotesque, and pathetic events, for example—dismembered arms that write letters, decapitated heads that are made to smile, and women who are commendable on account of their ability to withstand their misfortunes (a point I discuss in chapters 2 and 3)—these are all significant in an

aesthetic and emotional sense. The improvisatory virtuosity of the “clown,” who creates comic moments, is also part of the aesthetic. Furthermore, the work of the writer who summarized and reviewed the play participates in an economy of translation (which I discuss in chapter 2) when he writes, “The play commences with the appearance of a recitor and a clown (*an imitation of the old Greek chorus*)” (my emphasis). Both the “recitor” and “clown” are two stock characters from classical Sanskrit drama, the *sutradhar* and *vidushaka* respectively, who frame and introduce the play. Every now and then, they provide a kind of meta-commentary on the play as it is in progress, occasionally inserting themselves into the action—another point I discuss in chapter one.

Given the use of stock characters as well content that is marvelous, grotesque, and pathetic, many Indian theatre commentators from the time period frequently use Sanskrit aesthetic theory, *Rasa* (literally “flavor”), to speak about these plays, and the emotional understanding generated by *Rasa*. While it is true that the *Natyasastra* (200BCE-400CE), the text from which theories of *Rasa* are derived, was not formally compiled as a modern text from various existent scattered manuscripts until 1926, its theories were nonetheless in circulation for the better part of 2000 years (Vatsyayan 26, 34). In the nineteenth century, commentators, critics, members of the elite, and the laity all were aware of *Rasa* theory, presumably from various scattered sources containing parts of the *Natyasastra*. While the laity and elite educated Indians may not have understood *rasa* in the same way, at the very least, everyone seems to have had an understanding of the eight *rasas*, or eight emotional modalities: erotic (*sringara*), the heroic (*vira*), the comic (*hasya*), the pathetic (*karuna*), the furious (*raudra*), the terrible/horrible (*bhayanak*), the marvelous (*adbhuta*), and the grotesque/disgusting (*bibhatsa*). If a play had any element that made us feel

horror, for example, it was said to have the *bhayanak rasa*. A play could have all or just a few of these *rasas*, but generally would privilege one or two over all others—the play above privileges many *rasas*, and contains heroism, comedy, pathos, marvel, and the grotesque.

We know of the more educated understanding of *Rasa* in the nineteenth century because of personal communications between playwrights and their associates, discussing the merits, demerits, and need for more *rasa* or “flavor” to appeal to those who are capable of discerning and appreciating “flavor” (Desai 23).<sup>3</sup> The propensity of various public intellectuals, such as Vishnushastri Chiplunkar (1850-1882), to use it as a construct while speaking about Shakespeare and Milton in comparison with Kalidasa (4<sup>th</sup> Century Sanskrit poet) also attests to a sophisticated understanding of *Rasa* and its theorization (Chiplunkar 401). In yet other places, elite intellectuals commend playwrights and theatre troupes for performing more than simply comic, marvelous, and grotesque things, and giving more time to finer sentiments such as pathos, heroism, and eros (Banhatti, *Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 418). At the same time, wall posters, such as those I speak about in chapter 1, advertise which *rasas* will be shown, rather than aspects of the plot, which were well known, as I mention above, suggesting a popular understanding of *rasa*.

The focus on *Rasa*, and privileging of the emotional interpretation that the audience ought to comprehend, suggests a deep connection between mass popular culture, the aesthetics of feeling, and subjectivity. The few wall posters reprinted by

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<sup>3</sup> The word used by a prominent Bombay based barrister in his feedback to the playwright Balwant Pandurang Kirloskar is “rasadnya” which I translated as “one capable of discerning and appreciating flavor.”

Banhatti in his appendix prompt us to conclude that the lay public was aware of *rasa*, and the modalities of *rasa* were categories of emotional understanding that enticed the audience to come to the show, and engaged them in an active way (*Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 421, 424, 426). Thus, theatre was a space that successfully united a popular and elite understanding of emotion and the aesthetic, and therefore interpolated a lay and elite audience. It also fostered the creation of a modern Indian subjectivity based entirely on the aesthetic qualities of the plays, and the ways in which audiences were prompted to “feel” about events on stage, religious or historical. This economy of emotion united people as feeling and understanding individuals, whose comprehension of emotion cut across divisive ties of caste and class, thereby formulating a new subjectivity on the basis of performance.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I argue that owing to the commercially successful itinerant theatre, western India saw the development of its first secular, popular culture, and a modern Indian subjectivity. This popular culture developed when the manager of the theatre troupe that performed the play *Indrajit Vadh*, mentioned above, Vishnu Amrut Bhave (d. 1903), left his employ as a scholar at the court of a regional aristocrat in Sangli, a town near the south-western border of what is present day Maharashtra, and took his troupe to perform in Pune and then Bombay. While the itinerant theatre remained little more than a curiosity for the English-speaking audiences of the newspaper, I show that for Indian audiences, this theatre became hugely successful, attracting audiences irrespective language. Itinerant theatre’s broad appeal, however, was not always welcome, but in spite of unsuccessful attempts by the urban, educated middle

classes to appropriate it, itinerant theatre remained relatively free of any kind of hegemonic class interests.

To determine the extent to which, if at all, the itinerant theatre was appropriated by middle class interests, I use Partha Chatterjee's definitions of what constituted the middle class in colonial India: an ability to appropriate popular culture for its own interests, the "classicization" or "Sanskritization" of that popular literature, and the use of "culture" to claim the rights granted a liberal bourgeois subject in England. In the early period I write about, from 1843-1880, I argue that the middle class was unable to successfully fulfill the definitions offered by Chatterjee ("The Subalternity of a Nationalist Elite" 94-117). As an intervention, this chapter therefore argues that the circulation of theatre troupes ushered in a climate of popular cultural ferment. It provided a cultural environment in which the redefinition of what it mean to be an subject was possible, simultaneously wedded to and divorced from religion and history: thinking, comprehending, and feeling within a religious and historical framework, while at the same time wholly secular, and wholly contemporary.

The itinerant theatre troupes that created this new mode of being were entirely different from the student theatre troupes of the same time, which I use as an example of the kind of drama espoused by the western-educated intelligentsia. Student productions often gained publicity despite their limited appeal, because of their proximity to centers of power, broadly defined as colonial institutions. Students often thought they were appealing to "universal" ideals, yet they had limited purchase, if any, outside of elite spheres. Student productions were always ideologically motivated, more often than not designed to impose a definition of what "high" art constituted, and with a theorization of

“the universal” but without a broad appeal beyond a narrow audience of interested colonial authorities and some fellow students. The plays students enacted were scripted, historical, or from classical Sanskrit. Some of the playwrights of a later generation—those who corresponded with the educated elite mentioned above—reformulated the itinerant aesthetic and combined it with the student amateur productions.

In the second chapter, I argue that middle-class and upper-caste playwrights very consciously appropriated the popular by meticulously combining the itinerant theatre and student theatre aesthetic in the final two decades of the nineteenth century. They did this by generically relying on the form of the itinerant theatre troupes, while supplementing that form with fixity of script, elevated language, and more sophisticated musical direction. In this chapter, I foreground the discussion of *Rasa* as well, to show how various *Rasas* were themselves coded as “high” and “low” and how new productions by the western educated playwrights sought to distance themselves from the kind of marvelous and grotesque things seen in the itinerant plays. In many ways, the plays and playwrights I discuss in chapter two realized that the kinds of performances students performed were never going to attract a large audience, but the ways students theorized “universals” on the basis of western liberal subjectivity and an elite understanding of *rasa* (rather than popular understanding) was valuable to preserve. Appropriating the student theatre at the theoretical level enabled the “*sangit natak*,” or “musical play,” as this genre was termed, to develop a sophisticated theoretical backbone while preserving its popular and itinerant roots. In its historical context, the *sangit natak* relied on the pre-existing popularity, created by the itinerant troupes, on which to impose various middle-class “ideals” as derived and developed by a vernacular intelligentsia such as V.S. Chiplunkar,

who used *Rasa* to critique Shakespeare alongside Kalidasa. As a result, beginning in the 1880s, according to Chatterjee's definitions, the middle class was slowly able to make inroads into the popular sphere.

I focus on two plays in the second chapter, *Sangit Shakuntal* (1880; "Shakuntala the Musical"), by B.P. Kirloskar, who translated Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, and G.B. Deval, who translated David Garrick's *The Fatal Marriage* (1757) as *Durga* (1884). This period from 1880-1920 has been termed the "golden era" of the Marathi *sangit natak*. Both Kirloskar and Deval were instrumental in bringing that "era" about with their translations and original plays that were predominantly "musical plays." The act of translation for Deval and Kirloskar was not, I argue, a one way street, and in this chapter I try to supplement Tejaswini Niranjana's claim about translation of Indian texts into English, from her book *Siting Translation* (1992), in which she argues:

In creating coherent and transparent texts and subject, translation participates—across a range of discourses—in the *fixing* of colonized cultures, making them seem static and unchanging rather than historically constructed. Translation functions as a transparent presentation of something that already exists, although the 'original' is actually brought into being through translation. Paradoxically, translation also provides a place in 'history' for the colonized. The Hegelian conception of history that translation helps bring into being endorses a teleological, hierarchical model of civilizations based on the 'coming to consciousness' of 'Spirit,' an event for which the non-Western cultures are unsuited or unprepared. Translation is thus deployed in different kinds of discourses—philosophy, historiography, education, missionary writings, travel-writing—to renew and perpetuate colonial domination (3).

In Niranjana's work, one wonders, what about texts translated into Indian languages? A similar question arises with Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* (1989), which is about the development of English literary studies in a colonial context—what happened to those hegemonic values if and when English texts were translated into Indian

vernaculars? Did they retain the same ideological and cultural backbone? Aesthetically, and in terms of creating an aesthetically minded liberal bourgeois subject, when texts were translated into Indian vernaculars from Sanskrit or from English, instead of offering some kind of foreign construct, I argue that they reinforced a pre-existing version of Hindu orthodoxy. The Hindu orthodoxy that these plays reinforced operated on a sort of “barter economy” of translation (Chakrabarty 72–96), where concepts of universalism, and liberal bourgeois western values, especially sensibility, were equated with Hindu aesthetic values of *Rasa* as a kind of “ego transcendence”<sup>4</sup> akin to that theorized by David Hume and Adam Smith in the eighteenth century.

The third chapter follows from both preceding chapters to describe how the existing Hindu orthodoxy changed in the final two decades of the nineteenth century, as demonstrated through the performance of two plays about companionate and child marriage. The two plays, *Sangit Soubhadra* (1882), by B.P. Kirloskar, and *Sangit Sharada* (1899), by G.B. Deval, can be seen as bookends to a changing society. Because these two plays are nearly twenty years apart, we see the differences between the historical moments of each play, and in the scholarship about those plays, as it affects the generation of emotional modalities. Here, building upon the idea of an aesthetic subjectivity from chapter two, I focus on what kind of agency the aesthetic subject has. I argue that s/he only has the agency over his/her desire, and not even over his/her body. At the same time, *Sharada* can be read as an attempt to restore a kind of agency over one's body by the way it resolves its plot through the creation of a quasi theocratic social

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<sup>4</sup> See Chakrabarty's “Translating Life-Worlds into Labor History” and “Domestic Cruelty and the Birth of the Subject” from *Provincializing Europe* (2000) for more about the “barter economy” of translation.

institution that adjudicates over civil (Hindu) affairs. Given the proximity of the aesthetic subjectivity to religious discourses—*rasa* is a religious theory too—the ability to shape one's future and legislate morally right and wrong action is displaced onto religious authorities who dispute, "legislate," and arbitrate in civil matters—as was the case in *Sharada*. Thus, the religious functions as political, and the subject becomes more than simply an aesthetic one, with agency over his future, especially on issues where questions of doctrine may arise.

By the late nineteenth century, “the popular” had become, in many ways, a tool of the intelligentsia—a point discussed earlier and made in Rakesh Solomon's “Culture, Imperialism, and Nationalist Resistance.” However, the theatre remained popular culture par excellence, relying primarily on the regional circulation of theatre troupes, visual sophistication that played with religious, secular historical, and aesthetic-theoretical themes and issues that comprised *Rasa* theory. It spoke to a broadly textually illiterate society, while also enveloping the educated intelligentsia in its fold—whether or not the educated intelligentsia espoused it. Moreover, as a visual genre, the proliferation of itinerant theatre troupes and their progeny, the *sangit natak* companies, require us to rethink our definitions of literacy and models of communication in colonial India.

I am positioning this dissertation at the nexus of many disciplinary approaches precisely with such redefinitions in mind, in an attempt to show that the creation of modern Indian subjectivity relied on the visual rather than print, and also on a preexisting popular sphere that the middle class appropriated, rather than created for the first time. Despite the enduring influence of the “golden era” of the Marathi *sangit natak*, and the preceding popularity of the itinerant tradition, both have always remained at the margins

of scholarship in a variety of disciplines as topics of their own. However, the most remarkable and encouraging view of emerging scholarship on theatre in colonial India is its engagement with scholarship in Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, and other Indian vernaculars.<sup>5</sup> In a city such as Bombay (Mumbai), where some of the theatre I write about was performed, the status of vernacular scholarship is particularly challenging, given the heterogeneous nature of Bombay society during the nineteenth century. In the colonial metropolis of Bombay, spectators would have attended performances in different languages, and went to shows performed by ethnically/religiously different theatre troupes. At the same time, scholarship about the nineteenth century often ignores the proximity of different theatrical traditions and the exchange between those traditions and their audiences.<sup>6</sup>

Given the limitations of existent scholarship and the place of the itinerant theatre and *sangit natak* tradition in the formation of a modern subjectivity, I have attempted to instead address theatre from two disciplinary perspectives, with hopes that a disciplinarily diverse work will positively add to the growing body of scholarship on colonial theatre and reach beyond one language tradition. Accordingly, I position this dissertation to

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example Singh, Lata, ed. (2009); Bakhle 50-95; Chatterjee, Sudipto (2007); Bhatia, Nandi (2004); Bhatia, Nandi ed. (2009; selections); Dalmia (1996). This list does not, of course, include the volumes of literature written about Indian theatre in the vernaculars. Throughout this dissertation, however, I primarily contend with some of the vernacular scholarship about Marathi theatre.

<sup>6</sup> As examples of this kind of scholarship, one contends with works such as S.N. Banhatti's *Marathi Rangabhumi: Itihas* (1957), which largely ignores the influence of Parsi, Gujarati, and English theatre on Marathi theatre, opting to focus more on the influences from Karnataka and south Indian folk theatre. Similarly, Somnath Gupta's *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origin and Development* (2005) contains a seven-page appendix about "Hindu" drama in Bombay, which he defines as Marathi and Hindi language drama. In some senses, the way various socio-cultural groups interacted in Bombay in the 19<sup>th</sup> century enables studies of theatre that are quite insular in their approach, and is a struggle for me in this dissertation as well. After the first chapter, I rarely discuss influences on Marathi theatre from other theatrical traditions. The secondary scholarship and primary documents are partially the cause of this, the other cause is the nature of this dissertation, which needs to maintain some focus.

address some themes in south Asian historiography and also in the study of theatre history and historiography.

Within the scholarship specifically on Indian theatre, there is quite a difference between the scholarship in English and other languages, and scholarship in Marathi. Solomon periodizes the scholarship in English into two modes: histories written before and histories written after 1947, the year of Indian independence. Of the histories he writes about, published between 1827 and 1992, all are written in English, with the exception of one volume, written in French, and the ones written in the post-Independence era are all, with the exception of one, written by Indians (“Towards a Genealogy of Indian Theatre Historiography” 6). There is a further difference between scholarship in English about Indian theatre more broadly, and scholarship written in English specifically about vernacular theatrical traditions, where the latter often erases the complexity of vernacular theatre histories. The scholarship written in Marathi, one of the vernaculars, offers an alternative vision of Indian theatre. The differences between scholarship in Marathi and scholarship in English remain a hurdle for any scholar, mostly because the differences paint such disparate pictures, in terms of the pedigree, focus, and context of the theatre that is their topic, leading a reader to believe vastly different things, often a narrative that lacks meaningful details.

The scholarship on Indian theatre written prior to independence (prior to 1947) offers a view of Indian theatre existing only as Sanskrit theatre, with a less than half-hearted nod towards folk or the modern theatre of the pre-independence period (see Solomon “Genealogy”). Ironically, the theatre surveys taken by students across the US today, whether they use the *Norton Anthology of Drama*, or, more often than not,

Brockett's *The History of the Theatre*, reinforce the ideas of older pre-Independence, "Orientalist," scholarship, reinvigorating the notion that "Indian Theatre" is always and only a thing of an ancient, irrecoverable past. These surveys offer very little in the way of folk performance traditions, often relegating them to sidebars or hasty chapters written as afterthoughts. Most of all, however, the histories written prior to independence completely ignore their contemporary theatre, further stabilizing their present—the colonial Indian present—as a civilization with a lost golden past, which it is their duty to recover, translate, and present to Indians and the rest of the world.

By contrast, histories written in the post-independence period—Balwant Gargi's *Theatre in India* (1962), Som Benegal's *A Panorama of Theatre in India* (1968), Adya Rangacharya's *The Indian Theatre* (1971), Farley P. Richmond, Darius L. Swann, and Philip B. Zarilli's *Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance* (1990), and Nemichandra Jain's *Indian Theatre: Tradition, Continuity, and Change* (1992)—offer only a passing analysis of Indian drama (let alone Marathi drama) in the pre-independence, modern period, a period roughly defined by Ananda Lal from the mid-nineteenth century up to 1947 (see Lal "A Historiography"). Thus, Indian drama during the colonial period remains under-researched both in pre and post independence theatre historiography. Solomon writes of the post-independence scholarship, "Most of these historians, with a surprising degree of uniformity, offer extravagant praise for the plays and theatrical productions of the post-Independence period, and the consistently rate them superior to those of its pre-Independence years" and, "Wittingly or not, these historians are clearly participating in a broader nationalist process of self-definition, and, as experts, they are providing the necessary authority to bolster a newly independent country's high valuation

of the artistic attainments of its postcolonial era” (Solomon, “Towards a Genealogy of Indian Theatre Historiography” 22).

Furthermore, when writing about vernacular theatre traditions, these histories also rely on very few English source materials. Solomon mentions Rangacharya’s autocritique: “By the author’s own admission, except for the chapters on Sanskrit and Kannada theatres, the book derives almost all its information from three secondary sources: *Indian Drama*, the problematic Ministry of Information and Broadcasting anthology; *The Marathi Theatre, 1843-1960*, a short work issued under the aegis of the Marathi Theatre Council; and *Seth Govind Das Abhinandan Grantha*, an occasional volume of essays in Hindi brought out in 1956” (Solomon 25; italics original). What this points to, on one hand, is the barrier faced by independent scholars—a specifically linguistic barrier—that gets re-codified as absence or lack in scholarship not limited to these theatre histories, but also in the scholarship I critique in the first chapter. On the other hand, the linguistic diversity leads to a desire to write histories of a particular vernacular-language based theatre as distinct and isolated from other language traditions in India.

Works that exemplify an intra-linguistic approach have a more complex relationship to larger, pan-Indian theatre histories, and some of them succeed while others do not. Vasudha Dalmia’s monograph *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions* (1996) successfully makes a case for how Bharatendu Harishchandra and practitioners of Hindi theatre in colonial India sought to distinguish themselves from Parsi theatre. Her narrow focus, on the works on one playwright between the years 1850-1885, and the ways in which Harishchandra distanced himself from the Parsi stage, makes this a compelling

work of scholarship that reaches beyond its linguistic tradition. By contrast, Shanta Gokhale, in *Playwright at the Center* (2000), devotes just ninety pages for Marathi theatre between 1843-1947, reducing a complex, fecund period into hasty summaries of various playwrights. What makes Gokhale's work even more astounding is that she does not seriously consider Parsi theatre—both in Gujarati and Urdu—nor various folk theatres from south India, to make her case for the origins of Marathi theatre. Since her study does focus on both Bombay and Pune, where, especially in the former, linguistic plurality has been the norm rather than the exception, such an omission seems willful rather than accidental.

In the past ten years, however, several volumes, multiple and single-authored, have addressed some of the shortcomings of the aforementioned approaches. Both Lata Singh's edited volume *Theatre in Colonial India* (2009), and Nandi Bhatia's edited volume *Modern Indian Theatre, a Reader* (2009) offer readers a sense of the linguistic and formal diversity that currently is (and was, in the pre-independence modern period), Indian theatre. Aparna Dharwadker's *Theatres of Independence* (2005), meanwhile, offers a sophisticated narrative of, as its title indicates, post-independence Indian theatre. What makes Dharwadker's book remarkable is her theorization of translation, where, amidst a dizzyingly complex and sophisticated account, she writes,

the close linkage of translation to publication and performance has fostered a vital multilingual theatrical culture in post-independence India; it has also modified the hierarchy of theatrical languages. While Bengali, Marathi, and Kannada continue to be dominant at the level of original composition, Hindi and English have emerged as the two most important target languages of translation. There is, however, an important distinction between these two transregional languages. Hindi is clearly the more important medium of translation for purposes of performance and

audience appeal, while English is more important for purposes of publication (Dharwadker 81).

Furthermore, unlike Bhatia's edition, Dharwadker offers readers a narrative of post-independence theatre, rather than a sectional constellation of inter-related issues, themes, influences, and theatres—as is also the case with Singh's edited volume.

Against the models of scholarship in the English language, Marathi language theatre histories offer quite a different vision of “Indian” Theatre, while also serving up a host of problems of their own. For one, there is no dearth of literature on Marathi theatre in colonial India, but most of it is popular and not scholarly. The histories of Marathi theatre written in Marathi have much more of a historical awareness than the English language scholarship I spoke about above, and are also more numerous. I opted, therefore, to selectively review a few works that are explicitly about Marathi drama prior to Indian independence. Those included in this review are exceptional, and among the few scholarly works, as opposed to popular works on the Marathi theatre in the colonial period. The first of these works, Srinivas Naryan Banhatti's *Marathi Rangabhūmicha Itihas, Khand Pahila* (1957), or “The History of Marathi Theatre, Volume One” is the work that most closely overlaps with the first chapter of my dissertation, and it is a comprehensive work designed to foreground the continuity, from indigenous traditions, of Marathi drama. In the author's note, Banhatti informs us that he began research on his monograph on 1 April 1944, and that it took him the better part of thirteen years to write his work (*Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 5). The title of the work is a little misleading: Banhatti never completed his second volume—a fact that is, at the very least,

disappointing, given his meticulous attention to archival and documentary sources in his first volume, which spans the years 1843-1879. He writes:

The Marathi Rangabhumi is wholly an Indian [desi] fruit. After English rule began, whatever changes emerged, those English values and English ideas excessively appeared in front of us. As soon as English rule began, education conformed to it, literature took an English guise... In this English age, in the field of arts, our stubborn Marathi mind always preserved its self-ness [svatva] (2; my translation).

In some ways, Banhatti's moment, immediately before and after Indian independence, privileges such arguments as these, where "culture" and specifically the artistic traditions of India, retain an unalloyed, non-hybrid purity in relation to history. Some of Rakesh Solomon's critiques of theatre histories in the post independence period (see above) also rest on a newly independent nation's desire to see something of itself untrammelled by its colonial legacy. But Banhatti's is not purely a post-independence claim: contemporary historians, such as Janaki Bakhle (2005), also argue that, "The one (and perhaps only) art form said to have successfully resisted colonial influence during the nineteenth century was Indian classical music, both North Indian (Hindustani) and South Indian (Carnatic)," suggesting that a model of continuity, rather than the reinvention of tradition, is an argument with many merits of its own (Bakhle 3). My work tends to privilege continuity, like Banhatti and Bakhle, but I also acknowledge outside influences; I do not, however, consider this theatre to be a "hybrid," and "reinvented," genre.

Other theatre histories, such as M.S. Kanade's *Marathi Rangabhūmī Ushāhkalā* (1968; "The Dawn of Marathi Theatre"), R.S. Walimbe's *Marathi Natyasamiksha, 1865-1935* (1966; "A Review of Marathi Drama, 1865-1935), or Walimbe's other work, *Sangit Rangabhūmī Suvārnayuga* (1984; "The Golden Age of Musical Theatre"), while

undoubtedly thoroughly researched, providing a wealth of evidence and primary documentation, offer only a nominal acknowledgement of the indigenous theatrical traditions beyond a narrowly defined genre—the high period of *sangit natak* (1880-1920), or musical drama. In this respect, Kanade’s work is particularly telling: for him, “theatre” means something other than folk, religious, and traditional performances. He dates the “dawn” of Marathi theatre to some of the prose drama written or translated by Indian students at newly established universities—a genealogy that Walimbe also creates in both his works. In both works, therefore, the implicit message to readers is that the generic qualities and formal attributes of the *sangit natak* owe very little to indigenous performance traditions, and are instead the project of a literate intelligentsia asserting itself against a backdrop of colonial education and cultural marginalization.

In my dissertation, I work with a more reasonable model of continuity rather than the model Walimbe and Kanade offer, of the reinvention of a lost classical tradition by literate intelligentsia. My primary aim, and intervention within theatre studies more broadly, is to demonstrate a model in which theatre in colonial India was neither a “derivative” genre, deriving its formal and stylistic attributes as a result of colonial education, nor hybrid, as though Indians incorporated paradigms and forms, ideas and applications from every source available to them, nor reinvented. The most important aspect of this tradition is that it developed from a pre-existing heterogeneous tradition; if indeed this drama was derived, concocted, or hybrid, its constituent parts were more often than not drawn from the various prevalent and contemporaneous performance traditions, which included forms such as *dasavatar*, *tamasha*, *lavani*, *kutiyattam*, and others, and perhaps we can also count the English drama in Bombay as a pre-existing Indian

tradition. Each of the forms (excepting the English drama) had musical elements in them, and excepting *tamasha* and *lavani*, which are based on heroic ballads or courtly dance performances (see Rege “Popular Culture”), all forms relied on religious tropes. Since so many of the playwrights were from what is today the border between Maharashtra and Karnataka, the indigenous influences on this drama were primarily from South India and the Konkan region. As a project, this work aims to redefine the modern, colonial period drama as an artistic form that needs to be understood on its own terms, and not simply as a product of colonialism nor one of resistance to colonialism. Within the tradition of Marathi theatre, working with a model of continuity is incredibly important in this respect, since many post-independence playwrights were heavily influenced by the genre of Marathi musical theatre from the colonial period—playwrights such as Vijay Tendulkar, Satish Alekar, and Vasant Kanitkar, who all received decorated civilian honors from the Indian government: the Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, and Padma Shri respectively.

There is, undoubtedly, an overlap in the literature that disciplinarily falls under “South Asian Studies” and that which specifically addresses “Theatre History,” especially when one considers popularity, regional consciousness, and the formation of modern Indian subjectivity. Reading Sumit Sarkar’s *Modern India, 1885-1947* (1989), one is struck when he mentions that in 1911, literacy in India was only 1% in English, and only 6% in the vernaculars (*Modern India* 66). At the same time, he and others have suggested that a public sphere emerged owing to print culture in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sarkar, “Indian Democracy: The Historical Inheritance” 26–7; Bayly 180–211). Furthermore, while Sarkar acknowledges that “Written literature in a largely illiterate

country, however, can be a guide to the ideas and values only of a minority” (Sarkar, *Modern India* 10), I was not able to find histories that take an institution such as the theatre seriously, especially given that it was the most popular form of entertainment in Western India—one which relied on visual and cultural literacy rather than textual literacy.

To the historians above, with their specifically historical focus, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Bhabha’s edited collection (not entirely part of the historiographical tradition), *Nation and Narration* (1990), and more recently, Veena Naregal’s *Language Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India Under Colonialism* (2001) have further reinforced the notion that nations cannot exist without an active print culture, and without non-governmental spaces to discuss, debate, argue, and form a sense of community. Naregal argues, in a chapter about hierarchies of language, “despite the apparent homology that official policy sought to establish between English and the vernacular, there remained an inherent contradiction between the modern, universalist norms upon which English sought to base its claims as a language of superior rationality...” (*Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere* 104). My dissertation functions as a supplement to her argument about this contradiction, and I argue that in the aesthetic sphere, the performances of itinerant plays and *sangit nataks* attempted to address precisely this claim of “English...as a language of superior rationality” by positing equivalent concepts from indigenous, particularly Sanskrit, traditions.

In the methodological approaches to the subaltern studies we see yet another way that the focus on performance may be useful. David Arnold suggests that, “There were vast areas in the life and consciousness of the people which were never integrated into

their hegemony” (35). That is to say, the hegemonic “state” in colonial India, and the “elite” domain of politics never affected, in theory, many peoples. Citing Gyan Pandey, Arnold writes that, “the middle-class nationalists led by Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru made a belated attempt to contain the movement,” of the peasants in Awadh in 1919-22, “by opposing its more violent and radical attacks on the landlords in defense of ‘national unity’ and Gandhian non-violence” (Arnold 37). What this points towards is an inability to understand the consciousness of a large swath of society that was not integrated into the forms, metrics, and empirics of the colonial state, especially non-literate peoples. Arnold cites the work of David Hardiman to mention that messages often traversed long distances by word of mouth, transcending “boundaries of caste and language. Rumors, too, travelled rapidly from village to village, market to market, and could act as powerful agents of peasant self-mobilization, for they gave anonymous voice to widely shared fears and expectations” (Arnold 42). While the performances and theatre I speak about do not relate to peasant movements, to me, the studies above point to a necessity to think about communication beyond the printed page, and think about a different literacy reliant upon visual and cultural cues.

Theatre functions as a superset, then, incorporating the visual, which can be further decomposed into its religious, mythic, or historical plot, and its actual depictions in terms of stage props, costume, and makeup. Theatre also incorporates music, both with and without lyrics. Theatre is, for these many reasons, far more able to permeate the spaces of society that are impenetrable to the logic of print literacy, and also illegible to the logic of the hegemonic colonial state. For these many reasons, an understanding of nineteenth century India cannot afford to lose sight of the theatre, which was instrumental

in reformulating Indian subjectivity as modern, for both men and women, and becoming a site of self-definition. Most of all, theatre was a site where popular and elite understanding met, both as a physical space where audiences would sit and watch, and a discursive space where ideas were interrogated.

## Chapter One: Towns and Troupes: Itinerant and Student Amateur Natak Mandalis in Maharashtra, 1843-1880<sup>7</sup>

In American academe, “Indian Theatre” has, for the most part, been used to refer to classical Sanskrit theatre and the many folk traditions of India. Recently, a small corpus of work has begun to explore contemporary Indian theatre, with an understanding that to even speak of “contemporary” Indian theatre is to include several different language traditions under the umbrella category “contemporary Indian theatre.” Meanwhile, some secondary scholarship has tangentially approached the beginnings of contemporary theatre in India.<sup>8</sup> In this chapter, I attempt an understanding of the history of one of those traditions, Marathi language theatre, between the years 1843-1880 and also make a historiographic intervention about archival materials. Understanding the dynamics of that theatrical tradition and how it intersected with various other theatrical traditions of the era is important for a number of reasons. For example, what was then the Bombay Presidency, and is now partly the state of Maharashtra, saw the rise of the first commercially viable theatre that was neither attached to a religious festival, nor reliant upon the patronage of a prince or some other aristocrat. Unlike colonial theatre that was performed for European audiences in Bombay, and unlike student productions performed at colleges, the itinerant theatre was accessible to a large cross section of society, rather than the limited audience that would have attended student performances or performances for European audiences. As a result of its commercial viability, this itinerant theatre became the first popular culture in western India. In this chapter, my primary argument is

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<sup>7</sup> All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

<sup>8</sup> For the beginnings of Marathi theatre see Gokhale 2006; *Play-house of Power* (2009); Bakhle 50–95; Chatterjee, S 2007; Dalmia 1996; Bhatia 2004; good places to start for theatre in the past seventy-five years are Dharwadker 2005; Dalmia, *Poetics, Plays, and Performances 2006*; Bhatia 2009.

about the commerciality of the theatre that developed. The marketplace, rather than a particular group or special interest in society, dictated all the generic and formal qualities of this theatre. As a secondary argument, I write about the ways in which student amateur theatre attempted to create a sophisticated vernacular idiom in Marathi. Finally, I also speak about various approaches to the phenomenon of female impersonation in the Marathi theatre of the time, especially since the vast majority of troupes were all male, and employed young men to play women on stage.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, theatre developed rapidly in the region today known as Maharashtra, which was then part of the Bombay Presidency, a colonial administrative division encompassing regions all the way from Sind in the northwest, Gujarat, and the western coastal regions of India down to the Madras Presidency and the Kingdom of Mysore in the South. Owing to the geography and linguistic diversity of the Bombay presidency, theatre was regularly performed in Gujarati, Marathi, Urdu, Kannada, and English. These various languages and their theatre traditions all influenced Marathi theatre, which borrowed freely from other traditions and also developed a unique form of its own. The theatre that developed during this time was primarily itinerant in nature—no theatre troupe owned a theatre of its own—and troupes performed in venues small and large, and sometimes in makeshift tents. Because commercial viability was so important, this itinerant theatre tradition was not co-opted for the interests of a particular class or caste, but was instead performed, by and large, at a level comprehensible to the widest possible audience, rather than at a level targeting a small literate social class. Finally, it is clear from the diaries, playbills, and letters I analyze that this was not a “literate” theatre in the sense of having scripted dialogues and plots, but was instead

“assembled” as a cooperative endeavor that depended upon actors, company managers, and in some cases, the audience.

Common knowledge holds that Marathi theatre began in 1843,<sup>9</sup> when Vishnu Amrit Bhave (d. 1901), a Brahmin at the court of Chintamanrao Patwardhan, the ruler of the princely state of Sangli, staged a musical about the marriage of Sita to Rama, taken from the *Ramayana*. In 1880, Balwant Pandurang “Annasaheb” Kirloskar (1843-1885), who worked as a school teacher in Belgaum, translated the first four acts of Kalidasa’s Sanskrit classic, *Shakuntala*, and staged it for a popular and educated audience. We only have a broken record of what happened between Bhave’s performance and the year 1880, when Kirloskar staged *Shakuntala*. While Bhave frequently receives some credit as the progenitor of Marathi theatre, Kirloskar’s position in the history of Marathi theatre all but obscures everyone who came before him because of his doubly scholarly and popular appeal. As a consequence, Bhave and his immediate successors remain cloaked behind Kirloskar’s aura, and with the exception of a few instances, there are very few primary or secondary sources giving us an impression of the Marathi theatre world prior to the 1880s. The theatre scene changed dramatically in the years following 1880, when Kirloskar translated and staged a musical adaptation of Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala*, because it was the first play labeled “high” culture that simultaneously boasted broad popular appeal, even though it was very Sanskritized, unlike the plays I analyze in this chapter. As a result, 1880 marked a turning point for Marathi theatre. However, in my chapter, I argue that prior to 1880, Marathi itinerant theatre was considered lowbrow

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<sup>9</sup> I take my definition of “Marathi theatre” from Shanta Gokhale, who defines it as the first of, “two streams of secular, urban theatre: the first is the touring professional theatre centred in Mumbai, whose audience is largely the educated, middle-class of Maharashtra’s small towns and cities...” The second strain she identifies is a post-independence phenomenon that is outside the bounds of this study (ix).

entertainment—for its lack of literacy, lack of formal composition, and its illiterate and “uncivilized” audiences.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the itinerant theatre tradition was, first and foremost, a genre of its own, and secondly that it was unlike the later Marathi musical drama used by Brahmins to reinforce their cultural capital. Veena Naregal and Kathryn Hansen are two scholars whose arguments are standard issue when considering Marathi theatre. They have argued for a relatively homogenous view of Marathi theatre from its beginning in the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, but I am much more invested in working with a heterogeneous model. Naregal, for example, claims that all the itinerant theatre troupes from the 1860s-1960s “were homogeneously upper-caste and mostly Brahmin” (“Performance” 79–80). As a result, she argues that Brahmins successfully co-opted the theatre, creating a disjuncture between the critical discourse of theatre and the interests of the performing community, threatening the commercial viability of the theatre, as well as its political potential (“Performance” 99). Hansen, meanwhile, also imposes a totalizing, homogenous view of theatre for a ninety-year time span in order to recover the alternative sexual history of homosexuality as it relates to male transvestism in several different theatrical traditions, including Marathi theatre (100), but without adequately historicizing the itinerant theatre within society or performance traditions in southern and western India.

In many ways, my work parallels some of Naregal’s smaller points and remains sympathetic to Hansen’s aims. At the same time, however, I argue that our archival record does not substantiate a homogeneous characterization of such a stretch of time in the development of Marathi theatre. True, student theatre, which I discuss below, did

attempt to create a high aesthetic idiom, but it never gained the widespread popularity required to co-opt the theatre, certainly not in this early phase. Instead, I use Partha Chatterjee's definitions of the Indian middle class to speak of smaller "eras" in the development of Marathi theatre. If we consider Maharashtrian society from 1850-1880, no class was able to appropriate popular culture, nor was any class able to sufficiently "classicize" popular literature. Finally no class positioned itself to claim all the rights that should be granted to a liberal bourgeois subject—three "themes" that Chatterjee uses to define the colonial middle class (P. Chatterjee, "The Subalternity of a Nationalist Elite" 112–3). As a result, this theatre remained "emergent" if we consider its relation to class, but nevertheless fully developed as a genre and form on its own. I argue that we need, first and foremost, to periodize our study of Marathi theatre. By a closer attention to periodization, a more nuanced reading of both the theatre history and its inter-related social history is possible.<sup>10</sup> It is my contention that all other factors being difficult to determine, the class that called itself the middle class, although actually "elite," found its strongest expression in the genre of theatre (S. Joshi xviii). However, I argue that in this early phase, prior to 1880, a middle-class never fully materialized, with only the premature attempts by student amateur theatre troupes. Thus, the kind of hegemonic dominance that Naregal speaks about did not come into existence ("Performance" 79–80). As a result this theatre remained populist, with only the commercial marketplace as its arbiter.

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<sup>10</sup> I would suggest three distinct time periods: 1843-1880, framing the beginning by Bhave's staging of *Sita Swayamvar* and the end by Kirloskar's translation of *Shakuntala*; 1880-1907, a time period which saw the rise of a commercially successful theatre and an aesthetic discourse of the theatre; 1907-1930 because 'Bal Gandharva' one of the most famous actors to perform female roles on stage became a hugely popular phenomenon. I end this last phase around approximately 1930 owing to the growth of the film industry and its impact on theatre.

What, then, was Marathi theatre in the mid-late nineteenth century? Just because it does not conform to a homogenous ideological and stylistic genre as some scholars have assumed does not mean we cannot speak about it. In addition to the arguments over definitions and categories, the primary focus of this chapter is to relate a theatre history from 1843 up to 1880, and to implicate the theatre as popular culture par excellence. I will argue that the main form of popular Marathi theatre to develop during these years was a mythologically based theatre whose plots and characters owed a lot to stories from the *Puranas*, religious writings that contained accounts of creation of the universe, genealogies of gods, demigods, kings, descriptions of cosmology and also philosophy. The popular theatre was also inspired by stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. However, Marathi theatre did not rely on specifically Sanskrit learning to generate its plots, nor to generate literary language used in the plays. As a result, these performances did not rely on a peculiarly “Brahmin” understanding of the mythology. That is, the plots appear to have been derived from popular folk traditions, which were themselves derived from various religious texts. Despite these two degrees of separation, and a lack of textual reference to religious literatures, many Brahmins did participate in this theatrical tradition. Vishu Amrit Bhave, one such Brahmin, was the first to gain widespread appeal for his productions.<sup>11</sup> While contemporaneous sources frequently describe this popular itinerant theatre as “Pauranic” or derived from the *Puranas*, it seems like the

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<sup>11</sup> I have broadly termed plays such as his part of the “Itinerant” theatre “genre”, rather than label them as “folk” or “Pauranic”, since the exact relationship with both “folk” traditions and the Puranas remains a little obscure. Productions of the time, and the playbills and photographs I have included also seem to use the term “Pauranic” in a somewhat casual manner, which further compels me to define speak of the productions I analyze as simply “itinerant” rather than specifically “folk” or derivative of the Puranas, or some other religious or epic text.

classificatory terminology used is not specific enough to use the term generally, and so I have chosen to use the encompassing term “itinerant” theatre in place of “Pauranic.”

Meanwhile, there was a second strain of theatre, student theatre, that developed in elite Indian circles and in the higher echelons of society as the colonial educational apparatus churned out Indian students. While colonial education is undoubtedly significant topic, I address it only briefly here, and at greater length in the following chapter. Here, I use the student amateur theatre to demonstrate various social dynamics that would have prevented Brahmins from immediately dominating the theatre scene—primarily owing to their disdain for vernacular culture. This second strain, the student amateur theatre, was able to attract more attention owing to its social proximity to centers of power. Therefore, it also depended upon the patronage of a few individuals and institutions of the colonial state, rather than broad commercial support. Unlike the itinerant theatre, student theatre developed with a self-professed determination to create a high literary and cultural idiom in Marathi, but remained culturally marginal, if one considers its popularity and failure in the commercial arena. In this early stage, prior to the 1880s, the student amateur theatre was the only space in which the upper-caste intelligentsia attempted to exert its influence over the aesthetic sphere, with varied but certainly not unqualified, success.

As I intend to demonstrate, the commercial arena placed many limitations on the genre and form of the itinerant theatre, but those generic and formal qualities also ensured its popularity and appeal. Contrary to Naregal’s claims, the itinerant theatre was never fully appropriated by Brahmins and the upper castes in this early phase. This was because of the nature of performance, which did not rely on a written text, but instead on a rough,

amorphous “form” in which actors used their improvisatory virtuosity in tandem with a plot and representations of gods and goddesses that were already known to audiences. As a result, the room for literate and individual authors such as Brahmins to dominate the genre did not exist. Therefore, while we can associate the itinerant theatre with a popular audience, we cannot judge the Brahmin owners of those troupes in a position of power to dominate the lower castes by creating a hegemonic idiom through theatre. The caste hierarchy creates a further complication for definitions of class in that while most people who would call themselves “middle-class” were Brahmins, the entire middle class contained more diversity than the Brahmin caste. Finally, I will end by analyzing the phenomenon of male transvestism on the Marathi Stage as an outgrowth of a society obsessed with sexual purity, and suggest some social explanations while also positing ways in which archival evidence might offer a more nuanced understanding of the workings of gender on the Marathi stage. My broader purpose in this chapter is to relate a much-needed cultural history of the Bombay Presidency, while also setting the terms of debate where Marathi theatre is concerned. Despite the paucity of materials, we can still do justice to the theatre given the remarkably revealing archival materials in existence: accounts, playbills, posters, and photographs, and, of course, the dramatic texts themselves—though the latter are not pertinent to the itinerant troupes.

### Itinerant Troupes and the Birth of a Popular Culture

Vishnu Amrut Bhave, the father of Marathi itinerant theatre and the progenitor of the Marathi Sangit Natak or Marathi Musical Play, died in 1901. By the time of his death,

an active critical discourse about the theatre had emerged, and the theatre scene was well into the “golden era” of the Marathi Sangit Natak (approximately defined from 1880-1920). Despite this, there are almost no secondary sources about his life except for a biography written by his grandson in 1943. Unfortunately, the biography does not tell us anything remarkably different from the commonly held accounts and, unfortunately, gives us only a passing sense of what obstacles Bhave encountered to stage a play once his patronage at the court of Chintamanrao Patwardhan came to an end in 1851 after the ruler’s death (Gokhale 1–11; Bakhle 83–7; Naregal 80n.1; Mehta 128). Let it suffice to say that Bhave’s Sanglikar Natak Mandali (so named because Bhave was from the town of Sangli, hence the “Sangli Drama Troupe”) was assembled at the behest of Chintamanrao Patwardhan of Sangli, a local prince, who wanted some form of entertainment after he had the opportunity to see a Kannadi theatre troupe in 1842 (Banhatti, *Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 18; Kulkarnī 8).<sup>12</sup> After seeing the Bhagwat Kannadi Troupe, Chintamanrao Patwardhan, knowing of Bhave’s literary interests, asked him to compose and stage something similar to the Bhagwat Mandali’s performances (Kulkarnī 9). The play, *Sangit Swayamvar*, based upon the marriage of Sita in the Ramayana, was staged at the court to a very limited audience. Nissar Allana’s *Painted Sceneries* (2008) contains a photograph of the venue at Chintamanrao Patwardhan’s courtyard where *Sita Swayamvar* would have been performed, which demonstrates the intimate nature of the performance space (15).

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<sup>12</sup> “Kannada” is a language spoken in present day Karnataka, which was then part of the Bombay Presidency; “Kannadi” is the adjectival form

To begin with, an intimate courtly setting provided many things for which the natak mandalis would later need to struggle. Living quarters, dressing rooms, ample money for costume design and sets, and most importantly, an audience that maintained composure during the performance—all these were the luxuries of having a prince as one’s patron. To the best of our knowledge, from the time Bhave staged *Sita Swayamvar* in 1843, until Chintamanrao Patwardhan’s patronage came to an end with his death in 1851, he did not travel outside of the court. After *Sita Swayamvar*, Bhave also composed ten more plays based on the *Ramayana*, according to one critic, but we have no other references to them outside his work (Kulkarnī 12). It is also unclear, mostly because we do not know how much Bhave traveled during that time, how popular his plays were outside of the court. This point is crucial to keep in mind when considering patronage and audience, when a commercial stage demanded broad popular appeal rather than a calculated attempt to appease the idiosyncrasies of an Indian prince.

From the time Bhave left the court of Chintamanrao Patwardhan in 1851, we can say that his activities were forced to become commercial ventures. Whereas Bhave had hitherto only drawn his form and generic qualities from the *dasavatar* (literally “ten avatars”, referring to the ten incarnations of Vishnu) tradition whose performers performed in Kannadi, Konkani, or Marathi, and was prevalent along the Konkan coast and inland along the border of present day Maharashtra and Karnataka, his departure from Sangli brought him into contact with many other theatrical traditions. Travelling to Bombay, he encountered Parsi theatrical companies performing in Gujarati and Urdu, as well as companies on tour from Europe, performing in English, which inspired him to try to secure the Grant Road Theatre as a venue for his own company (Kulkarnī 19). This

interaction between various theatrical companies and language groups continued well into the early twentieth century. Since audiences in Bombay, more so than Pune, were mixed, borrowing techniques and elements from one tradition and applying them elsewhere became quite common. So common, in fact, that by the time another playwright, Balwant Pandurang “Annasaheb” Kirloskar (1843-1885) popularized the Marathi Sangit Natak (Musical Play) as a genre, the genre was an assemblage of various techniques that had worked over the past thirty odd years. According to Nissar Allana, Kirloskar somewhat discarded the *dasavatar* form, he replaced religious *slokas* with songs, and he wrote lyrical plays that owed a lot to the Urdu language operas of Dadabhai Sorabji Patel. The music in Kirloskar’s plays was also heavily influenced by Carnatic music, and there are several references to a Karnataki “chal” or “beat” in his plays, and even one reference I came across to a garbha, a Gujarati dance (Allana 23–4).<sup>13</sup> In any case, Bhave too, would have similarly been exposed to a variety of theatrical traditions from which he drew freely once he left the court of Chintamanrao Patwardhan after the ruler’s death.

Once he left, however, Bhave had to arrange, negotiate for, and find all the things that were provided while he was in Sangli. He had to find appropriate venues, the talent to perform, and materials and sponsorship for set and costume design. The logistics of traveling with all these items and with a troupe prior to well-connected railways would have also proved to be a substantial hurdle. Before the establishment of permanent playhouses, plays were either staged at a royal court or in a wealthy person’s house—as was the case when Bhave performed in Sangli—or as a part of a larger religious festival, adjacent to a temple. In cities, troupes erected temporary tents. In Pune, for example,

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<sup>13</sup> see Balavant Kirloskar 26, for a Karnataki chal, and Balavant Kirloskar 30 for a “garbha.”

from the 1850s onwards, plays were staged at the Shrimant Sanglikar Wada (the house of Srimant Sanglikar) in Shaniwar Peth (a division of a city; literally “Saturday” Peth), then later in Kasba Peth at the Ambekar “Bakhala” (a privately owned space, like a ground or small field); they were staged next to the Appa Balwant Wada (the house of Appa Balwant), where the Nutan Marathi Vidyalaya (Nutan Marathi School) stands today, which burned down during a fire in the 1860s and was rebuilt as the Purnanand Natyagruha (Complete Happiness Playhouse) in the 1870s. They were also staged at the Anandodbhav Theatre (“Where Happiness Arises” Theatre) in Budhwar Peth (“Wednesday” Peth), which was constructed in 1864, and at two other theatres, the Vijayanand (“Victory to Happiness”) and the Aryabhushan (“Noble and Distinguished”) theatre (Mujumdar, “Kirloskar Sangit Natyagruha” 3–4; Kulkarnī 17).<sup>14</sup> Shankar Mujumdar, a critic and editor of the journal *Rangabhumi* (“Theatre”) which ran from 1907-1927, also mentions that many troupes—the *Sanglikar* (troupe of actors from Sangli), *Ichalkaranjkar* (troupe of actors from Ichalkaranji), *Kolhapurkar* (troupe of actors from Kolhapur), for example—often performed at the Anandodbhav Theatre, and that the makeshift tent next to Appa Balwant Wada could accommodate approximately 400 people. Furthermore, he points out that neither the permanent theatres, nor the performance spaces, were owned by a theatre troupe, and were simply rented out to those who wanted to use the space. So the Purnanand Natyagruha, for example, was half-tent and half building—a semi-permanent structure where even circuses performed, even after

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<sup>14</sup> Meera Kosambi mentions that the Aryabhushan Theatre was built inside the Ganesh Wada, a former residence of a high ranking Peshwai official (Kosambi, *Bombay and Poona* 178). Vishrambaug Wada was the home of the Poona Sanskrit College, and right across from Appa Balwant Wada, suggesting proximity between the college and the theatre. Also, today, the Aryabhushan theatre is called the Aryabhushan Tamasha Theatre.

it was built as a “solid” theatre in 1860 (Mujumdar, “Kirloskar Sangit Natyagraha” 4). We can imagine this structure as similar to a performance space adjacent to a temple, sharing a wall, and perhaps an elevated platform, with the audience seated in an area that would have been covered by a tent.

Gaining entry into these spaces was also an ordeal according to Appaji Kulkarni, who appears to be an avid theatre enthusiast, but one who was not directly involved in the theatre himself. He mentions that “because of a lack of ‘obstacles’ [pratibandha], by which I assume he means a gate or barrier of some sort, there was quite a bit of shuffling and bullying [dandgai] by the box office and many people entered without paying the entrance fee” (Kulkarnī 17–8). It was this rowdy behavior, presumably, that caused the audience space to be differentiated in the first place, with the more “respectable” members of the audience demanding some distance from their social others. While the practice of having differentiated spaces in the auditorium according to ticket prices was fairly common in Bombay owing to the early establishment of a theatre scene, as noted by Kumudini Mehta (a critic writing the 1960s), it was not always the practice in smaller towns, given that itinerant troupes erected the tents for the purpose of the play itself (125). From the 1870s and 1880s onwards, however, playbills such as those in Appendix 1, and the ones S.N. Banhatti (a critic writing in the 1950s) speaks about, highlight the socio-economic divisions that became commonplace within a theatre or performance space (Banhatti, *Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 421–8). Performances by itinerant troupes influenced the rates at the Grant Road Theatre in Bombay as well, driving down the cost of attendance, and consequently, theatre became a commercially viable business since it could attract large audiences (Mehta 124). It is this kind of transformation in the

performance space and theatre public, evident in the playbills and Marathi criticism, that Naregal and Hansen cannot address owing to their homogenous treatment of such a long span of time.

The playbills, four of productions by the Victoria Nasikkar Hindu Sangit Mandali (VHSM hereafter), and those in Banhatti's volume of the Altekar Mandali, reveal two noteworthy things. First and foremost, the locations where the VHSM staged their plays suggest a differentiation in the publics and prestige of various theatres. Only one play was performed at the Grant Road Theatre, a "new" translation of Kalidasa's Sanskrit play *Shakuntala*, adapted in musical form as *Sangit Shakuntal* [A Musical about Shakuntala]. The Grant Road Theatre catered to both European and Indian audiences, and as such, enjoyed a prestige unmatched by other theatres. *Shakuntala* had gained a reputation as well, as being penned by Kalidasa, who was dubbed "India's Shakespeare," and it would have piqued the curiosity of both European and Indian audiences. The other plays, *Sangit Venisamhar* [Destruction of the Braid, the Musical], *Sangit Indrasabha* [Indrasabha the Musical], and *Sagra Sangit Rangi Nayakin Prahasan* [A Comedy about Rangi the Dancer, Inclusive of Music] (1889), were not performed in such highbrow venues. *Sangit Venisamhar* was performed at Raje Bahadur's "Dukhambi", which would have been a small performance space, generally with a tent or structure supported by two pillars, and perhaps similar to the Purnanand Natyagruha (see above) in terms of its architecture. *Sagra Sangit Rangi Nayakin Prahasan* was performed at Kadarbhai's "kotha"—translated literally as a "warehouse" or "cow-shed,"—but in this usage meaning something akin to a salon, or private house, albeit a little more déclassé. In the twentieth century, meanwhile, "kotha" has become a term used more explicitly to refer to a brothel.

There are two theatres on the playbills, the “brand” name Grant Road Theatre, and the generic “theatre next to the golden Masjid”, while the other two performance spaces cannot be termed “theatres” in the strict sense. Secondly, the distribution between smaller and larger theatres throughout Bombay, as well as the list of performance spaces in Pune, should alert us to a level of theatrical ‘density’ in each city, while the names of the different troupes—Victoria *Nasikkar* Hindu Sangit Mandali, *Ichalkaranjekar* Mandali, *Sanglikar* Natak Mandali, *Punekar* Mandali, among many others—also denotes the extent to which this was a regional phenomenon broader than the city limits of Bombay or Pune, especially since each troupe’s name indicates the town of origin.

The division of internal space within a theatre is just as significant to our understanding of class and modesty as the geographical distribution of theatres throughout the cities, and theatre troupes throughout the Bombay Presidency. Excepting *Sangit Shakuntal*, which was performed at the Grant Road Theatre, the other three plays have separate ticket prices for men and women, suggesting perhaps, more of a preoccupation with segregating sexes in theatres with an Indian, rather than a mixed Indian and European, clientele. As with Vishnu Amrut Bhave’s first foray into the Bombay theatrical world, the audience at the VHSM’s performance of *Sangit Shakuntala* was not separated by gender or ticketed differently owing to the mixed European and Indian attendees. Similarly, the audience for Bhave’s play was a curious lot—all the influential Parsis and Europeans were present, and the Governor’s Secretary even asked to be admitted to the Green room, where he suggested taking the troupe on tour to England (Mehta 129). Such an illustrious group would most certainly have taken it ill were gender segregation enforced for the occasion. At the same time, Mehta notes

numerous incidences where, “the old custom of retaining the best seats for ladies was forsaken,” and other moments when reputable ladies, seated with their spouses, were asked to leave by the manager who judged them disreputable or confused them with prostitutes at the Grant Road Theatre (120). In yet another incident, Mehta writes of an opinion piece in the Bombay Gazette which asked why ladies in Bombay were so squeamish, when the even the Queen’s character was not “sullied by visiting the opera in London with so many Lola Montes [sic] in the audience” (122). These few anecdotes passively reveal that men and women were seated together at the Grant Road Theatre, and interacted in a very real way in the audience, despite the uncomfortable proximity of prostitutes.

For many Indian audiences, by contrast, the fear of “respectable” women becoming sullied by the Lola Montesses was real, and in many of the Indian theatres or performance venues, such as those where some of the aforementioned plays were performed, sexes were separated in the theatre, or at least ticketed separately. This is important to keep in mind later when I speak about Kathryn Hansen’s work on transvestism. Listed on the playbills for *Venisamhar*, *Sangit Indrasabha*, and *Sagra Sangit Rangi Nayakin Prahasan*, there are separate ticket prices for men and women. While men were categorized socio-economically based upon their ability to pay, women, on the other hand, were given two choices: to be admitted as a “Kulastree” (literally “family woman” but taken here to mean “Lady”) or as a “Veshya,” literally “prostitute.” Segregating the audience this way must have been a delicate affair, since the few examples we have do not necessarily state how the women were seated, whether they were separated into ladies and prostitutes, or just grouped together. S.N. Banhatti, for

instance, gives several examples where it is not clear whether the women were all to one side of the auditorium, or whether the ladies were seated in a different gallery from the prostitutes altogether (*Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 326–7). As time progressed, however, things seem to have become more clearly defined, since a small document published in 1910 about the newly built Kirloskar Natyagruha [Kirloskar Playhouse] in Pune indicates the entire first balcony as being reserved for women, with the ladies to southern side and prostitutes to the northern (Narayan 6). Another rather ironic characterization that supports my view of gendered categories becoming more defined and rigid can be seen in the way “Veshya” [prostitute] as a term comes to be used. While it is true that the VHSM’s playbills explicitly use the term, and the playbill for *Sagra Sangit Rangi Nayakin Prahāsan* reserves a separate space for ladies, Banhatti’s playbills use different terms. Rather than “Veshya” which translates literally as “prostitute”, Banhatti’s playbills alternately classify these women as “Nayakin” [professional dancer] or as a “Kasbin”—which can be translated variously as a “courtesan” or a “shameless” woman. We can relate this kind of change to attitudes towards performing women in general, and the sexual economy of nautch (“dance”) programs for princely patrons.<sup>15</sup> As to why prostitutes were charged more on the VHSM playbills, I believe the Altekar playbills indicate an answer: if the “prostitutes” were from the performing castes, then they would have been there, in theory at least, to learn songs and steal lyrics, and maybe steal a patron for the night too.<sup>16</sup> Of course, neither the Gazette, nor the playbills, nor any sources I have come across, make any attempt to explain how the usher or the manager of

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Janaki Bakhle’s *Two Men and Music* (2005). Her work begins with an analysis of the court of Sayajirao Gaekwar of Baroda, and the musicians and performers who were in residence at his palace.

<sup>16</sup> This is crucial to keep in mind when considering contracts between actors and managers (see below).

a theatre would determine a woman's sexual status, whether by dialect, dress or manner (Mehta 122). However, given the preoccupations with caste, purity, and marital status, such discretions may have been relatively straightforward to exercise.

The Altekar playbills, on the other hand, reveal something of the nature of performing in smaller towns. Both were advertised in the city of Dharwad, which is today just east of Goa and south of the Maharashtra-Karnataka border. Both playbills advertise that evening's "khel"<sup>17</sup> as an "aakhyan" which can variously be translated as a "tale", "fable", "story", "apologue" or "parable"—most of which would have been derived from religious sources. This is a marked difference from the VHSM playbills, which explicitly refer to their own productions as "Sangit Natak" or "musical play". These two playbills, dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1873 and 8<sup>th</sup> July 1873 are quite detailed in comparison to the VHSM playbills.<sup>18</sup> The former of the two even advertises a "tarwar dekhawa" [sword fight] in the first part, as well as the decapitation of a character in the second act! These playbills suggest that Altekar Mandali can also more precisely be termed as "mythological" theatre troupe (though at the time, it would have been simply termed "Pauranic" theatre), whereas the VHSM seems to have been oriented more towards the genre of a Sangit Natak (Musical Play), with scripted dialogues that the actors had to memorize—as is clear from the water-stained and illegible sheets of script in the VHSM collection at the Maharashtra State Archives. This distinction is important to make, since later troupes, such as the Kirloskar Natak Mandali (1880-1911), would not perform "low-brow" plays such as the "aakyans", but only plays in which dialogues were written by

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<sup>17</sup> Used until the late 1970s, "khel" literally translates as "game" or "play", and was used synonymously with "performance" as in "natakaca khel" or "performance [khel] of a play [natak].

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix for this playbill, the others are contained in Banhatti 421–8.

single authors, and which needed to be memorized rather than improvised. Thus, we can comfortably say that the VHSM was really a troupe that performed at the cusp of a changing society—one in which boundaries between low and high culture had not entirely been defined yet, and one in which Brahmins, who would control the productions of “high” culture in the later decades, had not yet managed to appropriate popular culture. Both troupes, however, were itinerant theatre troupes. Finally, unlike the VHSM, which, by name, hails from Nasik, the Altekar Mandali gives us another sense of just how ubiquitous the itinerant troupe phenomenon must have been: the three playbills we have are for three different cities: Dharwad, Belgaum, and Mumbai, and while all the playbills are in Marathi, the audiences in Dharwad and Belgaum would have most likely also understood Kannadi, whereas travel to Bombay would have brought other languages and traditions into play as well.<sup>19</sup> Travel would not have been easy, and yet, these companies circulated around the Bombay Presidency to stage their productions.

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<sup>19</sup> See Banhatti 421–8 for the Altekar playbills as well as others.

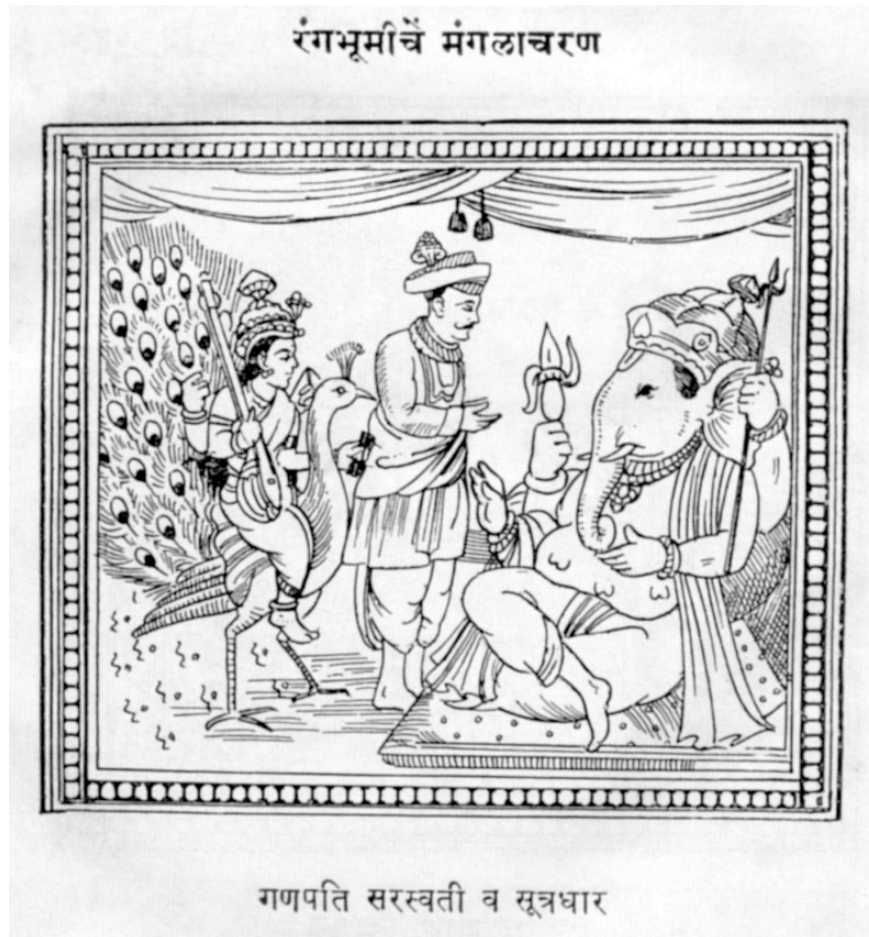


Figure 1: Ganapati Mangalacharan, date unknown, courtesy of the Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai

We have a description of how one of these performances would have looked to an audience member. Appaji Kulkarni writes of Bhave's plays:

First and foremost, the Sutradhar, coming out of the curtains and standing to the side will offer an invocation. He will offer some verses in song praising God [Ishastawanpar]. Then, in the guise of a forest-dweller, the Vidushaka will come out [of the curtains]. After he dances in a foolish manner, the Sutradhar and Vidushaka will have a humorous [vinodpar] discussion. After a common introduction, the Sutradhar will tell which play will be performed... Then, after a praise/puja of Ganapati, the curtain will open (Kulkarnī 13).

The initial dialogue between the Sutradhar and the Vidushaka is often very important; the Vidushaka played the joker, while the Sutradhar tried to convey the plot and some moral

to the audience. This opening sequence is depicted in figures 1 and 2 above. In figure 1 we see the Sutradhar singing praises to Ganapati to ensure that the play proceeds smoothly, while in Figure 2, we can see the Vidushaka dressed as a forest-dweller, performing his dance. At his side is Saraswati, Goddess of knowledge. There are, of course, other playbills contained in S.N. Banhatti's volume that can be analyzed similarly, but I have tried to choose those that are most unlike each other—and I believe that the Altekar Mandali and VHSM are quite different in the ways they present themselves.



Figure 2: The Sutradhar and Vidushaka, date unknown, courtesy of the Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai

Itinerant troupes also depended upon a regular fare of songs that were often stolen from other troupes or composed by members of the troupe. However, one has to be somewhat skeptical of what it meant to “compose” music for the play, or to “write” a play, especially when it came to the itinerant troupes that sprang up around the Bombay Presidency. It is more appropriate to say that these plays were “assembled” collaboratively. Just as Bhave’s play, *Sita Swayamvar* was based upon the marriage of Sita, an episode in the *Ramayana*, most plays staged by traveling theatre troupes were adapted from popular religious traditions well as from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. All the stories that would have been performed were known from the numerous religious festivals and practices, and in that particular region. Glancing at the plays A.V. Kulkarni lists as being performed, we need only to read their titles to glean their content.<sup>20</sup> All the plays in the lists derive from sources that were part of a living performance or religious tradition during the time, and were performed in the vernacular. Those partaking in the performance would not have to “memorize” the lines since the stories themselves were not the original works of a playwright, but rather part of a cultural repertoire, being recited or performed in a variety of ways during various festivals. Owing to these historical conditions, I would suggest that the traditional boundary between literate and illiterate, playwright and actor was particularly porous. Sudhanva Deshpande’s comment on this point is particularly enlightening: “modern theatre in Maharashtra radically altered the relationship between the actor and the audience; it now entailed new ways of representing, new ways of looking...the audience,

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<sup>20</sup> Kulkarnī 27 mentions plays such as *Subhadra Haran* [abduction of Subhadra], *Vatsala Haran* [abduction of Vatsala], *Sita Haran* [abduction of Sita], *Sita Swayamvar* [marriage of sita], *Kichak Vadha* [defeat of Kichaka], *Duhshahsan Vadh* [defeat of Duhshahsana], *Vruttrasur Vadh* [defeat of Vruttrasura], *Ravan vadh* [defeat of Ravana], and *Kouravpandav Yuddha* [The battle of the Kouravas and Pandavas].

from being participants, became spectators or onlookers” (181). It becomes ‘clearer’ that the performer/audience divide too, back then, was somewhat blurry, with a “knowing” audience that attended the theatre not for an unknown plot, but rather for how the known plot unfolds through the quality of song and representation. While actors and the audience may not have been literate, they certainly were not ignorant of religious stories, or the iconography associated with various Gods, Goddesses and heroic figures (see Figure 3).



पौराणिक नाटकांतील दहा तोंडांचा व बीस हातांचा रावण  
मुजुमदारकृत 'महाराष्ट्रीय नट' मधून

**Figure 3: Ten-headed Ravana, a very recognizable character. Courtesy of the Maharashtra State Archives**

We have to think of this kind of performance as a negotiation between the manager, actor, and the audience. The actor's ability to "realize" their roles based upon practice and experience was very valuable to the troupe, and also expected from the audience. If the actor portrayed his character well, it would be consistent with known representations and expectations of the audience, with some individual flair. Thus, while the stage itself was not 'literate' owing to the actors as well as the audience, it was visually very astute and 'legible' to its participants. As participants, Brahmins did not need to bring any specifically "literate" knowledge to this kind of production. Instead, thinking about the stage this way is something akin to Sandria Freitag's analysis of the inter-relatedness of reading, print and oral culture, in which visual and aural/oral literacy were fundamental to both the acceptance of theatre, the enjoyment of it, and its spread (38–9).

Actors and the managers both knew how to insert themselves into this domain of visual literacy and must have actively tried to do so in order to appeal to their audiences. This is precisely A.V. Kulkarni's point when he speaks of conventional ways to depict certain gods and goddesses, and the illiteracy of the vast majority of actors (27–33). Naregal's recent article, "Performance," seems to occlude all these salient points, with a rather ideological motive in mind—to show that cultural production was usurped by the upper-castes and then projected at the expense of forms such as the tamasha and lavani. On the contrary, I would insist that most natak mandalis were not in a situation to dictate their content to their audiences, even if their managers, and actors were Brahmins or from other upper-castes. Even the major ones such as the Ichalkaranjekar Mandali, Naregal concedes, though reputed for performing 'bookish' or prose plays that were staged from

written scripts that actors had to memorize, had to rely on, what she terms, their repertoire of “pauranic khels” in non-urban areas. Naregal further deconstructs her own argument when she mentions that illiterate actors often protested having to memorize passages, and even those who were literate, were burdened by the fact that the bookish plays were “poorly staged” and “many troupes simply did not have actors who could explore these roles and play their parts sensitively” (“Performance” 90–1). Thus, while her article tries to draw a connection between the damage done to performance traditions by the attempts of upper-castes to “reform” those traditions, her own examples instead indicate that there was a lot of friction between the owners of the troupes and their performers, and also between the troupes and the public.

At the same time, Naregal fails to mention what constitutes good acting, or for that matter, what it meant for a play to be “poorly staged.” Mehta addresses this concern too, when she writes, “Theatrical criticism had as yet to become a specialist’s task” and that while newspapers in the nineteenth century frequently carried reports of performances, the reports were often after the fact, and had very little to say aside from passing reference mentioning which play was performed, and when it was performed (144). Most importantly, however, I want to emphasize that “writing” a play was not the sole domain of the “playwright”, but rather a cooperative exercise in composition based upon the interaction between one such as Vishnudas Bhave, and those in his troupe who acted various parts on stage. This interaction sought to create a play that capitalized on the visual as a medium comprehensible to the audience, in which the audience would see their own cultural processes interpolated, mirrored and elaborated. Taking into account all these practices, Naregal’s interpretation in “Performance” seems a little heavy handed,

since even if we only account for the major natak mandalis, it is clear, as in her own article's internal contradictions, that the commercial success of the play and upper caste ideals were not necessarily synonymous, certainly not outside urban areas, nor were the two synonymous during the period of this study, from the 1850s-70s.

We can ascertain the aforementioned process through a variety of materials, some of which directly mention the process of “constructing” a play, others which are more indirect, and yet other sources that were heavily invested in “reforming” the nature of the stage. The most immediate of these sources is, once again, the account of Appaji Kulkarni, wherein he states that some parts were prepared in advance, whereas others would be recited somewhat spontaneously. Often times, actors “personalized” their roles based upon what Gods, Goddesses or demons they were playing (14). Furthermore, he mentions that owing to the fact that many actors were uneducated, and in some cases not capable of memorizing lines, it was the Vidushaka's responsibility, from the beginning to the end of the play, to distract the audience whenever an actor “forgot” his lines, or was unable to improvise at the given moment (Kulkarnī 15). These two anecdotes give us a glimpse of how the plays were themselves both limited and empowered by a number of factors—the inability of a literate author to properly write and distribute a script to actors and expect them to memorize it themselves, and also the fact that it was unnecessary to do so, since the actors were more than capable of forming Gods and Goddesses on their own, and “rounding” out their characters based upon their own cultural literacy and improvisational virtuosity.

In some cases, however, the managers did train actors—though we have no records of what exactly the training entailed. In V.S. Desai's edited collection of

documents about Marathi Drama, *Vishrabdha Sharada Volume 2* (1975), we have some letters and a contract from Vishnu Amrut Bhave's Sanglikar Natak Mandali. Following the death of Chintamanrao Patwardhan, and once Bhave began to take his mandali on tour, theatre became quite popular and commercially viable. Various people founded dozens of other natak mandalis—up to 36 according to Sudhanva Deshpande! Facing what proved to be a competitive environment, Bhave found it necessary to enter into contracts (kaydesheer karapatre) with his actors to prevent them from leaving to join other mandalis (S. Deshpande 177; Mehta 130; Desai 9–10). The contract contained in Desai's collection is for a period of ten years, and is signed by the actors in exchange for singing tuitions. Bhave taught them songs that they would perform in various plays. The contract is written on stamp paper, making it official and legally binding. Glancing at the list of eight terms, a few are noteworthy: item four states explicitly “aapan shikwilyapramaane aaple hukumashivaya konaas shikwinaar nahi [we shall not teach others as you have taught us without your permission]” and in the last paragraph, it mentions that the penalty for breaking the terms of the contract will be one hundred rupees, in addition to an eighth part of the monies earned from teaching the materials elsewhere (Desai 9–10). Without a doubt, this contract indicates that there must have been a fierce competition amongst troupes seeking an audience. Since the plays themselves were not original productions, and plots were well known to their audiences, anything beyond the ordinary, anything innovative that would give one troupe the upper hand, or anything that would make the troupe known within the performing circuit must have been a valuable commodity. Furthermore, the contract also suggests a nascent culture of stardom, in which companies would be able to advertise actors playing certain

roles to draw an audience to their shows. Two clues indicate the beginnings of such a phenomenon. Appaji Kulkarni, speaking of actors renowned for their swordsmanship, says that good swordsmanship was a particularly demonic characteristic, and “even Europeans would purposefully go to see the plays” (30). He then goes on to list several actors from various mandalis. Similarly, Naregal notes “Gopal Date’s rendering of Summersingh, a complex character in *Narayanrao Peshwe Yanche Natak* established his reputation as a star actor, yet such ability was mostly exceptional” (Naregal, “Performance” 91).



Figure 4: Gopal Date as Summersingh, courtesy o the Maharashtra State Archives

The Altekar Mandali even advertises Gopal Date in its performance at the Elphinstone Theatre in Mumbai (Banhatti, *Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 423). Finally, the contract itself suggests that the managers of companies were trying to rein in the power actors had within their troupes, so as to establish some proprietary rights over the acting and singing procedure, and guarantee returns in terms of patronage and invitations to perform.

Musically speaking, the plays' appeal lay in the ability of managers and actors to compose catchy tunes that would stimulate the audience and patrons. This, too, required a great deal of cooperation between performers and the writers. It is a well-known fact that until well into the golden era of Marathi drama, there was no music director for the plays. The first play to require a music director was *Sangit Manapman* [Honor and Insult, the Musical] (1911), by K.P. Khadilkar—and Urmila Bhirdikar explains why:

This was the first time the author and music composer of a play were separated. Unlike earlier writers of Kirloskar Sangit Natak Mandali, the writer of *Manapaman*—Krisnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar (1872-1948)—was not familiar with the musical moulds. The practice of actors suggesting tunes did not work as well. So, Govindrao Tembe (1881-1955), who had by then acquired a reputation for playing the harmonium, as well as being a knowledgeable and keen scholar of music, was invited to suggest tunes. In the first joint attempt, Tembe sang the tune of a thumri, 'meri gali a jav re sawariyan', popularized by a gramophone record. Khadilkar, after understanding the distribution of the long and short vowels, wrote out the song 'vari gariba vira ji abala'. After this, he assured Tembe he felt confident of writing songs on the tunes Tembe suggested ("The Heroine's Song in the Marathi Theatre Between 1910 and 1920: It's Code and Its Public" 38).

This analysis alerts us to two things: that from the beginning, actors and musicians suggested tunes they knew to the writers, who then composed the lyrics based upon those tunes. Secondly, it could have been the case that many plays had very similar tunes with different lyrics. Considering this alongside the practice of staging plays that were based

upon source materials from the *Puranas*, we get a sense that these plays were hugely collaborative efforts, dependent upon an actor's ability to develop his roles appropriately, owing to his knowledge of some religious imagery, the actor's ability to suggest a variety of tunes so the "writer" could compose lyrics, and the "writer's" ability to loosely assemble everything, procure "gigs" and patronage, find actors to play various parts, and so forth.

In some ways these cooperative endeavors limited the stage as well. It ensured that the "language" of the play remained rather colloquial and crude, since it was brought down to a common denominator for the less educated actors. Even in the "major" theatre troupes, where the managers and many of the actors were Brahmins, there was a hierarchy, but the efforts required to stage a play must have condensed that hierarchy at least a little bit. And for those people who gave their sons to a theatre troupe, well aware that that may be the only opportunity their sons had for an education, their children, through training, did gain material and cultural advantages of a sort through their performance, and through this theatre of collaboration. While I am not suggesting that social hierarchies were overturned, or that the troupe itself was an egalitarian space, I do want to suggest, borrowing from Lata Singh, that the actors used "kin terms across caste, class, religious, and ethnic boundaries creating socially expedient relations between them where in reality no blood or marriage relations exist[ed]" (272–3). That is, there was always a slippery negotiation between actual social roles and the roles in which they were cast, not just on stage, but also as members of the theatre troupe.

Perhaps the single most telling aspect of this kind of theatre that emphasizes just how collaborative these projects were is the scarcity of texts. Statements such as

Sudhanva Deshpande's above, about the three-dozen troupes that existed, leave us with a sinking feeling, knowing that we will never know what all these companies did, what plays they staged, how frequently, who played which parts, how much money they were paid, beyond, by and large, passing references. The paucity of secondary texts is paralleled by an almost non-existent archive of the plays themselves, and very little documentation in terms of letters, diaries, or associated materials before the mid-late 1880s/90s. The collected papers of the Victoria Nasikkar Hindu Sangit Mandali, for example, are exemplary in this sense: gathered sometime in the 1960s, the writing on the pages is now faded and illegible, but the VHSM does not seem to have been a minor troupe by any measure. Thus, in some ways, we can say that itinerant theatre troupes exist only as a genre that the 'golden-era' of the Marathi Sangit Natak, roughly defined from 1880-1920, sought to forget. Naregal's article unintentionally reinforces this process by omitting "minor" sources, and then refusing a reading that enables the few sources we do have to demonstrate a vibrant theatrical culture.

While the major theatre troupes certainly did create an elevated theatre, and alter the relationship of the author-performer-performance, Naregal's work assumes that a popular, non-Brahmin dominated theatre ceased to exist once the "elite" theatre had established itself firmly as the definitive theatre. Elsewhere, she has written that what marks discursive trends in the later nineteenth century in western India is the tension that remains between "control" and "improvement" in terms of a "desire to control subjectivity through an ideology of improvement" (Naregal *Language Politics* 205). This she attributes to an increasing self-awareness on part of the native intelligentsia, the upper-caste elites, and to their inability to represent more than a narrow segment of

society—more than themselves. As a result, “the colonial public sphere...yield[s] a relatively homogenous discourse with potentially hegemonic dimensions less through the processes of discussion and accommodation, more through the virtual exclusion of counter-discourses in the domain of cultural production” (Naregal *Language Politics* 224).

There are two points at stake above that I would like to critique. The first I have already mentioned above—about the limitations of our historical record—and therefore the limits of a discursive analysis too.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, as studies such as Anne Feldhaus’ edited volume *Images of Women in Maharashtrian Society* (1998) have shown, a “relatively homogenous” discourse about issues such as gender did not exist, nor did one emerge. Rather, some plays in the 1880s-90s sought to create an unstable “resolution” to satisfy various interested parties. This can be seen in a play such as *Sangit Soubhadra*, staged by Kirloskar in 1883. Although it is adapted from the *Mahabharata*, the reconciliation it enacts within itself is constructed precisely to avoid inflaming elements within the elite, Brahmanical sphere Naregal assumes to have usurped all cultural production. It has traditionally been interpreted as a play about companionate marriage. Yet, to stage such a play without causing uproar, not only did the principal characters have to be divine, but they had to be “high ranking” divine figures such as Sri Krishna, whose blessing seals the marriage between Arjuna and Subhadra—literally “by the hand of God.” Secondly, its social message was further diluted since the Brahmin audience would have known that the characters in the play are Ksatriyas, not Brahmins. As a

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<sup>21</sup> This is precisely the point K. Narayan Kale makes in his chapter on the history of Marathi theatre. He instead reads playwrights whose plays were hugely successful in Bombay’s mill district, Girgaon, much to the ire of upper-caste intellectuals, and their resistance to the ideological hegemony that upper-caste intellectuals sought to establish (see Kale).

cultural “product”, the play self-consciously reminded the Brahmin audiences of their own internal struggles, while also allowing them to entertain the possibility of a more open society. It was certainly a thoroughly conservative production and resolution to the companionate marriage question, but a very insecure expression of a particular segment of society—insecure within itself, if not against outside elements of the society—and also an example of the appropriation of one social group (Kshatriyas) for the vicarious pleasure of another group (Brahmins).

What we can say definitively about the later nineteenth century is that, owing to the development of a sizable native vernacular intelligentsia, the “elite” productions were able to flourish in a way that was not possible even thirty years prior to the 1880s. These productions used an elevated prose style, often staged translations of classical Sanskrit drama, and also performed in spaces that were differentiated by a patron’s ability to pay (for the men), and a woman’s sexual ‘status,’ as discussed earlier. These changes in style and performance space were meant to introduce some realism to the stage, designed and theorized to impose particular formal characteristics on theatrical performances—to create a hegemonic discourse—yet everywhere the discourse is full of cracks and fissures. Instability, about gender and sexuality, caste, class, education, literacy, formal qualities of drama, was the most pervasive characteristic of the new theatre, owing to the insecurities—the structure of feeling or political unconscious, if you will—of playwrights who were cozy with the upper-caste intelligentsia. Furthermore, these points all suggest the inability of us to define a “middle-class” along the lines Chatterjee describes. Before we over-reach to the 1880s, however, it is important to first consider the place of theatre led by students.

### The Student Amateur Troupes

The student amateur troupes, and troupes led by western-educated persons had a considerably different relationship with society at large than the itinerant troupes. These groups and the performances they staged also had a significantly different pedigree. From their nascence, these student troupes and troupes led by the newly minted intelligentsia remained wholly or nearly wholly dependent upon state funding, and also upon smaller groups of supportive individuals. They were not able to sustain themselves in a commercial arena. In this section, one of my aims is to show that these plays remained outside a commercial arena, but at the same time contained some kernels of ideology that later influenced the ideology of the golden era of the Marathi Sangit Natak (1880-1920). Beginning with an exposition on the background of state support for these troupes, I will then speak about the formal and ideological qualities they emphasized. The key to understanding these plays is that they are very self-conscious about the ideological work they do, and have a purposiveness to their writing.

In some senses, the existence and beginnings of student amateur theatre can be traced to the discretion exercised by Mountstuart Elphinstone in the years after 1818, when, in order to maintain continuity and smoothly transition from the defeated Peshwai Confederacy to the British Colonial Government, he perpetuated certain forms of patronage and governance. He retained an institution such as the Peshwai dakshina, whereby the Pune-based ruler would make gifts and presents to thousands of Brahmins in order to further their studies, research, and other activities. The institution of the dakshina was more or less an informal connection between the political powers and Brahmins. Owing to this connection between the state and Brahmins, particularly Chitpavans,

Brahmins exercised a formidable hegemony over all forms of social life—something quite unique to western India (Kumar 39). The continuation of the *dakshina* under Elphinstone's guidance was part of a policy of appeasement towards the Brahmins of Maharashtra. The *dakshina*, in addition to other developments in education, remained vital to the way student and amateur theatre gained audiences, and secured their plays for publication.

Elphinstone's decision to retain the *dakshina*, albeit in a substantially reduced form, was motivated by some political calculations. Kumar mentions Peshwa Baji Rao II distributing upwards Rs. 1,000,000 to over fifty-thousand Brahmins in the years prior to 1818, against which Mountstuart Elphinstone's Rs. 45,000 seems a paltry sum indeed, but Elphinstone's sum was also accompanied by the creation of Poona Hindu College in 1821 (Kumar 49–50), and a greater concern for education more broadly speaking in the form of government schools. It seems almost redundant to explain student amateur theatre in terms of the establishment of government schools, since the former could not exist without the latter. However, without the gradual establishment of educational institutions in all their forms, without the Native Education Society's focus on English and western science and philosophy (Parulekar 43–5), the student amateur troupes would not have so eagerly adopted new formal and aesthetic paradigms. In any case, from the fifty thousand Brahmins who had received support from the Peshwai in 1818, Elphinstone's plan reduced the number to 2,665 in 1820, and later years saw even more reductions, to the point that by 1857, only twelve thousand rupees were distributed. The fund itself was entirely taken over by the Department of Education in 1859.

In place of general monies to unaccountably fund Brahmins in western India, over the years, the fund siphoned off its monies to support “useful” knowledge, to establish caste-blind fellowships, and also most importantly for this chapter, to establish the Dakshina Prize Committee. The committee distributed prize money for translation and original work in Sanskrit, Marathi, and English (Kumar 264–75; Naregal *Language Politics* 80–91). But this transition, from the Peshwai to the colonial administration, was hardly an easy affair, and the support of non-traditional learning revealed, among other things, a split within the Brahmin community between those who were British-educated and the more traditionally-oriented vedic and shastric Brahmins. Both Naregal and Kumar have closely detailed this debate, so the need to reiterate its proceedings is unnecessary here. Let it suffice to say that ultimately, six-thousand rupees were set aside, a quarter of which went towards funding the printing of vernacular texts, another quarter towards the composition of original works or for translating into Marathi, the third quarter for general and unspecific improvements in native education, while the last part was used towards the creation of a professorship of Vernacular Language, and the cultivation of the Marathi language (Naregal *Language Politics* 87–8).

These activities, in the late 1840s and early 1850s, greatly influenced the creation of a sizeable body of work—translated and original—in Marathi. While the actual debates over whether it was more important to fund Sanskrit learning or vernacular learning occurred in the late 1840s, the emphasis on vernacular education began much earlier when Major Candy became the Superintendent of Poona Sanskrit College in 1836. What the funding from the Dakshina Prize Committee accomplished was an economic incentive for college-educated youths to actually learn Marathi, and develop a

sophisticated literary idiom in Marathi. The subtext of both Naregal's and Kumar's discussion, especially given the controversy over whether or not to fund vernacular instruction, seems to be premised precisely on whether or not Marathi was worthy of instruction, given that it was the language of non-Brahmins.

An example of one of the founders of the Marathi Dyanaprasarak Sabha or "Marathi Society for the Dissemination of Knowledge" serves to illustrate the general disdain amongst the literati for Marathi as a language. Govind Narayan helped to found the society, yet, as Murali Ranganathan (2008) notes, Govind Narayan underwent a significant transformation in his attitudes towards the language. Ranganathan mentions Narayan's initial disdain for Marathi: "having been mainly educated in English [he] became a strong believer in the supremacy of English over other Indian Languages, especially Marathi, as a medium of instruction in India. This was accompanied by a strong level of disinterest in and a complete disdain for Marathi as a literary language" (15). Yet, owing to his association with Dr. Wilson and the Reverend Robert Nesbit, who taught at the Free Church School, and by participation in some competitions, he eventually turned his opinions and began to write in Marathi (15). Narayan also won a prize from the Dakshina Prize committee, for his essay "Satyanirupan" or "An Exposition of Truth" which was published in a collection of his essays that is unavailable now. However, the list of advance subscribers who purchased the translation "includes all the leading citizens of Mumbai like the then Governor of Bombay, Lord Falkland, the Chief Justice Sir Erskine Perry...Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy," and "the *Dakshina Prize Committee* purchased 100 copies of this book" (17; italics original). Narayan's publication is typical of the publishing industry at the time: limited not only by cultural attitudes towards the

language, but also by the fact that its appeal was very narrow—to a cross section of society that not only could read and write, but cared to read about the “exposition of truth.”

In addition to the aforementioned circular circulation of books and essays, in which Dakshina prize judges would award a book and then purchase copies of the book, Ranganathan also mentions that the middle of the nineteenth century has been characterized as the ‘age of translation’, while also being a time when many controversies surrounding the medium of education, standardization of the language, and other issues were resolved (14). This is also the topic of Naregal’s extensively researched chapter about “Colonial Power, Print and the Re-Making of the Literature Sphere” (Naregal *Language Politics* 145–200). As an epoch though, this classification is not recently construed historical revisionism. The prevalence of translation is apparent in essays published just a few decades after the 1850s. Eminent citizens such as M.G. Ranade wrote lengthy “Notes” to the *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1898) about the growth of Marathi Literature, while a more recent scholar, V.G. Dighe has termed the period between 1818-1870 as “The Renaissance in Maharashtra, First Phase” (Dighe; Ranade). These few examples should alert us to the ways in which the educated, the intellectuals, the elite, and publishing houses and government institutions were all moving through the same revolving doors. This is one of the reasons why there are more remnant texts and archives, for example, than the itinerant troupes.

Playwrights such as Vinayak Jandardan Kirtane, L. G. Dixit Satarkar, V.S. Chhatre, G.N. Madgaonkar, Sokar Bapuji Trilokekar, were involved in debating form and content of Marathi plays before the dominance of the Sangit Natak genre in the 1880s-

1920s. Very little is known about most of these playwrights, and there are few secondary materials available, but we do have the texts of many plays. In my own research, I found just one source in Marathi that is a literary study of some of their works, Arvind Waman Kulkarni's posthumously published, *Vismaranaat Geleli Marathi Natake* ("Forgotten Marathi Plays" 2004). While definitely a scholarly piece, his work lacks proper documentation of sources, and also lacks, for example, a bibliography owing to its posthumous publication. What little is available about the playwrights outside of his work can be found in their prefaces to the plays, or in brief biographical notes by the playwright's children, if the plays were lucky enough to be posthumously reprinted.

Despite these limitations, what is available is remarkably telling when it comes to the dissemination of the kind of debates found in the magazine of the Marathi Dynanprasarak Sabha, and the attitudes to drama that were cultivated in an elite sphere. Kirtane, for example, first read his work *Thorle Madhavrao Peshwe Yanjwar Natak* ("A play about Thorle Madhavarao Peshwe" 1861) to the Marathi Dyaprasarak Society and staged it later that year (Kulkarnī *Marathi Rangabhumi* 54). Parshurampant Godbole's translation of the Sanskrit *Venisamhar Natak* ("Destruction of the Braid" 1857) was also published under the auspices of the Dakshina Prize committee itself. The third edition of *Venisamhar* (1881) was even edited by the "director of public instruction." Some of these plays contain prefaces to explain the playwright's intent or purpose, and to suggest some governing philosophical paradigm. The plays themselves seem exemplary of the paradigm, and supporting material for the preface, rather than the other way around. There are two plays in particular whose importance in the development of Marathi theatre

prior to the 1880s strikes me as particularly unique owing to their self-conscious theorization of the purpose of theatre, and Indian society at large.

Beginning with Kirtane's play *Thorle Madhavarao Peshwe* I want to discuss the aestheticization of historical themes—something that A.W. Kulkarni also notes. Kirtane's next play, *Jayopal* (1865), is a Marathi version of the Biblical story of Joseph, with a few changes, including names and location. It has a preface by the playwright, justifying the play's compositional choices. Its publication and performance, I argue, follows closely upon the rationale and themes involved in writing his first play. There is, however, an interesting twist—*Jayopal* ends with a scene in which the Sutradhar and Vidushaka discuss the merits and demerits of having music in drama. Characters that would have been part of the productions staged by itinerant troupes, it is clear they have no place in the play, nor in Kirtane's aesthetic. The discussion, too, is telling. What is important to keep in mind here is that these plays were self-consciously fashioning themselves as 'high' culture, and unlike the itinerant troupes' plays, were entirely invested in the formal logic of a play. The purpose of this section, more than anything else, is to highlight the significance not just of discussions about 'form' of theatre, but also to briefly demonstrate how purposive this student theatre is, and demonstrate that these plays are entrenched in ideas of 'reform', however vague and non-descript that term may be. These plays always betray an ideological motive to their writing that is apparent in a preface or an epilogue, in order to demystify the playwright's ambitions.

We know that Vinayak Janardan Kirtane must have been reasonably well known, at least within some circles, since his second play, *Jayopal* went through a posthumous second printing and since Vishnushastri Chiplunkar commented about it in his respected

periodical *Nibandhamala* (Kulkarni *Vismaranaat* 74–5). Kirtane wrote and read his first play *Thorle Madhavarao Peshwe* in 1861 before the Marathi Dyanaprasarak Society in Bombay. Before he published or staged the play, he sought an audience of his peers who must have been generally encouraging. Unlike Godbole’s *Venisamhar Natak*, which was translated from the Sanskrit play, Kirtane’s source materials were, notably, contemporary, secular, and historical, and the play was staged in a way devoid of religious context. He also refused to incorporate music in the performance, for reasons that the sutradhar and vidushaka explain in *Jayapal*. Furthermore, if it were not for the content identifying it as written about the Peshwa Madhavrao, it could also read as any court drama with intrigue and off-stage action.

A.W. Kulkarni notes five characteristics that make this play stand out: that it is the first play written in a “salag svarup,” which most closely can be translated as “realistic form,” it is the first play written that is not a translation from another source, it is the first prose play, it is the first historical play in Marathi, and it is the first shokaantika [tragedy]. A.W. Kulkarni notes that “Marathi rangabhoomi vara aalele he pahila svatantra natak aahe” which roughly translates as “this is the first independent play in Marathi”, even though he does not say what “independent” means (54). Already, there is a web of terminology here that should be significant for us: “realistic,” “independent,” “historical,” and if we include what I said above, then “secular” as well. Before we go into greater detail, it is necessary to point out that this play, from its very conception, was not meant for a popular audience. By “independent” and “secular” we can comfortably say that it was intended for a polite audience, and since we have no real records of its performance, it may be safe to say that it was not performed commercially very much, if at all, but must

have enjoyed circulation as a book since people like Chiplunkar did write about Kirtane. After reading it for the Marathi Dyanprasarak Society, Kirtane staged his play later that year—and if we are to take A.W. Kulkarni’s suggestions, then it must have been performed before an audience who would have already been familiar with the content, if not the actual words of the play.

As a topic, Kirtane uses the history of Peshwa Madhavarao (1745-1772) after the defeat of the Marathas at Panipat in 1761. As a young man, Madhavarao was appointed Peshwa by the assistance of his paternal uncle, Raghunathrao. The main action in the play occurs when the young Madhavarao and his uncle disagree in court over the methods of persuasion and whether they should use force with Hyder Ali of Mysore. Madhavarao asks for patience and restraint while his uncle suggests open warfare in order to check Hyder Ali’s unwanted aggression in the Deccan. Although Raghunathrao was under house arrest, the open confrontation in court caused a rift in the sardars of the court, and ended with Raghunathrao storming out of the court in a fury. Eventually, however, Madhavarao and the sardars on his side decided to openly risk war. The conflict aggravated Madhavarao’s tuberculosis and ultimately brought about his untimely death. Kirtane unproblematically follows this history for the plot of his play.

However, A.W. Kulkarni points out that the proximity of the history to Kirtane’s play does not end at the level of plot, nor does Kirtane simply adhere to the historical narrative. The entire framework of the play, from plot to character consciousness, and the individuation of the characters themselves, relies on the historical figures. This is historical realism at its apex, and many sections are lifted directly from Grant Duff’s 1826 *History of the Mahrattas* (56–7). While A.W. Kulkarni reads the play alongside

Grant Duff's *History*, and locates passages and characterizations that are immediately dependent upon Duff's work, I want to suggest that the entire logic of the play (virtuous action as opposed to selfish action, cause and effect, proper domestic relationships, good governance), contains an entirely different ideological sensibility that seems absent from the plays performed by itinerant theatre troupes. In the depiction of a historical personality by way of an academic text, the governing 'consciousness' of the play already relies on developments of a university education. In an article published in the magazine of the Marathi Dyanprasarak Society, *Marathi Dyanprasarak* Laxman Narsinh Joshi distinguishes between Indians who have, in the past, written histories, and modern historiography:

ya deshacha purvekadila va paschimekadila lokat purvipasun itihās lehun thevanyacha sampradaya aahe. tyata prachina itihāsamādhye kityeka thikaani aatishayokti aadalataat, parantu arwaachin itihās ha doṣh kami disato. tase ya deshaat nahi. ya deshaacha pushkala prachina itihās aahe khara parantu to kavini svabuddhi pradarshanārtha va kityeka thikane manushyache mane ishvaracha agaadh lilekade, va tyacha adbhuta samarthyaakade laagaavi ya hetune keval alankrut karuna thevilāa aahe; va mithya konte yacha nirnayakarane param kathina (142–3).

[To the north and south of this country, there has been a customary practice (sampradaya) amongst the people to record their history. In the ancient histories, exaggerations interfere [aatishayokti aadalataat] frequently, but we rarely find the stimulation/surprise [doṣh] that we find in modern historiography [itihās]. We do not find that in this country. It's true that there are many ancient histories written of this country, but they suffer from the writer/poet's [kavi] opinionated description [svabuddhi pradarshanārtha] and in many places people's minds seem to be given a wondrously divine sense of play (manushyache mane ishvaracha agaadh lilekade) in order for the reader to get a sense of God's amazing capabilities, such is the poet's intentional decoration of the history; and also to tell and instruct us which are the falsehoods so we can take decisions]

While I am not suggesting that Kirtane directly responded to this article, the growing academic sentiment contained in essays such as L.N. Joshi's is something with which Kirtane would have been familiar.

Kirtane's other play, *Jayapal* (1865), also departs from the formal logic driving itinerant musical theatre. While it is a theatrical adaptation of the Biblical story of Joseph, it remains, according to the playwright himself, "a thoroughly Maratha production" (Kirtane 67), owing to the localization of places, names and some smaller elements in the plot. A.W. Kulkarni notes that aside from the fact that *Jayapal* (Joseph) has six brothers as opposed to eight in the Biblical story, and that some overt sexual references are more muted, the play remains faithful to the original (Kulkarni *Vismaranaat* 70). The localization does not, however, mean the play is automatically "Indian" in sensibility, aesthetic, and content. In fact, Kirtane's intentions are quite contrary to any sort of indigenous aesthetic. Much like the university students who scorned the Marathi language, Kirtane writes a final scene in *Jayapal* that performs an entirely didactic and ideological task. He includes a dialogue between the Sutradhar and Vidushaka—a dialogue that would take place at the beginning of most of the plays the itinerant troupes performed, as is evident from figure 1, for example—and instead writes a scene at the end of *Jayapal* wherein the two discuss the merits and demerits of song in drama.

The Vidushaka—the stock character who is always crass, joking, and who plays the fool, but also improvises if actors forget their lines or momentarily lose their improvisatory abilities in the itinerant theatre—complains that there are no songs in *Jayapal* (175–80). The Sutradhar, who is the figure of sense and reason, and who would have sung the songs in an itinerant play with the Vidushaka, tells the Vidushaka that

“important people say that your shlokas and aaryas, and your dindyas, these should be kept off the stage.” He responds, “your important people are damn smart” (176)! We are, of course, to understand “damn smart” or “mothe shahane” ironically. The crux of the conversation, however, points to a desire to erase all sorts of song from the stage, and the Sutradhar tries his utmost best to get rid of the Vidushaka by facetiously humoring him. However, conversation ends with the Sutradhar suggesting that despite the time of night, if the Vidushaka insists, then he should sing a song for the audience, but this time the Vidushaka declines, and leaves. Upon his departure, the Sutradhar remarks “baricha pida geli; ataa aapanhi jave” (“the tormentor is gone, now we should all go as well”) (180), suggesting that music and song are not desirable attributes of modern drama, and that as the audience, we should be happy that they have been expunged from the performance.

The preface to *Jayapal*, like the epilogue between the Sutradhar and Vidushaka, is also a kind of tract on the qualities of good drama. In it, Kirtane mentions that “It is not the dramatist’s business to draw a picture of the outward man, to depict the everyday life of this nation or that nation, to show what costumes the Hebrews wore, or what houses the Marathas lived in” (67). Instead, “[the playwright] principally concerns himself with the inner being...everywhere there are men and women...everywhere therefore will certain feelings arise out of these relationships” (67). Following these themes of universalism, he defends his use of vague geography noting that “Shakespeare was not so ignorant of Geography as to call Bohemia an island...The truth is, he had nothing to do with the actual position of Bohemia” (68). And secondly, perhaps most interestingly, he notes that the names of the characters in his play who come from the upper echelons of society seem to bear a resemblance to ancient kings and queens, whereas the lower

characters have rather contemporary names. He explains that the names of the ‘lower’ characters do not exist in the historical record, which is why he had to resort to contemporary names (69). The purposes of drama, therefore, are twofold—a presentation of universal, “inner” life, and a kind of response to the historical condition.

Playwrights such as Kirtane, Joshi, and Chhatre, were all involved in debating the formal qualities of theatre—and their debates reached the apex of elitism in journals such as Chiplunkar’s *Nibandhamala*. Chiplunkar even remonstrated Kirtane for his play *Jayapal*, suggesting that he should use indigenous sources rather than “unknown” sources such as the Bible (as quoted in Kulkarni *Vismaranaat* 75). He mentions further that Jayapal’s wedding seems otherworldly, and there is no consistency in how the *rasas* can be applied to the play, for which reason the play is unsuccessful. Finally, Chiplunkar’s position also reveals some nuance in the response to music on stage. Appaji Kulkarni (1903) notes that Chiplunkar acted the part of Dharmaraj Yudhisthir in *Venisamhar* when it was performed in Pune in 1872 (Kulkarnī *Marathi Rangabhumi* 41–2). The play, translated from the Sanskrit play of the same name, is taken from an episode of the Mahabharata, did contain many songs and musical numbers. At the same time, Banhatti notes that an article in another magazine Chiplunkar edited, the *Vividh Dyan Vistaar*,<sup>22</sup> complains about the formulaic aspect of Itinerant theatre, especially the interruption by songs (Banhatti, *Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 291–2).

The resistance to music in the popular, itinerant tradition, and a simultaneous endorsement of music in plays translated from Sanskrit seems unsurprising and also quite

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<sup>22</sup> This title is some what difficult to translate: “Vividh” = Various; “Dyan”= knowledge; and “Vistaar” = expansion or growth

consistent with the way indigenous, contemporary forms were denigrated. It parallels Mehta's (a critic writing in the 1960s) evaluation of the student amateur troupes, that "they venerated the new learning but would not be satisfied unless they found at the same time some inspiration from their own heritage" (Mehta 185). Thus, the student troops venerated their colonial education, but needed classical Sanskrit texts to inspire them as well, as though the classical Sanskrit texts constituted their "heritage". The student troupes purportedly "reformed" the stage in other ways too, in terms of their use of costumes, which would have not been so glaringly mythological (see Figure 3 above, for example), their use of sets and their use of curtains (Kulkarnī *Marathi Rangabhumi* 48–9). Unfortunately, we do not have a precise sense of what any of these would have looked like, except for A.V. Kulkarni's note that for a college performance of *Shakuntala*, students apparently spent four hundred rupees on garments made from bark to clothe *Shakuntala* that were specially ordered from Madras (40–1)! Similarly, A.V. Kulkarni notes that students at Deccan College paid an English actress, Miss Alisha May, five hundred rupees to teach them some acting and also read some passages (41).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> To give a sense of how large an expenditure this would have been, I found three articles describing various occupations and the salaries associated with them. Nadeem Tarar, for instance, speaks of a professor of architecture at the Bombay School of Art, J.L. Kipling, who was recruited by the Punjab Government in 1875 to be the principal of the Mayo School of Art in Lahore for a monthly salary of Rs. 800 (Tarar 208). By contrast, Mrityunjoy Sarkar, a weaver in Bengal in 1887 earned Rs. 6 per month before receiving several raises over the next decade (T. Roy 971–2). Yet another scholar mentions, "While in Calcutta, English-knowing people could get a salary from Rs. 10 to Rs. 600 per month; in Delhi, on the contrary, there were not 30 or 35 petty appointments of writers from 15 to 40 rupees per month (Sangwan 94). Perhaps the most useful figure comes from an article about Pandita Ramabai, in which the author mentions in an endnote, "The economic disparity was at times quite startling: M G Ranade, as a judge at Nasik, was earning Rs 800 per month in 1875; while Parvatibai Athavale's husband, a clerk in the customs office in Goa in the early 1880s, earned Rs. 15 per month for nine months of the year, no salary being paid for the remaining three months" (Kosambi, "Women, Emancipation and Equality" WS–49). Salaries in excess of Rs. 100 per month, given these few articles, would have been rare since few people would have the educational background and opportunity to earn so much.

While I have predominantly used just one playwright to highlight the debates over form, and given a scattered account of the student and amateur theatres, I go into much more detail in the following chapter where I specifically write about translation, and the values that were communicated by translating plays. For now, let it suffice to say that debates over form and genre were irrelevant to the itinerant theatre troupes, whose audience varied greatly, and often, as mentioned above, required them to perform in a more conventional way. Kirtane's audience, on the other hand, was drawn from the elites of society; his plays were performed in small, intimate venues such as at Elphinstone College in Bombay, or Deccan College in Pune. Unlike those who attended Bhave's performance at the Grant Road Theatre out of curiosity to see "Hindu" drama, the patrons attending student performances were doing so with an eye towards aesthetics, and also to experience the creation of a literary and dramatic culture that was simultaneously Indian and English at the same time. There would have been fewer performances of the student theatre—given that the student and educated population was so small— but Mehta notes, "Considering that these plays were produced barely once or at the most twice a year by the students, the newspapers gave them far more attention than was perhaps warranted. There were full-length reviews with names of the cast and usually the talents of actors were highly commended" (189). Such press alerts us to the proximity of the student amateur troupes to centers of colonial power that enabled them to be included in the archival record. At the same time, since performances were so few and far between, the occasion elicited quite a large audience as "the University youth crammed the Pit and the galleries," much like the heckling and jostling at makeshift tents (Mehta 196).

Finally, the fact that Kirtane wrote the preface to his plays in English, the play itself in Marathi, and that Chiplunkar critiqued it using theories of *Rasa* derived from Sanskrit drama, should alert us to the sophistication of this audience, both within the theatre, and the audience that read the plays as texts. Most of all though, it is clear that the amount of attention garnered in the press, and a desire to see the creation of a high and uniform aesthetic idiom did not necessarily correlate into an actual domination of the theatre scene, which remained dominated instead by upward three-dozen theatre troupes that performed more than twice a year. The ability to impose a upper-caste idiom, as Naregal suggests, would have been impossible at the time, since the Brahmin students themselves evinced a hesitation to embrace vernacular culture unless it came to them from textbooks and in the form of translation prizes and scholarly incentives.

### Female Impersonation

The issue of female impersonation can serve as an example to elaborate the insecure sex and gender dynamic. Whether in productions of the major itinerant troupes, or amateur student theatre, there is one aspect that has been frequently understated in the scholarship of Mehta, Banhatti and A.V. Kulkarni, that is, perhaps, overstated in some recent work by Kathryn Hansen. In most troupes on record, all the actors were boys or men. Female impersonation, or transvestism, was very common, and in the former sources, seems completely unproblematic, whereas in some of Kathryn Hansen's work, it is the entire topic of discussion. Between these two polar opposites, of either ignoring the issue altogether or making it central to any argument about the stage, I want to offer two

critiques. The first critique relates to the limits of our archival record, and the ability for us to properly understand a phenomenon when we have very few non “elite” sources available to us. The second critique is an attempt to give a social explanation for female impersonation. This second critique intersects tangentially with my argument about needing to periodize Marathi drama by drawing our attention broadly to social change, which, by the 1920s, began to see male transvestism as outmoded. If we mistakenly homogenize a large span of time, then we will fail to account for broader social change taking place that is reflected in the theatre.

Female impersonation seems to have been a rather mundane aspect of the early theatre in Bombay and Pune, existing both because the major itinerant troupes could entice a more respectable clientele to attend their performances if they had an all-male cast, since female performance traditions had been so entwined with sexual practice, and also because of the unavailability of female actors for the student troupes, since women did not attend college or high school. Respectable men and women would not have wanted to watch what was quickly being labeled “prostitute” art—as my discussion about the playbills above indicates. Once again, I want to emphasize that this discussion of female impersonation is about the early phase of Marathi drama, from 1843-1880, since the dynamics of sexuality, I believe, changed substantially in the final decades of the nineteenth century, owing to the “classicization” of Hinduism as Partha Chatterjee describes as being characteristic of the middle-class in India (P. Chatterjee, “The Subalternity of a Nationalist Elite” 112–3). Furthermore, this is neither an attempt to disprove that alternative sexualities may have existed, nor is it an attempt to argue its

opposite, that transvestism and the gaze were part of a larger homosexual circuit that was expressed through staging and acting practices.

First and foremost, we need to approach the issue of female impersonation contextually as it relates to our archival record, and then depending upon the kind of drama being performed. Histories of Marathi theatre tend to be unspecific owing to their broad and generalizing characterizations. Treating transvestism as I treat the theatre, by periodizing it, enables us to approach the topic with some nuances that are lost in a macro critique. In her article about “Theatrical Transvestism” Hansen writes

The analysis presented here challenges the time-honoured but fundamentally homophobic premise that female impersonators were mere surrogates for missing women. Women in the nineteenth century were, of course, disenfranchised both as social actors and as theatrical performers. My argument is that female impersonators were desired, in their own right, as men who embodied the feminine. Contrary to popular notions, they often coexisted with stage actresses and were chosen by their fans in preference to them. Moreover, these cross-dressed actors with their huge followings were vital agents in the redesign of gender relations and roles (100).

A few things about her article make it noteworthy: that it covers the time period between 1850-1940, it treats Parsi Gujarati theatre alongside Marathi theatre, and it makes further claims such as “Theatre histories also report that actor-managers had their favourite ‘boys’” (121). As I have argued, theatrical culture and society changed too drastically to make a broad claim about such a long time span. Marathi sources tell a different story than the one she posits.

Speaking specifically of female impersonation on the Parsi stage prior to the Bal Gandharva (a famous Marathi stage actor known for his female impersonation), she mentions, “No biography or autobiography has emerged to illuminate this important

institution. Records are somewhat more complete in the case of two non-Parsi actors, Jayshankar Sundari (1888-1967) from the Gujarati stage and Bal Gandarva (1889-1975) from the Marathi musical theatre” (114). While I cannot speak about Jayshankar Sundari, Hansen’s work on Bal Gandharva in the aforementioned article, her work in “Stri-Bhumika: Female Impersonators and Actresses on the Parsi Stage,” and her work in “Making Women Visible,” leaves the reader thinking about what Marathi sources have to say on the matter. Finally, Hansen mentions, in her conclusion to “Transvestism” entitled “Sexuality and Subculture,” that explicit reference to homosexuality is missing, and that “so little is known about how the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ subject were constructed in India at this time, especially in terms of an alternate sexuality, that one baulks to interpret the silence of the biographer as innocence, evasion, or erasure,” suggesting that a lack of evidence makes it incredibly difficult to interpret in any way, let alone for the specific aims of her article. Despite this, she concludes, “as a project in the recovery of alternative sexual histories, it may be important to claim the urban theatrical environment of western India as a site that enabled transgender or homosexual activity. The evidence I have presented may well be sufficient to prove the case” (120–1).

In the early 1990s, there was a lively debate amongst South Asianists, largely led by historians and anthropologists, on how to deal with scattered and often inconclusive or incomplete evidence. The debate is now in Vinayak Chaturvedi’s edited collection *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (2000). The set of articles to which I refer is the central argument between Gyan Prakash and Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook. O’Hanlon and Washbrook suggest that

...the past, including its historical subjects, comes to the historian through fragmentary and fractured empirical sources, which possess no inherent themes and express no unequivocal voices. In and of themselves, these sources and voices are just noise... To state the obvious, the historian must... turn the noise into coherent voices through which the past may speak to the present and... construct the questions to which the past may give the present intelligible answers (198).

This characterization of the historian, as one who imposes form on disparate voices, contrasts with Prakash's understanding of a historian's task. Prakash responds using Lata Mani's work on sati as well Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak". He mentions

Here, the interpreter's recognition of the limit of historical knowledge does not disable criticism but enables the critic to mark the space of the silenced subaltern as *aporetic* that, by resisting a paternalistic recovery of the subaltern's voice, frustrates our repetition or the imperialist attempt to speak for the colonized subaltern woman (227).

While it may be tempting to read Kathryn Hansen's work alongside Gyan Prakash, stepping back a moment to think about what her larger methodological approaches are, we must ask whether our presentist desires to recover alternative histories have led us along a path overstepping the bounds of what a text or archival evidence substantiates. This is perhaps my single most important reason for remaining sympathetic to Hansen's aims, while also remaining a little uncomfortable with her methodology.

Marathi sources about sexuality do exist, and in public archives. In the 1920s and early 1930s, for example, there was a lively debate about the "question" of male transvestism involving personalities such as Shankar Mujumdar, the editor of the influential magazine *Rangabhumi* [Theatre], who wrote a piece entitled *Kulin Striya Aani Rangabhumi* [Respectable Ladies and the Theatre] in 1934, that speaks about the issue of male transvestism. Ganpatrao Bodas, a famous actor at the turn of the century, in his

autobiography *Mazhi Bhumika* [My Role] also describes the sex lives of male actors (as cited in Bhirdikar “Boys in Theatre” 69). While neither of these two sources make reference to homosexuality explicitly, we must not ignore the only Marathi sources we have, even though written by upper-caste men, because doing so creates a further epistemic erasure, which is why I insist on smaller, more manageable time periods to think about a theatrical tradition and society that was changing rapidly.<sup>24</sup>

Reading around the topic of transvestism and the theatre, however, we can find social explanations for female impersonation. As Neera Adarkar has noted, there were quite a few all-female performance troupes, and they often counted prostitutes among their members (WS87). Moreover, because female performance was closely associated with courtesan culture in princely and merchant circles—the nautch programs I mentioned above—the doubling of female performance and sexual seduction would have made a mixed theatre company unacceptable for many of the troupes whose members were predominantly by upper-caste, and mostly Brahmin.<sup>25</sup> It certainly would have been a source of parental conflict if parents learned their sons were performing with women, whether disreputable or respectable, at the university. If the playbills I spoke of earlier are any indication, nineteenth century India was a culture obsessed with sexual purity, and any suggestion of sexual transgression would have evinced at least a few frowns from

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<sup>24</sup> Hansen seeks to fill this erasure by instead using a fourteenth century commentator on the *Kama Sutra*, Madhavacharya, who speaks about oral sex as it relates to classical Sanskrit theatre. Her article, therefore, not only creates a synchronic view of a quickly changing ninety year time span, but also attempts to implicate it as part of a trajectory going back to classical Sanskrit theatre, via the fourteenth century! See Hansen, “Transvestism,” 122.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Bakhle, *Two Men and Music*, 2005, or, for that matter, see the debate over sex-segregated seating within the theatre (above).

one's social group. For many, as Bhardikar notes, just participating in the theatre, for example, was synonymous with a loss of one's caste status ("Boys in Theatre" 70).

While it seems rather straightforward that student troupes had female impersonators owing to a student body that was homogeneously male, the social pressure from one's parents, for example, was profound outside the university as well. For upper-caste Hindu men, the fear of being alienated from one's social group was a real one, regardless of the cause of alienation. To nineteenth century South Asianists, the biography of Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), for example, is well known. Her father was excommunicated from the Brahmin community for teaching Sanskrit to his wife and daughter, leading to the impoverishment of his entire family. Similarly, an anecdote about Justice M.G. Ranade is even more telling. After his first wife died when he was thirty-two, he "succumbed...to pressure from his father to marry a pre-pubertal girl. Ranade even desisted from sitting down to dinner with his close friend and associate Vishnushastri Pandit, who had married a widow (and thus lost caste)—again because his [Ranade's] father threatened to sever family ties" (Kosambi, *Crossing Thresholds* 23). This was the situation of a very well established intellectual, who was a founding member of the Indian National Congress, and also a judge at the Bombay High Court. Finally, in the Marathi-speaking non-academic world, saying that a son or daughter was participating in the theatre, was synonymous with saying that son or daughter was a lost cause. Today the association is used in jest, but it still bears the echoes of theatre's association with immoral behavior. So, the association of the theatre with performing women and a laxity in sexual purity and morals (whether or not it was true), is a significant and compelling reason for female impersonation. While I do not suggest this

was the only reason for female impersonation, nor the most important one, it is a reasonable and credible one that highlights how much alienation, excommunication, and the desire for respectability were real concepts with material (and in this case, aesthetic) consequences. This analysis suggests that we have to think of female impersonation as socially acceptable for the aforementioned reasons, and within that context, we must not be too hasty with our interpretive paradigms.<sup>26</sup>

Most importantly, using an interpretive model that foregrounds the heterogeneity and transitory nature of the time period still allows us to peer into some exciting times for Marathi theatre, and Indian theatre more broadly, in a way that enhances our understanding of social change. My work allows us to see the arch of social change in the theatre—arching towards Naregal’s claims, but not there yet. Breaking a theatre history and analysis into more distinct periods enables an understanding that does more justice to the vibrant theatrical culture. From its beginning in 1843, with Bhave’s performance of *Sita Swayamvar*, until the late 1870s, Marathi theatre had an audience that was not preoccupied by the modernizing impulses of colonialism necessarily, nor with the desire to create an authentically Indian drama that was simultaneously “respectable.” We can see this in many writings from that era, notably a chapter from AV Kulkarni entitled “Natakaca dhanda halakat ka zala” (Kulkarnī 34)?<sup>27</sup> roughly translated as “why did the business of theatre lose its quality?” Such headings tell us that even people during that

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<sup>26</sup> In Susan Schwartz’ *Rasa: Performing the Divine in India*, we find yet another compelling reason for female impersonation: that in various traditions (she cites Kathakali and Kuchipudi) female impersonation has been a matter of tradition. So, beyond social explanations, Hansen also omits to mention the way some performance traditions in India were restricted by gender (35).

<sup>27</sup> This is a curious phrase, and while I offer one translation above, the word “halakat” is used in such a way that we can interpret it as a deterioration both commercially in terms of revenue as well as in terms of artistic standards.

time saw a changing environment for the theatre between the years 1843 and 1903, when AV Kulkarni wrote his book. He goes on to tell us a little about the less successful theatre troupes, but the entire discussion alerts us to the fact that from being a novelty, theatre became a commercial explosion, creating a host of new problems for the troupes and public to deal with—just a few of which I mentioned above (36–8). It was not until upper-caste audiences felt the need to “reform” the stage after things turned sour, that they began to attempt to use the theatre as a tool for imposing ideology on the lower castes, or as a vehicle to display their own cultural capital. But to do that, they had to organize as a class first, a class that could, on its own, provide a large enough market for a theatre troupe. Therefore, I have shown that the itinerant troupes could boast popular appeal, but that popularity was not class or caste specific.

The troupes were unable to and did not necessarily care to create a hegemonic aesthetic idiom in this early phase, limited by the abilities of the actors, as well as audiences—suggesting an overarching concern of commercial viability more than anything else. Similarly, these productions did not use or see classical Sanskrit theatre as a literary or artistic forbearer, suggesting that many Hindu themes had not been “classicized” yet. And finally, the publics of this theatre, while obsessed with sexual purity, certainly were not invested in proving themselves to their colonial overlords—not yet. Partha Chatterjee’s “Subalternity of the Nationalist Elite” gives us three grounds on which to understand this newly forming “class” that I attempted to define here. The first is an appropriation of the popular; secondly, a classicization of tradition; finally a nationalism that “insisted on eradicating all signs of colonial difference by which the colonized people had been marked as incorrigibly inferior and therefore undeserving of

the status of self-governing citizens of a modern society” (P. Chatterjee, “The Subalternity of a Nationalist Elite” 112–3). None of these three criteria are entirely applicable to this early phase of Marathi drama, nor are they, however, entirely inapplicable. All three criteria, therefore, also complicate Naregal’s analysis in “Performance, Caste, Aesthetics” which tries to map a trajectory of Brahmin dominance from 1843 until the years before and after independence in 1947. Rather, such a large time frame cannot effectively describe the complexity of the interaction between social and cultural spheres, but becomes enslaved by a homogenous framework. What we see in this early phase, as I have tried to show, is the gradual development of an aesthetic consciousness, however ambiguous, that the itinerant troupes created. In the following chapter, however, I demonstrate the ways in which upper-caste playwrights sought to create a high aesthetic idiom, and appropriate the popular sphere for their own middle-class/upper-caste goals—positing a new modern Indian subjectivity.

Chapter one, in part, has been submitted for publication of the material as it may appear in *Theatre Survey* (Cambridge University Press). The dissertation author was the primary author and investigator of this paper.

## **Chapter Two: Rasa, Sensibility, and the Sinews of a Modern Subjectivity**

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how mass popular culture, in the form of itinerant theatre, came into being in western India during the second half of the nineteenth century. Alongside itinerant theatre, student amateur theatre sought to elevate the popular itinerant theatre and create a high aesthetic idiom, an idiom that depended heavily on ideas derived from the colonial education that those students had received. However, the students were never able to successfully appropriate the popular aesthetic sphere, and as such, the rising educated elite never managed to impose their middle class and predominantly Brahmin caste ideals onto the rest of society via the popular sphere. By the 1880s, however, the social environment had changed, and the erstwhile students, now part of the solidly middle class intelligentsia, were in a position to appropriate the popular culture sphere, to classicize it, and use it to demand all the rights granted a liberal bourgeois subject—three criteria Partha Chatterjee uses to define the Indian middle class in colonial India (“The Subalternity of a Nationalist Elite” 94–117). Here, in this chapter, I investigate the political space created by popular theatre, and the way changes in aesthetic form played a vital role in creating a liberally minded bourgeois subject, who was simultaneously an Indian subject.

Playwrights Balwant Pandurang Kirloskar (1843-1885) and Govind Ballal Deval (1855-1916) were part of the educated intelligentsia, and instrumental in molding the itinerant theatre into a form of high art. Both came from similar social backgrounds in southern Maharashtra, as Brahmins who had the benefit of a high school and college English education, while also a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit owing to their caste background. Their plays bear the influence of their English education, while

simultaneously revealing their upper-caste status. Without their educational background, neither playwright would have been able to successfully unite the most popular practices of the itinerant plays with a self-conscious appeal to high aesthetic idiom, both Indian and English. At the same time, their educational “moment” differs greatly from their like-minded student amateur predecessors whose plays I addressed in the previous chapter. I argue that both Kirloskar and Deval, true to the political unconscious of their epoch, bear the indelible marks of an inspired reversion to popular and classical Indian traditions rather than a simple rejection of them, as was the case with the student theatre from the previous chapter.

Furthermore, the choice of subject matter embraced by Kirloskar and Deval emphasizes those elements of Indian and English drama that most nearly approximate ideas of “liberal humanism,” in terms of an integrated, reflecting, bourgeois subject. Kirloskar’s and Deval’s plays evince an attention to the ways in which the aesthetic sphere can be political. They reformulate and theorize liberal humanist concepts such as universalism, individualism, sensibility, ego-transcendence, and sympathy with approximate concepts of Indian aesthetics, especially *rasa*. As a category of criticism, *rasa* derives from the *Natyasastra* (200BCE-400CE; literally the “Dramatic Scripture”), a text about drama, and contains a theory of how theatre generates emotional responses, which I equate with “sensibility” in the eighteenth century English liberal humanist tradition, by way of David Hume and Adam Smith.

My argument, and the aim of this chapter, is to relate Kirloskar’s translation (1880) of Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* (100BCE-400CE) and Deval’s adaptation (1886) of David Garrick’s version of *The Fatal Marriage* (1757) to the formation of a new Indian

subjectivity. The new Indian subjectivity reformulates the negative colonial identities given to Indian subjects, while creating an “indigenous” subjectivity that is deeply rooted in an approximation of English liberal humanist ideology in the tradition of Indian aesthetics. The new subjectivity envisioned by these two playwrights was created and refined within a theatrical space, where it reached a wide public. Fully grasping the potential of the theatre commercially and ideologically, both playwrights wrote to create a high aesthetic idiom that would simultaneously appeal to a large public, something the student amateur troupes from the previous chapter were unable to do. But, by such a broad high and popular appeal, Kirloskar and Deval created a modern and a respectable regionally based identity. The theatre, I contend, played a defining role in the way ideas of liberal humanism were translated and equated with an Indian philosophical tradition, and the identity it forged was simultaneously contemporary and also reminiscent of classical antiquity.

In the previous chapter, I spoke briefly about education, and how student productions “venerated the new learning but would not be satisfied unless they found at the same time some inspiration from their own heritage” (Mehta 185). In this chapter, I want to first resume that discussion and place an emphasis on how the nature of British education in India changed from the 1820s to the 1880s. To do this, I draw upon some concerns expressed by Gauri Viswanathan and Sanjay Seth, about the kind of subject colonial education policy sought to produce. I demonstrate that Kirloskar’s and Deval’s relationship to Indian and English texts parallels the changes in education, and instead posits a different, but equal, modern Indian subject.

Following the foray into education, I write about the aesthetic theory of *rasa* in the background of a Sanskrit text such as *Shakuntala*, and the relationship of *rasa* to the nature of “sensibility” in eighteenth century England. The aesthetic formulation of the liberal bourgeois subject in eighteenth century England, as defined by Adam Smith and David Hume, was highly contingent upon the ability to produce and respond to emotional stimuli, particularly the suffering or emotional state of another human by transcending one’s ego. Writing about sensibility alongside Sanskrit aesthetics may seem somewhat speculative or tenuous, but the ideas of people such as Adam Smith remained in wide circulation in colonial India, and his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) was included on both government and missionary school syllabi for well over a century (Viswanathan 128–9). Kirloskar and Deval would have, undoubtedly, been familiar with his works and ideas. As I demonstrate, in the Indian intellectual sphere, the emotional response that sensibility and sentimental drama in England sought to elicit in an audience, through tableau-vivants, for example, was explicitly compared and utilized alongside Sanskrit dramatic theory, which also privileges an emotional response and the development of emotional modalities in performance. Owing to this close thematic connection, drama, whether Indian languages or in translation, became a site for redefining a host of cultural attitudes towards, but not limited to, individualism, universalism, aesthetics, and subjectivity.

Finally, I will read Kirloskar’s translation of *Shakuntala* as well as Deval’s translation of *The Fatal Marriage* as *Durga*, to highlight and tease out moments where the baggage of an English education and Sanskrit dramatic theory seems most noticeable. With *Shakuntala*, I argue that the play depicts an ideal, organic society, and how the

performance itself is a resolution, in the aesthetic sphere, of a nineteenth century society fractured along caste lines, especially divisions between Brahmins and Ksatriyas over political legitimacy.<sup>28</sup> In *Durga*, I focus more closely on specific instances of translation, rather than the general theories I use with *Shakuntala*. Reading the plays will bring issues raised with educational policy and aesthetic theory into focus, connecting aesthetic practice, in the form of drama, to the reformulation of an Indian subject as distinct from that which educational policy sought to produce. Unlike my first chapter, reading drama will also give this chapter a more literary inflection, rather than a straightforward theatre history. Towards the end of the chapter, I will also posit a few theories as to why the upper-castes felt the need to define a new Indian subjectivity in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

### The Failed Enterprise of Creating an "English Subject"

Earlier, in the previous chapter, I explained the relationship between student amateur theatre and the way some students received funds or awards from the Dakshina Prize committee for translation. Here, it is essential to go into significantly more detail to understand the reasons, for example, why the funds allotted for translation projects during the 1850s-1860s were related to the educational goals of the colonial administration. At the same time, the Dakshina Prize committee's workings were symptomatic of larger trends, reflecting the ways in which colonial education sought to produce a very specific kind of colonial subject. With the defeat of the Maratha Confederacy in 1818, policies

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<sup>28</sup> In Maharashtra, "Ksatriyas" are generally called "Marathas," which is not to be confused with "Marathi," the language.

towards Indian subjects were designed to appease the erstwhile rulers, and also placate elements within the hierarchy of the Maratha Confederacy. The effect, broadly speaking, is the evidence of a manifest fear that the Chitpavan and other Brahmin groups in Maharashtra (who were the vast majority of administrators and rulers in the Maratha Confederacy) would revolt, or create an uprising to reestablish themselves as a political force. It was no coincidence that various colleges were established in India in the early 1820s, when the East India Company was looking to consolidate its power.

Rosalind O'Hanlon notes the extent to which the British were anxious to appease the erstwhile rulers, and also to supplant them as quickly as possible. From 1749 onwards, a "Peshwa" or Prime Minister, functioned as the de facto ruler of the Maratha Confederacy. The Peshwa was a Brahmin, and the title quickly became hereditary. When the Maratha Confederacy was defeated in the Third Anglo-Maratha war in 1818, colonial policy sought to portray Brahmins as usurpers of the throne (O'Hanlon 26). On the one hand, the British nominally re-instated Pratapsingh Bhosale at Satara as the head of the Marathas in 1818, since he was a descendent of the King Shivaji, a Ksatriya/Maratha who founded the independent Hindu Maratha Kingdom in 1674 that would later become the Maratha Confederacy. Pratapsinh was reinstated precisely because he was a Ksatriya (or Maratha), rather than a Brahmin.

On the other hand, the British also retained an institution such as the Dakshina, which was designed to patronize Brahmins to conduct research in Sanskrit during the years of the Maratha Confederacy. The British were keenly aware of the symbolic value they could project by "restoring" a descendent of Shivaji and labeling him as the "true" Maratha ruler, while portraying Brahmins as usurpers of the throne (O'Hanlon 26). At the

same time, it was necessary to both appease the Chitpavan Brahmin sub-caste, from which most of the Maratha Confederacy had drawn its administrators, while also relegating their status from one that combined the religious and political duties to one circumscribed within the religious function alone. The Dakshina Prize Committee thus functioned to impose the caste-based orthodoxy in which Brahmins would be solely a religious, and not a politically powerful, caste. The continuation of an institution such as the Dakshina from the Confederacy enabled the British to portray themselves as patrons of the Brahmin caste, as the Peshwa had been, thus appeasing Brahmins.

The fear of upsetting Brahmins, who formed the bulk of the Hindu religious orthodoxy, was hardly something limited to western India, but even dominated discourses of sati, as Lata Mani's study *Contentious Traditions* (1998) demonstrates. Mani's examples serve to demonstrate how not upsetting the religious authorities with regards to sati was a political calculation based on an insecure political position—much like the reasons behind perpetuating the Dakshina in western India. Mani indicts colonial policies precisely on these grounds: that the British did not outlaw sati until it was politically feasible to do so. In her work, she describes the half-century long deliberations, from the 1770s until 1829, when sati was officially banned, and how various interventions by local officials were censored and kept at an arm's length by the colonial administration, which insisted that actions taken to prevent widow immolation were not official policy, nor political judgments exercised by the official at large, but rather the expressions of private beliefs and sentiments.

One of Mani's examples is particularly telling. In 1791, M.H. Brooke, a collector of the Shahabad District (which is in present day Bihar), managed to intervene and

prevent the burning of a widow. When he sought government approval of his decision, Mani notes, “His action was commended but he was urged to use private influence rather than official authority in dissuading natives from *sati* on grounds that ‘The public prohibition of a ceremony authorized by the tenets of the religion of the Hindus, and from the observance of which they have never yet been restricted by the ruling power would in all probability tend to increase rather than diminish their veneration for it’” (17). While the discussion of *sati* also reached England, there it “differed only in the sense that they began with the desirability of abolition and then proceeded to its feasibility, as against in India, where questions of practicality always came first” (24). However, when *sati* was finally abolished in 1829, Mani quotes William Bentinck, the governor-general at the time, whose words directly confront the real reasons behind the fifty-year prevarication concerning *sati*: “now that we are supreme, my opinion is decidedly in favor of an open, avowed and general prohibition, resting altogether upon the moral goodness of the act and our power to enforce” (24).

What makes Mani’s account remarkable is its insistence, and thorough rejection, in some ways, of earlier attempts to define the nature of the discourse on *sati*. She argues in her very first chapter that in works prior to hers, the terms of the debate were defined by tensions and disagreements between “the modernizing ‘anglicists’ who, unlike their ‘orientalist’ forerunners and colleagues, had no particular fascination with things Indian” (15). This interpretation, taken by previous scholars, accordingly favored a debate that centered on the ethics of toleration rather than what Mani contends actually occurred—an emphasis primarily on the political feasibility of abolition, with all its considerations (15). Her analysis departs from simplistic notions of “Orientalist” tolerance as opposed to

“Anglicist” modernity and “progress” and instead focuses on whether or not those discourses were effectual in any way, with regards to actual practice. Rather, the debates raise issues of how power can be appropriated and deployed, and by an attentive reading of the heated debates, Mani leaves us with a much more insidious picture. She removes the topical “moral” and “ethical” balms that were applied at the time, to reveal instead the raw deliberations of political authority that preoccupied Company officials.

That even marginal deliberations should arouse such a heated and calculated debate leaves the door wide open when it comes to more mainstream issues such as education, and the best ways to inculcate English values in a newly conquered Indian territory. While sati was certainly more sensational, if we are to believe that definitions of the center, of more mainstream issues, really do come from what is marginal, then we can see the debate over sati as framed within larger issues of education and subjectivity that permeate this chapter. However, the link between education and sati is more than tenuous, and relates also to the same disagreements between the modernizing ‘Anglicists’ and the ‘Orientalist’ Indophiles<sup>29</sup>—a reading that Mani demystified in favor of a more Foucauldian reading of the ways in which the undercurrents of political power were masked by debates over the ethics of sati. Similarly, the establishment of colleges, the formalization of a curriculum following the defeat of the Maratha Confederacy in 1818, and the retention of the Dakshina—these all reveal an aversion to upsetting the religiously powerful groups who had just been defeated. It is true that immediately following the Third Anglo-Maratha war of 1818, the British were the undisputed rulers

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<sup>29</sup> I offer a rudimentary definition of these debates, since a more detailed analysis can be found in Viswanathan 101-4. Anglicists were, by and large, in favor of promoting English language and literature at the expense of what prominent Orientalists such as Horace Wilson (1786-1860) wished to promote: “Oriental” languages and literatures.

over most of the Indian subcontinent, but given the aforementioned analysis, the 1820s marks a period when the British were still coming to terms with that political reality, and were still thinking in terms of appeasement and insecurity, despite their newly won political power. So, just as the debates over sati continued until the practice was finally legally (and therefore, politically) abolished in 1829, so too we can see debates in the field of education, between Anglicists and Orientalists, as prevarication disguising the political insecurity involved in ruling western and central India.

The crux of the Anglicist-Orientalist debate, as it related to the implementation of a curriculum at the newly established colleges in Poona (1821) and Calcutta (1824), was over the extent to which those institutions would teach Sanskrit and “traditional” knowledge as opposed to an English, post-Enlightenment curriculum, with widely ranging topics in science, history, literature and culture. Even though study of Indian literatures, primarily Sanskrit and Persian, was not always motivated by apolitical concerns, and more often than not had explicit legal questions in mind, what marks the transition from Orientalist to Anglicist educational policy is the removal of a large political threat, the Maratha Confederacy, from central and western India. Without the need to politically appease factions within its own territories that could look to indigenous princely states and confederations, the East India Company was free to pursue its own policies of governance as it saw fit. While the Anglicist-Orientalist controversy took place over an extended period in Calcutta, the situation was markedly different in western India, which saw a very quick change from the 1820s to the 1830s, where Sanskrit learning and education was quickly replaced in favor of English education, with an added emphasis on vernacular instruction in schools and colleges across Maharashtra.

Gauri Viswanathan notes that the outcome of the debates between Orientalists and Anglicists “was a reformulation of the objectives of educational policy” (101). Her chapter on “Rewriting English” provides a detailed account of how Orientalists were discredited in various ways, one of which included being classified as Indophiles who were skeptical of Christianity in the same way that French Enlightenment skeptics such as Voltaire were skeptical of Christianity. Most importantly, however, she notes that Oriental studies were not allowed to be pursued as ends in themselves, but rather as fulfilling a specific need such as conducting legal business, or the need to understand Muslim and Hindu law through the study of Arabic and Sanskrit (113). Based on Viswanathan’s research, the legal aspect of Oriental studies remained important to retain, whereas in the course of the 1820s-1830s, leading up to the publication of Macaulay’s “Minute” on Indian education in 1835, Oriental literatures were increasingly dismissed on grounds of their religiosity, lack of historical method (for the historical texts), absurd exaggerations, and unscientific expostulation of natural phenomena. When objections were raised to how ridiculous the Homeric epics were, or Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Viswanathan notes that a prominent Anglicist, Alexander Duff, “dismissed any comparison of the study of Indian literature with the study of Western literature on the grounds that classical literature was read in Europe as literary production and not as divine authority, as it was in India” (109).

From Duff’s opinions, and Viswanathan’s further explanation, it is not an onerous task to grasp why English literature became the substance of education in India. English literature, argues Viswanathan, was consciously and deliberately cast as an alternative to Indian literatures because of its purportedly secular quality and “precision of

observation” rather than “a sense of mythic wonder ...celebrating events solely for the pleasure of the emotions” (Viswanathan 110). The latter was the fatal flaw of Indian literatures. At its very root, the categorically blurry distinction between a historical consciousness and mythical consciousness seems to have irked the sensibilities of Anglicists and Utilitarians like James Mill, who exercised a great influence over education from his position at the India House in London, where he actively defended the policies of the East India Company.<sup>30</sup>

On the basis of a “secular” rejection of Indian literature and history, one could similarly dismiss many works from the English canon, but Viswanathan keenly observes that English teaching emphasized a classical approach to literary studies, including rhetoric and a focus on “language rather than belief and tradition as a source of value and culture” (Viswanathan 114). As a result, “The return to a secular conception of literature...is not reducible to a mere repudiation of religious identity. More accurately it is a relocation of cultural value from belief and dogma to language, experience, and history” (Viswanathan 117).

Yet another historian, Sanjay Seth, explains the deeper significance of frustration that company officials, Utilitarians, and Anglicists felt with Indian literatures. He explains, by way of a lengthy discussion of Max Weber and Immanuel Kant, that the central issue is how “modern knowledge helps initiate, and is a defining feature of, a deep transformation which creates a knowing subject who is set apart from, even set up against, the objects to be known” (Seth 4). What is at stake in Seth’s argument is the

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<sup>30</sup>This lack of “precision” of observation and a focus on emotions also relates to the ways in which Prachi Deshpande speaks of bakhar literature, a genre of historical prose writing in Marathi that was primarily written in courtly settings. She suggests that writings such as the bakhars were accorded a literary status as a “consolation prize” for their lack of historicity (P. Deshpande 20).

order of operations, so to speak, of the debate. He writes: “My argument is not about intention; my claim is not that the British sought to produce modern subjects, but rather that western, modern knowledge posits and presumes a subjectivity or type of selfhood, and that this is so irrespective of intentions” (Seth 17). Taken out of context, this can seem like an apology for colonial education, but Seth’s argument is concerned with something else: the “problems” raised in the late nineteenth century by colonial administrators and educated Indians alike, that despite the English education that the Indian intelligentsia received, it failed to uniformly produce “western” subjects. The aim of his book is to investigate why education failed to produce a subject devoid of superstition, or one who refused to participate in Brahmanical rituals.

Needless to say, the subject posited by all these discourses was male and upper-caste, if not Brahmin. His English education was designed as a “mask for economic exploitation, so successfully camouflaging the material activities of the colonizer that,” in the words of Viswanathan, “one unusually self-conscious British colonial official, Charles Trevelyan, was prompted to remark, ‘[The Indians] daily converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the medium of their works, and form ideas, perhaps higher ideas of our nation than if their intercourse with it were of a more personal kind’” (20). As a matter of fact, those very Indians did converse daily with higher ideas that were of a personal kind. Both Viswanathan and Seth suggest that English education in India ultimately failed to achieve what it wanted to accomplish: to produce an Indian subject who was, in Macaulay’s words “Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (Cutts 825).

Instead, Indians labeled English education as merely “arthakari vidya”—knowledge that one acquires only to earn money (Seth 31). This observation should alert us to one over-arching fact that is evident from Seth, Viswanathan, and from the Dakshina Prize Committee’s funds for translation and composition in vernacular languages: that while the British were trying to create a particular kind of subject, Indians instead divested their English education from its “moral” and ontological underpinnings by recasting it in utilitarian terms—for their own economic advancement as civil servants. The Dakshina Committee prizes awarded for translation also revealed that a thorough education in English was too expensive to provide across India, and the need to replicate useful knowledge in the vernacular became a practical reality for disseminating knowledge (Viswanathan 149). Others such as Partha Chatterjee have also described how nationalism later reconciled western knowledge to Indian identity by positing western knowledge in similarly “materialistic” terms that Seth describes, against a “spiritual” or “inner” domain (Chatterjee *The Nation and Its Fragments* 116–34).

While Seth adequately describes the broader philosophical implications of “material” knowledge and Viswanathan cogently argues about the actual content of what was taught, neither approaches indigenous education in more than a perfunctory manner.<sup>31</sup> On this note, Viswanathan’s work drops off precipitously after 1857, stressing the utilitarian uses and its critiques to which English education was subjected in the

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<sup>31</sup> Tejaswini Niranjana’s work *Siting Translation* (1992) is also culpable here. While she argues about translation that, “In forming a certain kind of subject, in presenting particular versions of the colonized, translation brings into being overarching concepts of reality and representation. These concepts, and what they allow us to assume, completely occlude the violence that accompanies the construction of the colonial subject” (2), and continues to describe how “Translation is thus deployed in different kinds of discourses...to renew and perpetuate colonial domination” (3), we never get a sense of what happened when texts were translated into Indian languages. Did the reader get the message? Did he become “English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect?”

second half of the nineteenth century in a brief chapter entitled “The Failure of English,” which does not provide a substantial discussion of what either replaced the failed system, or the status of a parallel educational system of Sanskrit and vernacular knowledge.

Seth’s work also remains largely silent on the content of indigenous education. However, there are a few instances in both works that yield some interesting clues when connected, and that are fruitful to a discussion of how Kirloskar and Deval appropriated freely from their English education and Brahmin background to create an aesthetic idiom that was neither entirely indigenous, nor fully prescribed by colonial education.

Viswanathan notes that the purpose behind an English education was to reinsert Indians into the course of western history, from which they had wandered under the “bonds of a tyrannical system” (132), which most closely meant (by implication, since it is not in Viswanathan’s text) the view of the Indian ‘middle ages’ as being characterized by Oriental despotism and tyrannical law under Muslim rule. Only by acquiring a historical consciousness through English education, would Indians, “in a Platonist sense,” awaken, “a memory of their innate character” (132), through a kind of metempsychosis. While this failed for a variety of reasons, such as its expense and the view among some Indians that it was a specifically “materialistic” form of knowledge, it also further reinforced hierarchies within society, since upper-caste students did not want to sit in the same classrooms as lower-caste students. And in yet another moment of appeasement towards Brahmins, whose position in society had been eroded by British rule (albeit only sparingly), Viswanathan notes that often times concessions were made to entice upper-castes to the university or government schools by creating separate classrooms for the lower-castes, or by sending them to missionary schools (151–2; Tejani 33).

Finally, under the British educational system, even though Anglicists “won” the debate and Oriental learning was marginalized to an extent, Sanskrit was offered at the high school level, and in some regions it was compulsory. While Sanskrit was not a mandatory subject in college, the Universities of Bombay and Calcutta did require a second language for entrance, and for most students, this was Sanskrit (Seth 172–3). Seth does argue that the institutionalization of Sanskrit marked a decline in the traditional Sanskrit shastris, and it marked a change in the way Sanskrit was studied.<sup>32</sup> However, in the imagination of public figures who would become the first generation of nationalist leaders, this English education was able to function as neither purely material, nor entirely part of a “spiritual” domain simply because it retained a study of Sanskrit (Seth 177).

So, the educational system failed to produce a “modern” Indian subject, on English terms, owing to both the institutionalization of Sanskrit and the parallel education that Indians received by virtue of the caste background. But, these are just two strings dangling—institutionalization of Sanskrit studies and parallel education by virtue of caste background—if we do not tie the knot and connect them to aesthetic sensibilities and the formation of an aesthetically minded modern Indian subject.

### The Aesthetic Angle on Indian education

The educated colonial subject, who emerges in the wake of unsettled educational debates, is neither modern in a “post-Enlightenment” way, nor traditional, in an Indian

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<sup>32</sup> Mujumdar, for instance, in his biography of Kirloskar, notes that the in the “older generation” Pune boasted at least one Shashtri, Vaidic, or learned man in each district (*Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 62).

sense. He is pulled in four directions, two of which I have already mentioned: in the direction of the Orientalists, who sought to retain some Indian literatures in the education policy, and also in the direction of the Anglicists who attempted to remove all forms of “native” learning from the classroom. To these two directions I add popular culture such as from the previous chapter, specifically itinerant theatre, and also doctrinaire, orthodox Hindu culture. Reading drama, we can see all four currents influencing translation, performance, and interpretation, and all four themes become part of the wider reformulation of Indian subjectivity being mapped in the theatrical space. As I mentioned above, the reformulation of subjectivity in the context of Kirloskar’s *Shakuntala* and Deval’s *Durga* had little to do with a trenchant critique of social conditions, but rather a reformulation of the Indian subject as distinct and different from that which the educational policies sought to produce. While it is true that both playwrights, and Deval in particular, display distinct traces of their colonial education, their plays demonstrate a subtle but noticeable inflection in the direction of what an Indian subject ought to be: not simply thinking and acting in a liberal bourgeois, post-enlightenment manner, but to be aware of a certain social and cultural network; to be interconnected with the Indian environs in a pure and unmediated way, through a network of feeling.

The ways in which these two plays function—and those I speak about in the next chapter—all fundamentally rest on the categorically unstable position of the aesthetic realm as produced by an educated class, in the same way that Seth describes education as functioning neither entirely as “material” knowledge, nor circumscribed within the “inner” sphere. The purpose of the few pages that follow is to show the extent to which the “aesthetic sphere” and “aesthetic experience” were fundamental to ideas of the self

for a nineteenth century educated audience, functioning precisely at the intersection between the “material” and “spiritual” world, and almost as a conduit between then two. Here, following a justification of my method, I argue that in the absence of actual political rights, aesthetics become crucial and fundamental to positing Indian subjectivity, which is posited in every way equal to the kind of post-enlightenment liberal humanism that western-educated Indians would have learnt about in school and college. Indian aesthetics, particularly *rasa* theory, and the ability to cognitively “feel” for others, becomes the basis of this subjectivity, much like the culture of “sensibility” in 18<sup>th</sup> century England.

To understand the ways in which Kirloskar and Deval refashion the aesthetic, we need to first understand some basic concepts in Sanskrit drama and aesthetics. There are a few parts of this argument that are slightly speculative, but the ground on which the bulk of this argument stands, is fundamentally stable. For starters, *rasa* theory, a theory of emotional modalities generated by a performance, derives from the *Natyasastra* (200BCE-400CE; literally the “Dramatic Scripture”), which was not compiled from its various sources into its present day form until 1926.<sup>33</sup> However, its theories were nonetheless in circulation for the better part of 2000 years (Vatsyayan 26, 34). While I use the *Natyasastra* here, I do so because in the nineteenth century, there were two understandings of *rasa*, an elite understanding and a popular understanding. We know of the popular understanding from the wall posters I discussed in the previous chapter, and others that S.N. Banhatti gives in the appendix to his book (*Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā*

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<sup>33</sup> As I stated in the introduction, there are eight primary rasas: erotic (sringara), the heroic (vira), the comic (hasya), the pathetic (karuna), the furious (raudra), the terrible/horrible (bhayanak), the marvelous (adbhuta), and the grotesque/disgusting (bibhatsa). I will explain more in the following pages.

*Itihāsa* 421, 424, 426). The Altekhar wall poster, as the posters in the appendices of Banhatti's book, the printer advertises plays by which dramatic *rasas* will be shown. The few wall posters reprinted by Banhatti in his appendix prompt us to conclude that the lay public was aware of *rasa*, and the modalities of *rasa* were categories of emotional understanding that enticed the audience to come to the show, and actively structured the audience's experiences of the theatre in terms of *rasa* theory, which privileges emotional understandings rather than plot-driven understanding.<sup>34</sup>

As I mentioned in the introduction, we know of the more educated understanding of *rasa* in the nineteenth century because of personal communications between playwrights and their associates, discussing the merits, demerits, and need for more *rasa* or "flavor" to appeal to those who are capable of discerning and appreciating "flavor" (Desai 23).<sup>35</sup> The propensity of various public intellectuals, such as Vishnushastri Chiplunkar (1850-1882), to use it as a construct while speaking about Shakespeare and Milton in comparison with Kalidasa (4<sup>th</sup> Century Sanskrit poet) also attests to a sophisticated understanding of *rasa* and its theorization (Chiplunkar 401). In yet other places, elite intellectuals commend playwrights and theatre troupes for performing more than simply comic, marvelous, and grotesque things, and giving more time to finer sentiments such as pathos, heroism, and eros (Banhatti, *Marāṭhi Raṅgabhūmīcā Itihāsa* 418). Finally, the ways in which Kirloskar translated Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, also

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<sup>34</sup> Related to the elite/popular binary, Naregal points out that colonial Brahmins were involved in creating authoritative versions of various religious texts, "which again renewed Sanskrit's normative influence" (Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere* 226), therefore privileging the elite over the popular.

<sup>35</sup> The word used by a prominent Bombay based barrister in his feedback to the playwright Balwant Pandurang Kirloskar is "rasadnya" which I translated as "one capable of discerning and appreciating flavor."

demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the aesthetics of the text—he retains all the dominant metaphors and literary tropes, and also composed music for the verse.

I use the *Natyasastra*, rather than whatever texts comprised the traditional, Brahmin learning for Kirloskar, and the subsequent Sanskrit learning in high school, primarily because historians such as Gauri Viswanathan, Sanjay Seth, Tejaswini Niranjana, and others, have refused to look at what traditional learning meant in the nineteenth century, even though those they speak about would have had the benefit of both traditional Sanskrit learning and a colonial education. One of my aims here is to point to a serious problem in our scholarly view: the omission of indigenous knowledge systems and knowledge transmission systems from the historical record. Some of my argument here is based on a kind of trust, therefore, that highly literate intellectuals of the nineteenth century *would have known* about these things by virtue of their extensive Sanskrit knowledge, a knowledge that enabled them to translate back and forth, and quote from English, Marathi, or Sanskrit, without much of a translational problem. Kirloskar’s translation of *Shakuntala* and his letters are a case in point.

To begin at the beginning, when Kalidasa wrote *Shakuntala* in the fourth century CE, Bharata Muni was also composing the *Natyasastra*, the earliest Indian work on dramatic theory, from what appears to have been multiple pre-existing sources (Stoler-Miller 13). Whether Kalidasa pre-dates the *Natyasastra* or it antedates him, has never been conclusively proven, and Edwin Gerow points out that classical Indian dramaturgy and drama developed in tandem rather than one causally affecting the other (“Sanskrit Dramatic Theory and Kalidasa’s Plays” 42). Whatever the case may be, Kalidasa’s three extant plays very closely approximate the theories of the *Natyasastra*, and *Shakuntala* in

particular has been repeatedly used as a model of the heroic-romance genre, the “nataka,” precisely because the two texts can be paired so well. Pairing the two has also given rise to the notion that *Shakuntala* marks an apex in Indian culture, where theory, drama, and the experience of an audience are harmoniously integrated, while also leading to the idea that Indian Literature (and therefore history and civilization, according to the Anglicists and James Mill) has not progressed since *Shakuntala* was composed (Viswanathan 122).

It is the feeling of harmonious integration that became an important aspect of theorizing for Kirloskar and Deval. Writing about Kirloskar’s background in 1904, Mujumdar, his biographer, speaks at length about how there is no contemporary tradition of secular drama in India, and also how there is no artistic medium *universally* accessible to all. The arts of India, according to Mujumdar, have been limited by their religious appeal, and he explicitly compares culture in India to that of Britain, where men and women can enjoy each other’s company, for example, without the specter of prostitution or female performance traditions (Mujumdar *Kirloskar* 13).

There are two layers of ‘universalism’ and secularism built into these comments. On the one hand, there is the simple notion as expounded by Kirtane (see chapter one), in which there is a belief that translation can produce works that are identifiable and relatable outside of the culture in which they were produced, by virtue of an individual’s innate capacity to reason and relate to others in as a Lockean, post-enlightenment liberal bourgeois subject. This first notion presupposes an approach to notions of “innate capacity” and “understanding” as well as certain attitudes towards aesthetics in which human experiences are mutually shared and the formal qualities of an art form need not be specific to a historical context. On the other hand, there is a second definition of

universalism that develops with a theory of 18<sup>th</sup> century sensibility in England, with a focus on feeling, emotion, and the place of emotion in “understanding” and developing a disinterested viewpoint.

Clifford Geertz, lays out the definition of a subject who understands the first kind of universalism in these terms:

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe; a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures (as cited in Stoler-Miller 321).

Based upon Geertz’s observations, Stoler-Miller draws this set of contrasts:

In the microcosm of the Indian theatre, the resolution of psychological, social and religious disharmonies is enacted by characters who represent generic types. They are not unique individuals with personal destinies, like Shakespeare’s Hamlet or Lear. Indian characters live within stylized social contexts that reflect the hierarchical nature of traditional Indian society (26).

I admit that Stoler-Miller’s characterization of Shakespeare’s characters may be a little simplistic, and while these two polar opposites (reflective and growing characters against generic types) seem oversimplified, it is an opposition that I would like to sustain for a moment, to show the second sense of the universal, and how Deval and Kirloskar reformulate the aesthetic in the nineteenth century by favoring, instead of Locke, the next generation of English philosophers—David Hume and Adam Smith.

Returning to Viswanathan’s observation that Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) was part of the nineteenth century curriculum for students at schools run by the East India Company, and missionary societies, we gain a fuller sense of

Kirloskar and Deval as translators who adapted philosophical frameworks in addition to being playwrights. While there is little evidence to suggest that they personally read Smith, or Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature* (1739/40) the fact that it was included in syllabi at the high school and collegiate level, in addition to references to other figures from mid-late eighteenth century England (Oliver Goldsmith, Arthur Murphy, and David Garrick immediately come to mind) in the writings of various public figures (Mujumdar, V.S. Chiplunkar, or Kirtane, for example) is a compelling enough reason to think about the ways in which sensibility is a concept and cultural movement that acknowledges, from a non-Indian tradition, the importance of emotions in the development of character (both literary character as well as "personal" character) and subjectivity.

Suggesting that "The [Lockean] distinction between innate ideas and innate capacities seemed real enough to eighteenth century, although the distinction was sometimes hard to enforce," Stephen Cox argues instead that "Eighteen century scientific experiments provided further evidence for believing that the self can hardly be considered apart from its sensibility" (24, 26). Owing to such an understanding of emotion David Hume,

emphasizes the fact that we can never directly experience another person's emotion; we can imagine what it is 'only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it.' But in the process of sympathy, this weak 'idea' of another's feeling can be converted, under the proper circumstances, into a strong 'impression' similar to the feeling itself (Cox 28).

Building on this idea, Adam Smith also argues, according to Cox, "imaginative sympathy is the crucial process that allows us to break free of our native solipsism, internalize the

attitudes of other people, and become conscious of our moral identity and significance” (31).

Cox’s interpretation also resonates with the observations of others, such as G.J. Barker Benfield. Barker-Benfield’s descriptions of sensibility are even more revealing than those offered by Cox, and quite topical here. Sentimentalists who espoused sensibility, did so by defining socially unacceptable behavior for men, and simultaneously “publicizing their ideal of manhood” (Barker-Benfield 247). These ideals often involved restraint from violence, gambling, drinking, and other “male behaviors,” so that men would be more amiable company for women, who, in turn would have a good effect on men. Barker-Benfield writes,

Hume, and Smith, and other members of Edinburgh’s Select Society believed that the company of women, in Fordyce’s words, would ‘melt’ and ‘soothe’ the ferocious and forbidding aspects of male behavior, making men more ‘agreeable’...Novelists shared psychological and sociological assumptions with the Scots heirs of Locke, believing that men could change...Because sentimental fiction’s softened male was benevolent, compassionate, and humane, was literate and had ‘true taste,’ he would make a better husband (Barker-Benfield 248).

At the same time, Barker-Benfield points out that creating a man of feeling did not make a man effeminate, but was instead a mark of high civilization, in which the cultivation of manners was important, and society was founded upon “humanity” rather than “savagery.” Furthermore, “Smith insisted in the strongest terms that ‘our sensibility to the feelings of others’ was not at all ‘inconsistent with the manhood of self command’” writes Barker-Benfield (139).

How then, if one was to feel for others, did one retain the “manhood” of “self-command?” Cox cites a statement from Smith that is, for our analysis here, both bombastic and germane to the discussion of *Shakuntala* a little later:

This social sensibility, maintaining its strength throughout life, may cause even a virtuous person to be ‘confounded’ when he is censured, however unjustly, by other people. Reflecting upon this fact, Smith remarks that the, ‘demigod within the breast,’ the impartial spectator or conscience, ‘appears, like the demigods of the poets, though partly of immortal, yet partly too of mortal extraction.’ This is a fitting image of the true self as it often appears in eighteenth-century philosophy and literature—a ‘demigod’ seeking autonomy but shaped and limited by its sensibility (32).

That is, while the (male) individual remains, in Geertz’s words, “a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action,” his perception of other’s emotions allows him to be “shaped” and “limited.” He is both cognitive, yet susceptible to “finer” qualities of humanity—emotional sensibility. While these few paragraphs are hardly sufficient to do justice to the concept of ‘sensibility,’ in these few extracts, the importance of sensibility as an English correlate to the *Natyasastra* seems difficult to ignore, especially the rational, post-enlightenment, ego-centric approach to understanding emotions, that in turn de-center one’s own ego. That sensibility’s theorists and “practitioners” were part of the curriculum for educated Indians in colonial India adds yet another reason to explore it beyond mere juxtaposition and comparison of two epistemologies of emotion as I have done here.

On the surface, characters in *Shakuntala* are nothing short of Smith’s demigods, and are in fact, actual demigods. More importantly, however, the idea of autonomy as opposed to a social sensibility remains pertinent to an understanding of how the

*Natyasastra* and later critics commenting on the experience of emotion viewed an individual's position in society. Taking a step further than the contrasts Stoler-Miller draws above allows us to approach a second definition of "universal" and its related "subject" who is simultaneously emotional, generic, and "a dynamic center of awareness." Rather than an individualism based on an understanding of Lockean "innate capacities," if we focus instead on the revisions to "individualism"—particularly Hume's and Smith's interpretations—and the supplemental "emotional" nature of the self, "sensibility" enables us to "sense" the "countenance" of others and gain an "impression" of the other's "feeling" which breaks us out of our "native solipsism."

Similarly, in our contemporary understanding of the *Natyasastra*, Bharata Muni describes the theatre as a privileged space in which a diverse audience gathers and can appreciate the drama (Bharata chp. 27).<sup>36</sup> While each member of the audience does not have the same level of understanding (or "innate capacity" to put it in eighteenth century English terms), this audience is united in their experience of drama. The play creates an experiential locus and unity in the audience by conveying a particular mood or sentiment, called *rasa*, which most literally translates as "flavor", "taste" or "juice". Stoler-Miller writes:

The *rasa* is essentially the flavor that the poet distills from a given emotional situation in order to present it for aesthetic appreciation. In Indian aesthetic theory, human emotion (*bhava*) is thought to exist in the heart as latent impressions left by past experiences. Early theorists divide emotion into eight categories, each of which has the potential to become a

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<sup>36</sup> Based on a contemporary understanding of the *Natyasastra*, here I try to reconstruct what a nineteenth century understanding could have been. As an exercise, this involves a kind of academic generosity. While none of those I write about cite the *Natyasastra*, or the *Abhinavabharati* (see below) explicitly, the kind of Sanskrit learning that enabled Kirloskar to easily translate *Shakuntala*, and for the first generation of nationalist leaders to debate about the nature of Hindu law has been described by various scholars. See Salmond; Dalmia; Tucker; Feldhaus, ed. 89–212, for more on this.

*rasa*, a state of emotional integration. The eight *rasas* are the erotic, the heroic, the comic, the pathetic, the furious, the horrible, the marvelous, and the disgusting. Every drama or dramatic episode has a dominant *rasa*; of these the erotic and the heroic are of central importance throughout Sanskrit drama (Stoler-Miller 14; my emphases).

By means of an interaction between character, language, setting, and plot, the play achieves an emotional integration, *rasa*, which can be seen as a denouement of sentiments that is “sufficiently general to abolish the mundane distinctions between audience, actor, and author (Gerow, “Sanskrit Dramatic Theory and Kalidasa’s Plays” 43). However, the integration, or “denouement” is not one that takes place chronologically at the end of the play, but is rather a dominant emotional mode produced *throughout the duration* of the play. The audience, in theory, should be united and undifferentiated for the duration of the performance, an idea lending itself to a sort of totalizing experience of the theatre. That is, the audiences are united as physical bodies experiencing emotions that they apprehend as neither purely psychical nor entirely physical. In theory, the audience breaks free of its “native solipsism” because of its doubled emotional and cognitive understanding of characters, though generic, who in the experience of the theatre, are not so different from themselves.

In these short descriptions, we can already see some inklings of how Deval and Kirloskar will formulate the “universalism-individualism” dyad in their dramas: by a purported unity in the audience, and a generation of emotional modes through Sanskrit aesthetics produced by the play. The “recollection” or “memory” of past lives, the “latent expressions left by past experiences” should remind us of Viswanathan’s comment about a colonial education: that it sought to awaken, in a Platonic sense, their innate “character,” which Indians had forgotten, thence departing from the course of western

civilization (Viswanathan 132). When Deval and Kirloskar returned to that doubled Sanskrit aesthetic and Platonic moment of needing to re-learn their innate character, however, they did not chart their course back along a purely “western” tradition from which Indians had “departed” (as the Anglicists would have liked Indians to do), but rather created a uniquely Indian modernity, in which the subject-hood of a person was rendered through the differently conceived notion of what it meant to be a subject in the world. That is, one whose consciousness is derived from not simply from a sense of equal cognitive “innate capacity” but from a relational sort of harmonious totality, which depended upon the finer things—emotions and sensibility as understood in *rasa* theory. That it so happened that “sensibility” also privileged an emotional understanding, made re-orienting the subject as a feeling *and* cognitive one much easier, and also one that could *perform* English modernity, but remain, equivalently, *Indian* “in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect,” thereby opening up a kind of aesthetic resistance to the attempted reformulation of the Indian subject.

The totality, or universalism, and modernity of *rasa* was not one based on this life and “innate capacity,” but, as Stoler-Miller informs us, a philosophical understanding that consciousness can be “reawakened” from past lives—much like the Pythagorean and Platonic concept of metempsychosis. While the *Natyasastra* itself does not comment too much on the concept of reincarnation or reawakening, Kapila Vatsyayan informs us that the metaphysics of the text are implied, because of its historical context. This implies an understanding of *rasa* as it relates to atman, or “soul” and the idea of reawakening past experiences through the theatrical encounter (Vatsyayan 21–3). A key influential commentator on the *Natyasastra* does speak about both reincarnation and

“reawakening.”<sup>37</sup> In the *Abhinavabharati* by Abhinavagupta (950CE- 1020CE), Abhinavagupta uses reincarnation to speak of yet another *rasa*, the *santarasa*, or *rasa* of peace, which is often counted as the ninth *rasa*. In a lengthy summary of his philosophy, J.L. Masson and M.V. Patwardhan write:

Reduced to its bare essentials the theory is as follows: watching a play or reading a poem for the *sensitive* reader (*sahrdaya*), entails a loss of the sense of present time and space. All worldly considerations for the time being cease... The *ego is transcended*, and for the duration of the aesthetic experience, *the normal waking 'I' suspended*. Once this actually happens, we suddenly find that our responses are not like anything we have hitherto experienced, for now that all normal emotions are gone, now that the hard knot of ‘selfness’ has been untied, we find ourselves in an unprecedented state of mental and emotional calm. The purity of our emotion and the intensity of it takes us to a higher level...for we have come into direct contact with the deepest recesses of our own unconscious where the memory of *a primeval unity between man and the universe* is still strong (vii–viii; my emphases).

The key words and phrases in this passage should remind us of the terms used by “sensitivity” theorists as described by Barker-Benfield and Cox: “sensitive reader,” “ego is transcended,” “I’ suspended,” and “unity.” The terms used to describe emotional experience here, with the *santarasa* and other *rasas*, privileges the cultivated reader or spectator, who can, by virtue of his understanding, posit a relationship of unity between himself and others (or the universe). This relationship does not depend upon a simplistic cognitive “innate capacity” in the Lockean sense, but in an ego transcending awakening of past memories, a concept of universalism that is present in *Shakuntala* of the fourth century, and developed fully in Abhinavagupta’s aesthetic theory.

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<sup>37</sup> This is the one part of this argument where I attempt to imagine what an understanding of *rasa* could have been. Based on Vatsyayan, and my aforementioned analysis of a popular and elite understanding of *rasa*, however, the kind of understanding offered by Abhinavagupta does not seem unrealistic.

*Rasa* is a curious mood developed in Abhinavagupta's philosophy, since its presence depends upon the recollection of past events, often from past lives—and Abhinavagupta cites various moments in *Shakuntala* to illustrate his theory. In the passage above, we see this most closely in Masson and Patwardhan's use of “unconscious” and “memory of a primeval unity” as descriptors. What makes this a remarkable theory is that the idea of collectivity and *rasa*, unlike Bharata Muni's *Natyasastra*, does not arise out of a combination of elements in the performance—character, language, setting and plot—but is instead something prior to the performance. That is, it exists as a permanent state of feeling or emotion or consciousness that is simply brought into being for the sake of the performance from a collective unconscious.

Edwin Gerow writes that Abhinavagupta refutes the notion that *rasa* arises from the causality of plot, character, language, and setting, because as an effect of several causes, *rasa* would be limited to imitation of something that produces responses rather than being the thing in itself. That is, it is the externalization and imitation of permanent *sthayibhavas* (the causes of *rasa*) that give rise to the various modalities of *rasa*. Imitation also presupposes a separation and psychological distance between that producing the effect, and s/he who is imitating, and “Imitation produces an awareness that one is not that which one imitates” (Gerow, “Rasa as a Category of Literary Criticism” 236). Gerow writes further,

This paradox can be overcome only by recognizing the elements of the play as already determined in and through the sense of absorption which we recognize in ourselves as *transcending concrete experience* and *self-consciousness*. In effect, the events of the play are themselves not understood as specifics (Rama, the historical king), but are reformulated in a dramatic awareness (what Rama has in common with me)” (Gerow, “Rasa as a Category of Literary Criticism” 236; my emphases).

However, the real crux of the issue echoes the language of sensibility that Adam Smith uses:

It is the *capacity* of love or hate—shared by all men—that is the stuff of drama, not loving or hating this or that person (determined circumstantial love and hate, where time and place are crucial factors in the realization). The *rasa* is a form of *general emotional consciousness*, similar to the atman itself, and like the atman rarely experienced as such but only in personal and temporal determination. The play becomes a unique medium for the statement, or clarification, of pure emotional consciousness where the atman is not perceived in and of itself, but is colored by shadings of its most persistent emotional oppositions: love/hate, and so on (Gerow, “*Rasa as a Category of Literary Criticism*” 237).

So, *rasa* produces a “general emotional consciousness,” by invoking latent impressions similar to those produced by the atman and memory, and relying on our “capacity” to feel emotion. Our ability to understand various elements within a dramatic text, to relate to other characters, both literary and real, and develop a sophisticated appreciation of the literary text as well as the performance rests on the access we have to a “collective” memory, or memory of primeval unity—and we can think of generic types as the kinds of characters and subjects one understands by way of a general emotional consciousness.

The *Natyasastra* creates a hierarchical appreciation of a play—as indicated through chapter twenty-seven, wherein not all attendees can equally appreciate the sophistication of a play—and favors the physical space of the theatre as an externality that artificially yokes people together by ensuring an optimum experience of presence. In the *Natyasastra*, the spectators remain divided mentally (because of different levels of understanding), but united physically. Abhinavagupta’s *santarasa* reverses the experience of the theatre by instead suggesting that bodies remain divided whereas the mental appreciation can be collective, universal, and ego transcending. In the relationship

between Bharata's *Natyasastra* and Abhinava's *Abhinavabharati* we can see the analogy to Hume and Adam Smith, especially on the point of leaving one's native solipsism or ego behind. The former member in each dyad suggests it is not possible, whereas the latter explicitly suggests it is.

A final note here—since the privileging of an emotional kind of subjectivity can be interpreted here as creating an essentialist “irrational” and “emotional” native identity. On the contrary, the experience of *rasa*, whether in the *Natyasastra* or the *Abhinavabharati*, is a highly rational and disciplined affair. Nineteenth century intellectuals were well aware of the need to cultivate finer sensibilities, but beyond that the detail of the *Natyasastra* and the *Abhinavabharati* both attest to a sophisticated attempt to understand emotion that is rooted in a long, alternative epistemology than post-enlightenment liberal humanism. As I mentioned earlier, resuscitating these theories of emotion and aesthetics and rethinking the work aesthetics does for the individual and the audience seems particularly important given their similarities with the kinds of materials Indians would have read in their schools and colleges. The plays, which I discuss below, seek to take the educated Indian “back to a true self”—to use Viswanathan's words—but this true self is not a post-enlightenment modern English subject. He is different, and equivalent to that subject, but Indian and modern.

Returning to the way Stoler-Miller describes characters from Sanskrit drama, as generic types, (see Stoler-Miller above), and considering the aforementioned understanding of *rasa*, those generic types play a vital role in extending one's consciousness beyond one's ego and in inventing the modern Indian subject. This is true

of *Shakuntala* and *Durga*. Generic types allow, in Gerow's words, the apprehension of a "general emotional consciousness." The generic types create a rubric of comprehension, by which subjectivity is made legible and immediate to someone not of the same subject position. Making networks of social relations transparent, the plays depict a functioning whole in which each member of the audience can see his or her own social microcosm. The most important aspect is the place of *rasa* in generating this awareness, which is simultaneously cognitive and emotional. The characters, via actors, responsible for generating the emotional consciousness of *rasa*, sometimes learn how to better perform their "general" subject position—as is the case with characters in *Shakuntala*, but they remain somewhat unchanged otherwise.

With *Shakuntala* in particular, the way characters become more idealized versions of themselves is particularly important. While it is impossible to say what Kirloskar as a translator may or may not have intended, we can certainly develop and explicate the trajectory of Shakuntala as a character, and the ways in which the play functions on the aesthetic sphere as a response to the political climate. Through the "recovery" of an ancient Sanskrit text, artificially imposed in very different historical circumstances, Kirloskar creates a new and simultaneously old matrix of subjectivity.

My purpose is to show that Kirloskar did not maneuver the play through the late nineteenth century zeitgeist, but was instrumental in bringing about a zeitgeist for the age. We can, in many ways see how *Shakuntala* is a nineteenth century text because of Kirloskar; contemplating the reverse, however, about how the late nineteenth century is quintessentially a society defined through performance promises a more nuanced

understanding of aesthetics and subjectivity, and for this dissertation as a whole, a theory of the relationship between popular culture and theatre.

First, a brief summary of *Shakuntala*: while hunting, King Dushyanta, happens upon three maidens in a hermitage, one of whom is Shakuntala. After their successful (sexual and matrimonial) union, he returns to the city in order to govern, leaving her with only a ring as a token of their marriage. Still enamored with her husband, Shakuntala neglects the care of a guest, who happens to be a curmudgeonly and powerful rishi, and the rishi curses her that Dushyanta will not remember their marriage without the ring as a token. In act four, after Shakuntala's father performs the necessary marriage rites (with Dushyanta in absentia), a retinue sets out for the palace, where, in act five, Dushyanta has no recollection of the union, and Shakuntala has lost the ring. After a heated exchange both the hermitage retinue and the king reject Shakuntala, and she walks to the riverbank, calling on the earth to save her, where she vanishes and is transported to heaven, since her mother is a heavenly nymph. Early in act six, we find out that a fisherman has been apprehended with the lost ring, and upon reaching court, Dushyanta remembers his courtship, the fisherman is released from prison with a generous reward, and the scene shifts to heaven. In heaven, a nymph looking after Shakuntala has just observed (from heaven) that the spring festival will not be taking place at Dushyanta's palace, and descends to earth to find out why it has been cancelled. For the majority of act six, the nymph observes the pain and suffering Dushyanta experiences because of his actions and over the loss of Shakuntala. However, the act ends with a call to arms, when Indra, the king of the Gods, needs Dushyanta's help to fend off invading demons. Traveling through heaven after winning victory for the Gods, in act seven, Dushyanta asks his

heavenly charioteer to take him to a hermitage in the mountains where Indra's parents live. While there, he sees a child, whom he "recognizes" as his own, and then re-unites with Shakuntala as well. By the end of the play, it is apparent that order has been restored, and characters in the play have not fundamentally changed. Instead, they have been tested and have grown into characters who perform their essential duties—as husbands, wives, kings, queens, and on the basis of caste—more adequately than before.

According to Gauri Viswanathan, interpretations of the play in the nineteenth century focused on the lyricism and the exemplary pastoralism of the play. In Anglicist readings, people such as James Mill accorded pastorals an inferior place in literary genres, with deference to the view that only primitive societies produced pastorals. If *Shakuntala* was the great Indian work, and Kalidasa equivalent to Shakespeare, then there was a serious lack of historical development in India. Since pastorals were most often "produced by nations in their infancy, when individuals remained so fettered by the tyranny of despotic government that social criticism of any kind had to give way to indulgence in light romances" (Viswanathan 122), there was a similar lack of historical progress in India. In this reading, Viswanathan notes that the implication in Mill's work is that a population more invested in its own governance would be more preoccupied with issues related to the state, rather than silly romances and poetry. Furthermore, it was easy to read the play as promoting superstition and arbitrary divine will (because the rishi is a Brahmin, and semi-divine). Superstition and divine will, mediated by the ring, recast King Dushyanta's escapade in a more positive light but not without the tyrannical rishi Durvasa, whose curse sets everything in motion (Viswanathan 122–3; Stoler-Miller 35). When I say "positive light" I simply mean that the king's forgetfulness is, owing to

Durvasa's curse, excusable rather than premeditated. Durvasa is, therefore, the lynchpin of the whole operation, an operation that involves, the careful erasure of aristocratic privilege—the sexual escapade—by virtue of the command over society by Brahmins through their powerful curses. Furthermore, the play also invokes a generic typology of the suffering woman, and is complicit in revivifying and propagating that motif—one that has resonances in India, but also as a trope from eighteenth century English sensibility.

A nineteenth century reading of *Shakuntala*, given the historical and mythical memories generated by the itinerant troupes from chapter one, takes us into a nostalgic territory wherein the play functions as allegory and resolves the impossible contradictions and desires of the late nineteenth century intelligentsia. To begin with, unlike the plays I mentioned in the first chapter, whose plots are apparent from their titles, and often have strange episodes foregrounding the grotesque, marvelous, and inferior *rasas*, *Shakuntala* locates the couple as a unit, and the suffering caused by love, and the loss of love, with the added emphasis on the heroism of Dushyanta. It privileges the heroic, erotic, and the pathetic *rasas*, which are the finer, more sophisticated *rasas* of the *Natyasastra*. By choosing to translate this play, therefore, Kirloskar was attuned to the ethos of the age, in which “There had emerged an elite sub-section of the colonial intelligentsia consisting of lawyers, pleaders and other administrative personnel, who over the previous two or three decades, had worked their way into senior bureaucratic positions” (Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere* 218).<sup>38</sup> The intelligentsia was acutely aware of its

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<sup>38</sup> Naregal further writes, “The events of 1857 had shown that colonial authority would have to be challenged on its own ground, through use of a the political vocabularies of liberalism. Realising this, the post-1857 intelligentsia showed its ‘maturity’ through an increasing willingness to regard the emerging class of native capitalist entrepreneurs as potential allies in the ideological struggle to contest the legitimacy of the state. But, given the absence of representative channels, this challenge needed to be symbolically

elite position, and the exponentially privileged position they enjoyed, and had at the same time, to position themselves as representatives, with knowledge of all the subaltern others in India. While magazines and journals routinely published articles about the condition of the subaltern classes (Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere* 219), the theater offered a different possibility—of speaking to the subaltern classes on their own terms, and in a language that they could understand: myth, history and emotional sensibility that was all legible given the popular tradition of itinerant theatre.

Naregal contrasts colonial modernity with “modernity in the West” when she writes about religious texts being circulated in print by suggesting that,

But as colonial modernity had not led to the creation of large-scale reading publics, these processes of scriptural transfer from oral to printed forms did not correspond with the dissemination of the idea of a laicised knowledge into social commonsense. Textual production...continued to remain largely in the hands of a traditionally literate, upper-caste groups (Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere* 226).

With theatre, and the aesthetic reformulation of the Indian subject, the upper-caste groups were able to disseminate knowledge in a “laicised” form, and simultaneously tailor it for their own ends: the play is about the courtship, alienation, and then reunion of two lovers whose child is destined to be the great progenitor of India—Bharata himself.<sup>39</sup> What better way to usher in the last decades of the nineteenth century than to show a romance, a courtship, the likes of which would metaphorically engender the Indian nation? What

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staged through available public arenas like the press” (Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere* 218). What remarkable about this is the fact that Naregal needs to use metaphors such as “staged” and “public arenas” to describe the work of the press, but the theatre, where plays are actually staged in a public arena, remains absent from her discussion. A goal of this chapter is to posit what “ideological struggle,” and “vocabularies of liberalism” meant, if not partially at least, an aesthetic sensibility. Thus, this is a parallel text to Naregal’s argument, foregrounding “self-definition” as fundamental to the vocabulary of liberalism, and something that these plays enable the intelligentsia to do, through an aesthetics of performance that is easily translatable between “liberalism” and traditional Sanskrit aesthetics.

<sup>39</sup> The son’s name, Bharat, is the word for “India” in many Indian languages—and the official Hindi name for India is Bharat Ganarajya [Republic of India].

qualities his parents have too: Shakuntala the daughter of a heavenly nymph who is raised in a hermitage with Brahmins, and the multi-faceted Dushyanta as father and king.

The play depicts Dushyanta in a very flattering way: as a hunter, warrior, just ruler who protects both the venerable and marginal people in his kingdom, poet, painter, and lover, as well as one who fulfills his duties to the Gods. But if those were not enough in themselves to qualify him as a kind of renaissance man, he is also en route to becoming a good father. Within the fold of the play itself, since it has traditionally been interpreted as a drama about a king caught between the contradictory impulses of desire for Shakuntala and duty to his kingdom, it seems a little unwarranted to interpret any of his aforementioned qualities as being more important than his ability to govern well or his allure as a lover. However, in the context of the nineteenth century, balancing those many qualities—indeed the presence of an individual such as Dushyanta is—seems more attuned to the ethos of what Kirloskar was trying to create in this play. Each and every quality appears with an aura larger than life, but also as part of life, and inseparable from the fabric of the play. He is a hero who is both vulnerable in some respects and invincible in others, but exists as a character whose thoughts, emotions, and actions effect changes in the material conditions of the world. His multi-faceted personality enables a heroic figure to become an object of desire, and not just veneration.

Even though the vast majority of the first and second acts show Dushyanta observing Shakuntala and creating her as an object of desire, we must not overlook how he himself is also created as an object to be desired—or at the very least, to be emulated. There are several instances where Kalidasa focuses on his physical attributes, and contrasts those with the attributes of the rishis. In the Marathi translation, and especially

in the songs, Kirloskar retains the dominant metaphors, while putting everything in rather archaic and flowery Marathi. Kirloskar translates:

Aakarshuni dhanu kathin tanute ushnasahani bal te yete/  
 wyayamane sthul na disata vanakaripari he dhariti bala/  
 deti shikaris dosh pari ya bhupativarti guna zhala (Kirloskar *Shakuntala*  
 30).<sup>40</sup>

Right away, here and elsewhere, the ideal male has a lean body, taut muscles and a preternatural ability to hunt, and is unaffected by the sun's scorching rays. He has an energy that sustains him, and the energy seems in some ways to exist as part of his innermost being, as though no other kind of hunter can exist. And the further emphases on his body and musculature provide an excellent contrast with several other types, whose physiques are as much as part of their identities as Dushyanta's is part of his own. He is not an able hunter because he is lean and toned, nor does he have a strapping figure because he is a hunter. Neither term leads to the other, but each is instead a natural corollary to the other. Far from being incidental, the entire being of a character or subject in this play is bound by the indivisible compaction of his or her emotional intensity and physical appearance. In juxtaposition with Dushyanta, the rishis show quite an alternative set of physical attributes: rather than the hardened chests of the hunters, they have an inexplicable ability to reflect the rays of the sun rather than having to suffer them; their power emanates from a fiery hidden core, and their powers, like smooth crystal sunstones, remain unaffected by the sun (Balvant Kirloskar 32; Kālidāsa 105).

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<sup>40</sup> Stoler-Miller translates the Sanskrit as "Drawing the bow only hardens his chest./ he suffers the sun's scorching rays unburned./ hard muscles mask his body's lean state--/like a wild elephant, his energy sustains him" (104), whereas Kirloskar's Marathi translation above more closely reads "Drawing the bow hardens his body and gives him strength to bear the heat/ Exercise makes him attractive and strong like a forest dweller/ while hunting is itself flawed, it is a good attribute in a king" (30).

The deer Dushyanta hunts at the very beginning adds yet another descriptor to the aforementioned taxonomy of physical forms, and its presence at the very beginning of the play, provides an entry into the erotically charged economy of domination (Sawhney 24–8). As an object doubly significant as beautiful and desirable, the deer at the very beginning of the play draws our attention to the nature of the erotic desire elaborated later in the play when Dushyanta and Shakuntala meet. Dushyanta, the romantic hero, the hunter, takes pleasure in the gracefully bounding deer and its elegantly arched neck, but this whole image shatters once we realize the deer is, after all, being hunted, and turns his head backwards in terror (Sawhney 25). The rishis, however, interrupt this grim pursuit by chastising Dushyanta that his weapons should help the innocent and that the deer belongs to the hermitage (Kirloskar *Shakuntala* 7). According to Sawhney, this incident, along with others, manifests a host of binaries presented within the play—nature/culture, female/male, lust/asceticism, instinct/mastery—and through the progression of the play, Kalidasa retains the first term, but renders it subordinate to the second term which would be meaningless without the first (36). By analyzing the moments of “prohibition” in the play—such as the prohibition on hunting, for example—Sawhney argues that Kalidasa manages to intensify the erotic rather than diminish it. We can see this in act six of *Shakuntala* when, having recollected his union with Shakuntala, the king becomes virtually incapacitated: “his lips are pale with sighs/ his eyes wan from brooding at night/ like a gemstone ground in polishing/ the fiery beauty of his body/ makes his wasted form seem strong” (Kālidāsa 150). And at the same time, in this incapacitated, swooning state, Dushyanta recreates Shakuntala in a painting, only to heighten the emotional drama and the erotic economy of the play until their reunion in act seven. Both Dushyanta’s

transformation and physical descriptors are meant to create him an objet of desire and a subject to be emulated—and I return to this point below when I speak about actors who portrayed him.

Romantic love must undergo separation in order to purify it: to make the experience less immediate, less lustful, and more refined, and we can think about this refinement by the way the “high” *rasas* of suffering, heroism and eros replace the “lower” ones of immediate gratification.<sup>41</sup> Shakuntala also experiences some bodily transformations after her first meeting with Dushyanta (Kālidāsa 113), and before their secret marriage. We have to imagine, that at least for a while, she evinces the same physical transformations when she is in heaven after being rejected by both the retinue from the hermitage and at court. Given the double transformations—of Dushyanta and Shakuntala—and the weight Kālidāsa (and Kirloskar) give to describing the physical manifestations of emotional turmoil, it does not seem entirely fitting that the nineteenth century Indian audience viewed the play in the same light as Sawhney’s reading. Dushyanta’s transformation from a hard-bodied stud into a languid man of leisure and sentiment in the face of a lost love suggests a transformation in values in the nineteenth century that allegorically could be read in relation to an aristocratic class that would have undergone the same sort of transformation once they lost their political power.

While the set of binaries Sawhney introduces remain relevant in Kirloskar’s translation, for a colonial audience, the play would have functioned quite differently from both its original context sometime in the fourth century CE as well as the more

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<sup>41</sup> “Eros” as a *rasa* is not synonymous with our contemporary usage of “erotic” and means “love” rather than “sexual union.” To a nineteenth century audience, the spiritual connotations of “love” and “eros” would have been at least as important, if not more so, than the physicality of “sex.”

contemporary context from which Sawhney approaches it. While I hesitate to frame the play around any kind of rising national sentiment, I would like to suggest that the drama instead posits an interesting question about political power and legitimacy for nineteenth century audiences. It asks them to think about what qualities will be desirable in a leader, for sure, but it also asks, from where will those leaders come? In both cases, a nineteenth century audience would have been acutely aware that those of Dushyanta's stature—the rulers of the over 500 princely states in India—would not have been in a position to do much more than languish and lead a life of artistic pleasure, since they had lost most of their political legitimacy to colonial government.

However, the aristocratic class had not entirely lost its cultural privilege, and had displaced its lost political legitimacy onto aesthetics. Infatuation and lust, an overly artistic sensibility, like that of Dushyanta, are values suitable for neither young women nor for rulers. Janaki Bakhle's work on Indian classical music in courtly settings is topical here. She details the production of music at the court of a "liberal patron of the arts:" Sayaji Rao Gaekwad of Baroda (12). She characterizes him as "progressive" and "enlightened" and "unlike the rulers of numerous other princely states, who typically pursued lives of playboy pleasures without responsibility" (20–1). Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, as Bakhle explains, was the adopted heir, for whom an exception from Queen Victoria granted rights to accession. He was selected by the widow of the erstwhile ruler, and raised and educated by Sir T. Madhav Rao, a Brahmin who had previously been employed in two princely courts.<sup>42</sup> So, the education Sayaji Rao received was designed

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<sup>42</sup> Rosalin O'Hanlon also mentions that Pratapsinh Bhosale, the reinstated "legitimate" Maratha ruler was also similarly tutored by an East India Company approved official. In Bhosale's case, however, the tutor was not a learned Brahmin, but instead none other than James Grant Duff (1789-1858), a famous historian

specifically, (among other things, according to Bakhle), to depict the musician's karkhaana or "workshop" "as a department in disrepair, and in urgent need of reform" (23–4). The things needing reform were the arbitrary gifts given to musicians, resulting in arbitrary expenditures. All the tutelage of Madhav Rao was designed to reform the musicians karkhaana from an institution dependent upon patronage and tradition, into something that relied on rational organizing principles, and was instead organized around the needs to keep thorough accounts, and regulate the daily lives of the musicians (Bakhle 23–5). By implication, reorganizing the artists and musicians also entailed a reorganization of how the princes interacted with them, and how they reformed their own behavior. The need to reform a musician's karkhaana and, therefore, the associated aristocratic sensibility should remind us of Dushtyanta's absorption in painting, poetry and music in act six, which cause him to neglect his political duties as a king.

Returning to Dushyanta's ululating and languor, his actions, while separated from Shakuntala seem particularly marked by an inability to gain mastery over his instincts (one of Sawhney's binaries), but also indicative of a particular kind of prince too engaged in vain and effeminate pursuits: music, poetry, painting, for example. He seems to whimsically neglect his political duties rather than fulfill them. What cures him of his situation is, ironically, something an Indian prince could not possibly hope to do in late nineteenth century India: take up arms against invading "demons" in the aid of Indra. Since princes in colonial India had no real political power, except when they supported the British authorities, whether the East India Company or the crown later on, they were

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whose work *History of the Mahrattas* (1826) was used as a standard text throughout the nineteenth century, and is even mentioned by James Mill. Duff's job at the court was similar to Sir T. Madhav Rao's, and Duff was responsible for training Pratapsinh in "public administration" (O'Hanlon 27–8).

almost resigned to their roles as ridiculous patrons of the arts, for which they were perpetually feminized and labeled as aesthetes.<sup>43</sup> Their activities remained restricted to the kind of hunting decried in the first act of *Shakuntala*, while their more significant roles as protectors of Brahmins and the laity against invading foreign demons never materialized once they were made the puppets of first the East India Company, and then the crown.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon, whereby rulers of princely states were subordinated both politically and culturally comes from Queen Lakshmi Bai's husband, Raja Gangadhar Rao (d. 1853) of Jhansi. Prior to the 1857 revolt, since he did not have an surviving heir, his state was on the verge of annexation—which is one of the reasons why his wife, Queen Laxmi Bai (1828-1858), rebelled. Gangadhar Rao's memory had been emasculated after his death. As a generous benefactor participant in the theatre he had established in Jhansi, he was portrayed in British texts as living a “debauched lifestyle,” and they also “elaborate upon his penchant for playing the female lead in his plays,” according to Harleen Singh, which is, “evidence of pathological degeneracy” (H. Singh 41). While Singh mentions that his patronage of the arts was not quite so reprehensible in Indian texts, the displacement of a lack political activity onto the aesthetic sphere, which consisted loosely of theatre, music, and the artist's “karkhaana,” seems difficult to ignore.

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<sup>43</sup> For example, Queen Victoria granted the widow of Sayaji Rao's predecessor the authority to adopt an heir, but that reward was in lieu of services to the British during the 1857 revolt, when Sayaji Rao's predecessor, Khander Rao assisted the British to suppress the uprising (Bakhle 22) rather than take the side of the revolutionaries.

<sup>44</sup> The examples of Pratapsinh Bhosale of Satara, whom I mentioned above, and Sayaji Rao serve as exemplary with regards to the way in which princely states became puppets of the East India Company, and then the crown.

While we are to read Dushyanta's painting skills, his poetry, and his cancellation of festivities in the kingdom (in act six), as signs marking his suffering and desire to be reunited with Shakuntala, such a reading, in the nineteenth century, also has residues of "pathological degeneracy" or slightly more lenient Indian discourse on the topic.

Whereas Sawhney offers us keen insight into the ways certain binaries of the Sanskrit text are resolved, Kirloskar's Marathi translation of *Shakuntala* (1880) and its subsequent performance demands that we also foreground the qualities an aristocrat or prince should exhibit. Seen from this light, the performance of Dushyanta's listlessness and torpor in act six must have created a complex resignification of social expectations for princes. Princes are supposed to *act*, and not squander away their lives in emotional languor. However, nineteenth century princes were, in many ways resigned to their effete subject position since they lacked the political legitimacy to actually take to arms against invading demons, as Dushyanta eventually does.

In act six of *Shakuntala*, Sanumati's surreptitious gaze codes Dushyanta in very specific aesthetic, political, and castist terms that contrast with his "hard body" from the first act; similarly, Shakuntala is the object of Dushyanta's gaze in the first three acts, and she becomes the object of our gaze in act four, which I discuss below when I speak about the first performance of Kirloskar's translation of *Shakuntala*. Large parts of the first three acts show Dushyanta secretly watching the activities of Shakuntala and her friends as they tend to Kanva Rishi's ashram. While we are to take the Vidushaka's comment about turning the ashram into a pleasure garden as a joke (Kālidāsa 107), watching women singing and going about their tasks in secret makes us find more truth in that joke than falsity. Dushyanta's gaze is different from Sanumati's gaze on two accounts.

The first reason can be explained by remaining entirely within the text: Dushyanta ogles Shakuntala in the midst of her daily routine; he desires her before she begins to show the signs of “love.” In act six, Sanumati sees him for the first time after he has already been overwhelmed by the loss of Shakuntala and his forgetfulness. Rather than gazing upon a king as we do in the first act, with a hardened body, engaged in a peacetime corollary to warfare, Sanumati sees someone wasting away and overwhelmed with remorse. His love for Shakuntala has consequences beyond his immediate physical health, and results not only in the cancellation of the spring festival, but also in disinterestedness with regards to his kingdom at large. It clouds his judgment, and makes him incapable of determining the difference between reality and images, as his inability to recognize his own painting as an image of Shakuntala indicates. His separation from Shakuntala also makes him quarrelsome and, therefore, unaccountable to his public (Kālidāsa 157). Since he is unable to perform his regularly prescribed duties, Sanumati’s gaze does not entirely create him as an object of desire, but rather as a diseased or deranged person. Ironically, it is the Vidushaka who once again draws our attention to this fact when he tries to explain to Dushyanta that the painting he has painted is just a painting. While Dushyanta does not listen to the Vidushaka, just at the end of the act, Matali, the charioteer of the God Indra castigates Dushyanta for exactly same reasons the Vidushaka gives. By arousing the king’s anger, Matali gives Dushyanta reason once more to govern, and to regain his lost courage and virility. So, while the first three acts and act six contain a figure gazing on one of the principal characters in the play, act six is different in that while it portrays the king as a swooning lover who is full of remorse, he

is not constructed as an object of desire; he becomes desirable only in his capacity as a king who fends off demons, and assists Indra in restoring peace to the universe.

The second reading takes us just outside of the text to see what kinds of allegory we can read from a nineteenth century performance of this drama. Given Bakhle's descriptions of the musician's karkhaana, two things fall within our interpretational paradigm. Thinking about one of the playbills I mentioned in the previous chapter, *A Comedy about Rangī the Dancer, Inclusive of Songs*, or the numerous references early on to 'nautch' programs in Kumudini Mehta's unpublished dissertation, we get a sense that theatrical entertainment was not part of the lives of most people, except during certain festivals. While it is true that by the time Kirloskar translated and staged *Shakuntala* in 1880, there was an active theatrical community and culture, this play re-creates some of the most disreputable aspects of theatrical culture, and refashions them for a more respectable audience. You can see maidens singing and dancing, created as objects of desire for the male gaze. They are eroticized but "pure" because they are in a hermitage, and even though Dushyanta does not first come across Shakuntala in a "kotha" (a sort of déclassé salon or brothel), where *Rangī the Dancer* was performed, the ascetic's grove does become, in the words of the Vidushaka, a pleasure garden of sorts, and Dushyanta and Shakuntala do consummate their secret marriage in the grove. The sexual economy of the kotha, therefore, gets reproduced at the hermitage, in a "pure" space.

Distancing itself from the reality of courtly performance, *Shakuntala*, in the nineteenth century, presents love, marriage, and aristocratic privileges as clean, rather than as functioning parts of a sexual economy of the theatre. This is especially important, given that for someone of Dushyanta's stature, Shakuntala would have been one of many

wives, and perhaps even lowest in the hierarchy. For Kanva, the rishi at whose hermitage Shakuntala was raised, and who is a father figure for her, the whole situation is precarious. He requests Shakuntala's escort, Sharangarava, to ask Dushyanta to treat Shakuntala as equal to his other wives, and nothing more (Kālidāsa 130; Balvant Kirloskar 76). Furthermore, Kanva instructs Shakuntala that she should "be in the service of the elders/ befriend the other wives" (Balvant Kirloskar 77).<sup>45</sup> The advice Kanva gives Shakuntala, and the plea Kanva asks Sharangarava to make to the king, both raise a specter of abuse, inequality, and the real fear that Shakuntala could have just been duped, or used in a manner similar to courtly performers, whose sexual unions with their patrons rarely became official, orthodox "marriage."

Viewed from the angle of courtly performance, Kirloskar's translation of *Shakuntala* also makes a concerted attempt to bring performance traditions into a public and secular setting. It is not a silly farce about "Rangi the dancer," for example, nor can it appropriately be classified alongside the kinds of performances Bakhle describes in her book, which are purely funded by and enacted for the aristocratic patron—as was the case with Sayaji Rao Gaekwad of Baroda, and also Gangadhar Rao of Jhansi. We can, for example, imagine a sexual economy operating at a court, where actresses, dancers, and courtesans of various castes did engage in sexual activity with other members of the kaarkhaana, or with the patron. *Shakuntala* erases that history and resignifies it in the "pure" setting of an ascetic's grove for an audience that was becoming increasingly more educated, and seeing itself in relation to Indian antiquity rather than the courtly or

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<sup>45</sup> Kirloskar's Marathi reads "vadvadilan sevita jave/ savatishi prema dharave," Stoler-Miller translates this as "Obey your elders, be a friend to the other wives!" (Kālidāsa 130).

popular traditions such as the itinerant theatre from the previous chapter. In fact, even the cancellation of the spring festival in act six of *Shakuntala* seems somewhat indicative of the disappearance of Indian performance traditions that would have been adjacent to temples, or patronized by princes (see, for example, Srinivasan "Reform and Revival").

Sharmila Rege describes the disappearance of popular performance traditions in the face of Kirloskar's "bourgeois drama" as follows:

There are tensions between the emergent bourgeois theatre and the tamasha that comes to be pushed to the periphery. In the process the content of both the elite and the popular is reformulated, the emergent elite theatre marks its distinction from the folk via a process of de-sexualisation, so that only men perform on the stage (Rege 1043).

Kirloskar's *Shakuntala* was undoubtedly part of the "bourgeois" theatre, and quite different from the improvisational itinerant theatre traditions of which I spoke in the previous chapter; it was also very different from *tamasha*, a more or less comic and secular folk form. Rege's observations reinforce the extent to which, owing to the popularity of Kirloskar's form, it was possible to conceive of a drama that could be written in a high literary idiom with de-sexualized content, as opposed to a literary idiom suited to a common denominator, as was the case with the drama I spoke about in the previous chapter.

The Kirloskar Natak Mandali, or Kirloskar Drama Troupe, staged their first production of *Shakuntala* on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1880, and generated a lot of press, but the troupe really began as an amateur troupe. In a 1929 edition of Kirloskar's only other complete sangit natak, *Sangit Soubhadra* (1882) the press found the original manager of the Kirloskar Theatrical Company, Tryambak Narayan Sathe, to write the introduction.

Sathe spends some time detailing the particulars of Kirloskar's troupe and the first production of *Shakuntala*, which reveal the amateur beginnings of the troupe. Kirloskar himself started as a school-teacher in Belgaum, and although he had travelled to Pune before, the trip that was to culminate in the translation and production of *Shakuntala* occurred early in 1880, when he accompanied the revenue clerk from the south on a trip to Pune. According to Shankar Mujumdar, who wrote a biography of Kirloskar in 1904, Kirloskar had the chance to watch a Parsi Theatrical Troupe on that trip and it inspired him to produce something akin to that production, which was more formal and composed than the itinerant theatrical troupes (Mujumdar, *Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 67–8; Sathe 2). As he began to translate, he frequently met with Moroba Wagholikar and Balkoba Natekar, two public figures well versed in music, and some others, in order to receive advice and prepare his translation (Mujumdar, *Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 67). After conceiving of the idea sometime in August 1880, Kirloskar had assembled a cast and crew by late September, and practice began on the auspicious day of Dussera on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1880. The first performance, as I mentioned above, took place on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1880, with just under one month of rehearsals, at the Anandodbhav Theatre in Pune. None of the participants were professional actors or actresses of any sort, but were instead the prominent denizens of Pune, or like Kirloskar, were on leave from their day jobs because of the festival season.

Kirloskar himself was on leave during the rehearsals and performance, and the holiday season made it somewhat easier to select actors for various roles. Other participants were also amateurs on leave from their day jobs, for whom this would have been the ideal time to engage in brief forays into the amateur theatrical world. There does

not seem to have been too much of a discussion over casting, with the exception of Shakuntala and Dushyanta. Moroba Wagholikar played Dushyanta, owing both to his prior musical training, as well as his bodily constitution [shariracha bandha]; Mujumdar does not mention what exactly bodily constitution meant (*Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 70), but we can imagine that Wagholikar must have been, at the very least, a physically imposing figure, in light of the way Dushyanta's physique is described. The only other person who was cast for specific reasons was Shankar Mujumdar himself. While Mujumdar omits any mention of his role as Shakuntala in his biography of Kirloskar, Sathe, the troupe manager, writes,

Shakuntalechi bhumika ya charitralekhakane (Mi. Sh. Ba. Mujumdar) ghetlyane tyanni aaple nav ya thikani kramprapt asata galale! Parantu Mi. Mujumdarancha strivesh—garbhashrimantache gharanyatil youvanyukta rupasampann—tarunisahi khali man ghalawayas lawil asa 'rupasundari' paripurna hota. Tasech bhashan god, sabhya abhinaya, thasthashit kukumtilak, godas anlot, varna suvarna ketakasarkha, sarva prakare mohak asa hota (7)!

[This biographer (Mr. S. B. Mujumdar) had his name erased [from the credits after he took the role of Shakuntala! But, Mr. Mujumdar's female role—the youth from a wealthy household equipped with beauty—he would have even made her turn her head down and blush given his perfection in that role. He spoke sweetly, acted decently, had plentiful ornaments [literally “kumkum and tilak”], a good [literally “sweet”] figure, the complexion of a golden screw pine [ketak] flower, in everything he was charming!]

Two things make this account interesting: the fact that Mujumdar wanted to prevent anyone else from knowing that he played the part of Shakuntala, and also that when he played the part he was in the sixth grade, and already had some experience playing female roles. According to Sathe, it was because he was so young that his identity was 'protected' and kept hidden for so long—until Sathe wrote his introduction in 1929

(Sathe 9)! Then, as if once was not enough, Sathe goes on to repeat (almost verbatim), the physical attributes that made Mujumdar a good person to cast as Shakuntala, except this time he adds that Mujumdar spoke and acted like a woman from a good family, had eyes like a deer's, and re-emphasizes that Moroba Waghlikar had a constitution that suited a royal character (9).

The first few performances culminated at the end of the fourth act, and Kirloskar did not translate the rest of the play until the following year. We have to understand the entire shape of the play itself as arching towards an ending in the fourth act. This is, of course, somewhat ridiculous to imagine, since the plot itself does not really evince any conflict until act five. However, given the social climate, it may even be appropriate to think of this as a captivating performance phenomenon (if we are to believe Mujumdar's comments from earlier about the lack of a secular tradition of drama with a universal appeal) and as a novelty. If it was common in Bombay for the elite to attend the theatre as Mehta suggests, the exact opposite was true in Pune. While there was some activity in Pune, owing to the establishment of Pune Sanskrit College, according to Meera Kosambi, even by 1850, Pune was "still in a state of decline with the fall of the Peshwa. The population of Pune had reached its lowest recorded size of 70,324, and would slowly grow to the point that it finally reached approximately 120,000 by 1891" (Kosambi, *Bombay and Poona* 200). By contrast, Bombay had nearly a million residents by the same time. Secular, commercially appealing performances that also catered to an educated class would have been less frequent in Pune. For an educated, "middle-class" intellectual to see a performance that was entirely separate from the festival season would

have been, in and of itself, a spectacular occurrence, regardless of whether or not it was a ‘complete’ play with a conflict and a resolution.

Mujumdar writes that the first performance had a transformative effect on the audience. He writes, “Morobani itke natyakoushalya dakhwile ki, tya prasangachi kalpana prekshakanchya manat tantotanta utarun dili” (*Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 71).<sup>46</sup> We have, of course, to take Mujumdar’s evaluation with a grain of salt since his recollection of the matter occurs nearly twenty-four years after the event, by which time Kirloskar had become a legend. At the same time, he also provides us some contemporary responses to the performance that seem to confirm his views, and yet another account by a person very hostile to the theatre, who, while critical, also confirms its seductive “effects.”

Following the first performances, on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1880, the *Induprakash* newspaper wrote that “undoubtedly, the whole performance was spectacular [darshaniya]” (Mujumdar, *Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 72), while following the second performance, on the 11<sup>th</sup>, the newspaper wrote that few people were not moved to tears when Shakuntala leaves her father in act four (Mujumdar, *Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 73). Following the second performance, the troupe travelled to Bombay for four days where they performed at the Victoria Theatre on Grant Road on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1880. After the performance, Professor R.G. Bhandarkar asked them to stay for a second performance, but Kirloskar had to decline the invitation since the actors were not able to procure an extension on their leave (Mujumdar, *Annasaheb*

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<sup>46</sup> “Moroba showed such an aptitude for drama that the entire sentiment descended into the mind of the audience”: I have used some liberties to translate the word “kalpana” which variously means “idea” “conceit” “sentiment”, among other things. I consulted the Molesworth Dictionary for this translation. Furthermore the word “tantotant” is an adverb meaning “exactly equal or alike.”

*Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 74)—they even had to find a substitute for the Bombay performance, since the actor playing the Vidushaka was not able to make the trip.

Beyond the money earned, and the hype generated, Mujumdar mentions that the effect of the play was instantaneous and, “in programs of singers, performing women, in women’s quarters, in the chatter of children, and the performances of musicians [vajantraya], [one could hear] the songs from Sangit Shakuntal.” He compares this phenomenon to the 1727 performance of John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (Mujumdar, *Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 76), which should, among other things, reinforce our understanding of how playwrights saw themselves in relation to Sanskrit as well as English eighteenth century drama and aesthetics. The afterlife of the songs as described by Mujumdar also reinforces the discussion from the previous chapter about contracts developed by the managers of theatre troupes in order to establish some proprietary rights over the acting procedure, and also about how performing women were charged more for entry into the theatre. Given Mujumdar’s comment about the afterlife of songs, we may surmise that women from performing castes were charged more for entrance since they would, in turn, profit from the songs they had learnt to sing, by performing for private audiences, in venues such as “kothas” or brothels.

It was not until the following September that Kirloskar managed to secure a leave for translating, composing, and staging the final three acts. This time, rather than relying on the generosity of charitable and interested merchants, Kirloskar was able to gain an audience with Deccan college students and professors alike. He was granted access to the library at Deccan College in Pune, where they staged the first six acts on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1881. About these performances, however, the press generated was not necessarily glibly

positive, but provoked a rather mocking review by someone identifying himself as “Enemy of the Theatre” in which he complains about a variety of issues, largely unrelated to the actual performance itself. He complains, for example, about how crowded the theatre was and how insufferable the heat. But he also demystifies yet another thing about the theatre—the audience. He mentions, for instance that it is true that there are a few prominent people at the play, but the vast majority are illiterate, and there are quite a few kids who have run away from their parents, seduced by the spectacle (Mujumdar, *Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 83). However, the highlights of the enemy’s angry tirade come when he points out some rather humorous technical mistakes and audience responses. Apparently, in act seven, even though Dushyanta is in heaven, instead of pointing to the clouds below him, he pointed upwards. In act three, the dominant *rasa* of which is shringar (the erotic), he mentions that the women in the audience were very eager to clap—and began their applause before the men in the audience—though we are not told for what they were clapping (Mujumdar, *Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 83–4)! While he does not offer any substantial criticism, perhaps we can say that the performance was only momentous in that a classical Sanskrit text was translated and performed for a popular audience rather than a limited student audience—and that while it certainly adopted a “high” literary idiom of the latter, it certainly appealed to the former. We can also say that the “Enemy’s” comments also evince at least some discomfiture with a female audience that is sexually knowledgeable—a topic I discuss in the following chapter.

Focusing on the final act in the first two performances, act four, Mujumdar writes of it as the apex of emotional energy in the play, a comment rather confusing since one

should be inclined to value the reunion scene with the child Bharat as the emotional climax of the play. He writes of the fourth act that “This act is the most sapid, according to those acquainted with the rasas [rasajna]” (Mujumdar, *Annasaheb Kirloskar Yanche Charitra* 71). We may, perhaps, say that since only the first four acts were performed at first, the commentators artificially praised the fourth act since it was the final act of the first few performances. But that seems like an artificially simplified critique; those writing about it would have known the story, and some of them may have even seen it performed in Bombay with Parsi theatrical companies. That *rasa* is not a “climax” but a dominant mode throughout a play also undercuts the circumstances of the initial two performances that ended with the fourth act. Therefore, simply the novelty of the performance and its circumstantial fourth-act ending cannot be the reason for such proclamations from Mujumdar.

The fourth act, I believe, was instead praised because it shows the transition in social relations, wherein Shakuntala is married off and departs the hermitage. Until that point, the audience has seen her tending to the hermitage, ample training for her duties to come as a queen, and she has been made into an object of desire based upon the eroticization of her labor, as is clear from the enemy’s snide comments about women clapping. The entirety of act four reads as a slow, preoccupied tableau vivant, as Shakuntala bids farewell to the hermitage. It interrupts the activities at the hermitage and all action slows or stops entirely as Shakuntala departs. It marks a strange transition, in which the erotic *rasa* gives way to the pathos that dominates the acts five and six. As she prepares for her departure, what we see is an endless stream of emotionally torn interlocutors who seem singularly distraught about Shakuntala’s pending departure. She

repeatedly draws our attention to the ways in which the hermitage itself is changing. Kanva, for one, asks them to pause a while under the shade of a tree, a fawn tries to impede her by pulling on her dress, and other animals also remove themselves from their activities a moment to gaze upon her (Balvant Kirloskar 72–5; Kālidāsa 127–30). As she departs, the animals and plants are described as her “family” and she refers to various animals as “child” or “sister.” Watching this scene, we too, are meant to understand the significance of this transition—and all sorts of people are present here to watch the transition, both maternal and paternal figures, sisters, and a few brothers too—that Shakuntala will not longer be part of their lives. All these people must break their bonds with Shakuntala, since, according to Kanva, she will not return to the hermitage until well after his passing, and only after her child is grown and sits on the throne (Balvant Kirloskar 71).

Thus, accompanying her until the point beyond which they cannot pass requires a memorable display of affection, and Shakuntala bids farewell to each and every person and animal present. And we see that Kanva’s advice on how to behave, in some ways, is simply a concise description of what she has been doing in the hermitage anyhow: taking care of the fauna, minding her entourage, and hosting visitors. Her scene of departure, as slow, repetitive and emotionally overwrought, perhaps, as it is, is meant to evoke a transformation in our own sensibility, whereby we see ourselves in relation to each of the characters on the stage, including Shakuntala, and then see ourselves as each of those characters—as Kanvas, fawns, sisters, and as people departing. The particulars give way to a general consciousness of the pathos of separation, which overwhelms our excitement at over the eros of union in act three.

The emotional apex, in the fourth act, is remarkable for two reasons. The first relates to an overwhelming feeling of emotion upon Shakuntala's departure, and its related issues. Here, and later again in act five, Shakuntala becomes an object of desire not only because she has been eroticized, but by a kind of suspenseful pathos, since the audience would have known the rest of the story. Kirloskar's play, owing to its popularity, participates in revivifying the trope of a suffering woman who is, simultaneously, to be desired. That she needs to be "rescued" later on, when both the retinue from the hermitage and Dushyanta reject her, adds to the motif, and is the entire topic of my following chapter, when I speak explicitly about companionate marriage.

The fourth act is also notable for a second reason. I spoke about the self-reflective bourgeois consciousness that projects itself forward and refashions itself in response to past experiences. While it is true that *Shakuntala* does not evince any characters with such a changing consciousness, or rather a selfhood that is predicated on changing the way one interacts with the world, we do see characters who are tested, and become more idealized versions of themselves. Shakuntala's progression from the hermitage to the city as queen is part of her "becoming" a more idealized version of herself, where her daily activities will not concern the frivolous care and maintenance of hermitage plants, but instead will concern tending to the future of the kingdom. They will be serious responsibilities that are more fitting to her than the horticultural care of the hermitage. Dushyanta also becomes more idealized after languishing for an entire act, and to all those characteristics of his I listed above, in act seven, we are told that he is quite the father as well. These two are not characters who change fundamentally, but instead reawaken parts from their past lives to aid their efforts in their current (or future)

situations. The audience, that sees the “generalities” in *Shakuntala*, finds itself invoked into a unity of feeling and becoming through the awareness of *rasa*. Shakuntala’s past life as a maiden in a hermitage prepares her for her life as a queen, for example, and the whole plot, after all, revolves around Dushyanta’s ability to *recollect* his marriage to Shakuntala, which involves a transformation from impure (initial) eros, through pathos, to ultimately reach a purer eros, contained by the family unit.

I am repeating myself to suggest that there are two parts to subjectivity—the first which I just mentioned, about characters growing versus becoming more themselves—and the second concerning primarily the aesthetic and emotional response to characters and events on stage, and how “growth” necessarily involves a “recollection” or a prior life, which is simultaneously an aesthetic moment or reaching into the “deepest recesses” of our unconscious wherein we find a unity of mind with others, and things bygone, and of a moment when hierarchies and social unity existed in an undisturbed way. As both characters become idealized versions of themselves, we follow their emotional journey, and the audience would have followed it as well, knowing that though each individual member of in the audience was not a king or queen, a fisherman or hunter, a soldier or charioteer, or a heavenly nymph, his or her emotional understanding allowed him or her to entertain the possibility of having been something akin to the principal characters in *Shakuntala*.

At the same time, Kirloskar’s translation does not escape its historicity. Even though we have this conflation of the character’s individual pasts and the audiences’ responses to those within the space of the theatre, the play must simultaneously be understood for the historical allegory being enacted. In this historical allegory, we see the

birth of Bharata, who is born of a heavenly nymph from a hermitage and a legendary king. The play performs a very specific function, creating the child of destiny, Bharata, from two social groups—Brahmins and the Ksatriyas—who have been left without the ability to enact their own political future. Indra’s call to arms at the end of act six is ironic indeed in that it shows a Ksatriya doing something which he would have been incapable of doing during the British raj—taking up arms against invading demons—and so we can perhaps see this play also as doing the things for a society that cannot do the things its constituent social groups are supposed to do. Ksatriyas no longer protect Brahmins and Brahmins no longer live in hermitages; the final act, act seven, then displaces both the setting of the hermitage and the kingdom into an imagined, ethereal space (perhaps of the theatre), where the final unit we see is divorced from both caste-ridden contexts of rulership and religious worship, and is instead located within a nuclear family, where Dushyanta is a good father to his young son, and where Shakuntala has gone to her real home (“maher” in Marathi, meaning the bride’s home), to give birth to her son, as was custom in the nineteenth century, and remains to this day.

*Shakuntala*, then, performs the disappearance of political agency and instead posits aesthetics as a realm in which individuals have agency to enact their own political future. Such a reading requires refashioning eighteenth century liberalism with a focus on aesthetics and sensibility, because eighteenth century liberalism was predicated, in many ways, on an ability to determine one’s own future based on the objective choices made with a sympathetic imagination. In the aesthetic qualities of the text, Kirloskar points to an Indian tradition of subjectivity whose emotional resonances are equal, ontologically, to liberal humanism, but whose corollary political implications are absent. Kirloskar thus

creates subjects whose only future lies in the aesthetic realm, and whose very definition must be aesthetic, since political legitimacy is out of the question.

Kirloskar's "student" and close associate, Govind Ballal Deval, also translated plays in which translational choices further emphasize the relationship between liberal humanism, especially eighteenth century sensibility, and *rasa* and other Hindu constructs. One of his plays, *Durga* (1886), is a translation of David Garrick's 1757 adaptation of Thomas Southerne's *Isabella, or the Fatal Marriage* (1694), and Deval's translation reformulates many of Garrick's emotional language into Indian, and more specifically, Marathi-language terms. Deval, like Kirloskar, relocates emotional understanding and refinement from the eighteenth century concept into an indigenous network of legibility. The network becomes visible in the language used to describe the main character, Durga. Furthermore, owing to the translational choices, it is necessary to re-examine two notions about literary studies in India in the nineteenth century—that English literature, according to Viswanthan, was used as a mask of conquest, and also Tejaswini Niranjana's argument that translation "deployed in different kinds of discourses...to renew and perpetuate colonial domination" (3). Instead, I argue that while translation from Indian texts into English may have produced the kind of discourses Niranjana speaks about, translation from English into Indian vernaculars, especially of "secular" texts such as eighteenth century drama, in fact reinforced Hindu orthodoxy because foreign concepts were always approximated, rather than "translated" to preserve the "original" "meaning."

Govind Ballal Deval translation of Garrick's *The Fatal Marriage* follows all the plot twists faithfully. *Isabella/Durga*, has suffered for the past seven years since her

husband, Biron/Chandra Rao, left in search of his fortunes after being disowned by his father for marrying Isabella without paternal consent. Presuming Biron/Chandra Rao dead, Isabella/Durga is rebuffed by her father-in-law, Count Baldwin/Jivaji Rao, who still holds a grudge against her. Chandra Rao's younger brother, Carlos/Tulaji Rao, encourages her to marry Villeroy/Anand Rao, a suitor who has repeatedly courted her, and also helped her financially.<sup>47</sup> The day after Anand Rao and Durga marry, we find out that Chandra Rao is still alive, and has returned. After meeting with Chandra Rao, who presents Durga with a ring that ascertains his identity, she loses the little remaining sanity she has. Meanwhile, Tulaji Rao tries to murder his elder brother in order to gain an inheritance, only to be thwarted by Anand Rao, who comes to the rescue. After Anand Rao and Chandra Rao recognize each other, Chandra Rao dies of a mortal wound. Before dying, he hands Anand Rao a letter for Jivaji Rao, explaining his activities, and asking why Jivaji let Durga remarry if he knew that Chandra Rao was alive. In the final pages, the plot unravels and we understand that Tulaji Rao, for the sake of an inheritance, has withheld letters his elder brother sent to their father, and is the true villain. Just as the intrigue becomes plainly visible, a distraught Durga runs across the stage, followed by her young son, and thrusts a dagger into her heart, taking her own life.

When Deval translated this play in 1886, he had been working closely with B.P. Kirloskar (1843-1885), and had, three years prior, composed the songs in acts 5-7 for Kirloskar's translation of *Shakuntala* (Sathe 9). Some of basic plot similarities between the two plays—*Durga* and *Shakuntala*—enable us to surmise Deval's motivation for

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<sup>47</sup> All names mean specific things—while “Rao” is an honorific, “Chandra” means “moon,” “Jivaji” contains the word “jiv” connoting “life”; while a “Tula” is a scale, and the name for “libra” in Marathi. “Anand” simply means “happy.”

translating *The Fatal Marriage* as *Durga*. For starters, both plays depict the consequences of love and separation, both plays draw attention to a suffering woman, spurned by those who should support her, and finally, both plays also make use of a ring as a mnemonic object. When Deval translated the play as *Durga*, he was attuned to the logic of both texts, and the translation demonstrates his sensitivity beyond the plot, to the emotional atmosphere Garrick attempted to create.

Writing about Garrick's 1757 adaptation, Arthur Nichols (1971) notes that, "In keeping with the delicacy of the new age, any mention of 'bed' in the original script was changed to 'marriage.' In addition, the suggestive lyrics of Southerne's epithalamium were toned down. In general, when Garrick removed the comic sub-plot, he cut away all that was objectionable to an audience that preferred to weep" (87). Garrick, according to various sources, was greatly influenced by sensibility and sentimental writing, and also preaching to produce emotional effects on listeners. Garrick wished to move his audience to tears the way various preachers managed to do with their congregations (Barker-Benfield 72). Barker-Benfield also cites one of Garrick's contemporaries, and notes "Garrick invoked 'exquisite feeling and discernment' in his audience. Sterne said Garrick had 'some magic irresistible power,' which was 'released feelingly on stage with the vibrations of 'every fibre about your heart'" (298). *The Fatal Marriage* remained relatively popular in England, and was performed more often than any other Restoration tragedy in the Sadler's Wells Repertory until about 1851 (Nichols 10-1).

When Deval translated the play as *Durga*, he received a prize for the translation from Rajaram college, where he was a student (Patankar 13). Presumably, the prize was for Deval's ability to render concepts into distinctly Indian terms of understanding. That

the entire denouement of the play depends upon the recollection of her past husband, facilitated by a ring, seems hard to ignore, given the similar function of a ring in *Shakuntala*. As a memento, the ring serves up visions of a past life or event in both plays for the one who receives it. Just moments after seeing the ring, Durga (Isabella) tries to convince herself that her first husband died, and that while dying he must have given the ring to a close friend who was present at his death (Deval, *Durga* 50). While her first husband Chandra Rao cleans up and prepares for bed, Durga tries to buy herself time by telling him that she will join him after saying a prayer for Parvati, where we instead see her perform a long monologue full of tears, sorrow, and supplication. Nichols notes that this was a scene that Garrick altered for his adaptation in *Isabella*, and the prayer scene is entirely of his invention (Nichols 87). However, what makes this scene remarkable, in Deval's translation, in addition to the return of her past, is that she calls herself a "sadesati"—a feminine noun meaning "seven and a half years"—that is Deval's own ingenious addition to the play.

Until this moment, only others, especially Tulaji Rao (*Durga* 22, 39), have used the word when referring to her, but it is only in this scene that she finally begins to accept such an astrologically significant characterization. "Sadesati" refers specifically to the planet Saturn, which is supposed to exercise an inauspicious influence over people in whose birth horoscope it appears. And, as the word indicates, Saturn's negative influence lasts seven and a half years. During the moment of her prayer, we understand the nature of the play: whereas until her marriage with Anand Rao, only Tulaji Rao and Jivaji Rao referred to her as a "sadesati", her "prayer" foregrounds, in a turn of fate, how fundamental that label is to her identity. Destiny catches up with her just as she thinks she

has pulled away, just as she thinks her luckless and impoverished seven years are over. This clever translation—a translation operating by approximating the effect of “sensitivity”—captures the melodrama by adding a descriptor that embeds her lucklessness into her being, in a way that manipulates the register of “fate” and emotional melodrama into distinctly Indian terms, comprehensible only by tuning our attention to the local, the specific, and uncanny—along the lines of *rasa*. Tulaji Rao also refers to her as a “Pandhar Payi” meaning a woman with “white feet” (Deval, *Durga* 39). Such an epithet also indicates her inauspicious nature, and such a term is used today too to refer to widows—though never with a positive connotation.

The absence of conjugal harmony does not, on its own, necessarily make this play overflow with emotional melodrama. Deval also establishes the play’s mood very early. It begins with a conversation between Anand Rao and Tulaji Rao, in which Anand Rao asks Tulaji Rao how to entice Durga into a marriage. When we first see Durga, she is crying while simultaneously bouncing her child on her lap. The child innocently asks her why she cries as she tries to suppress her tears in front of Anand Rao (Deval, *Durga* 13). One critic, Patankar (1937), expresses his disapproval of the emotional doldrums of the play. He compares the play to Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth and Othello, and mentions that “natakache shokaparyavasana prasangapeksha svabhavatun udbhut karne adhik kausalyadarshak asate” (Patankar 19).<sup>48</sup> *Isabella* and as a result, *Durga*, both suffer from an overwrought reliance on the emotional mode rather than the unfolding of a character’s consciousness. He does, however, characterize Tulaji Rao as driving the play by his

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<sup>48</sup> “It shows more cleverness to have a play unfold because of a character’s consciousness than an emotionally distraught finale.” I have translated “svabhava” as “consciousness” here even though it can also be translated as “constitution”, “disposition” or “temperament.”

“karun” *rasa* or quality of having pathos, and sorrowful. However, he locates the rise of that *rasa* in Tulaji Rao’s “Pashanhrudaya” or “stone-heartedness”. This reading (even though Patankar himself acknowledges that the play is strange precisely because the pathetic mood arises from Tulaji Rao’s actions and not Durga) sidesteps omnipresent pathetic sentiment throughout the play. This sentiment can only be understood if we focus on the character of Durga. Since the play has “little intellectual content to recommend it, and a female role that is out of proportion with the other characters...” according to Nichols, “*The Fatal Marriage* and its alterations never experienced a run of any length unless Isabella was acted by an actress of extraordinary power...” Nichols further suggests that the play did not reach its peak until Sarah Siddons became famous for the role of Isabella in 1782 (65–6). While we do not know who played the role in India in Deval’s adaptation, Nichols’s remarks do suggest that our understanding of the play cannot be divorced from Isabella/Durga’s looming presence throughout. And, despite Carlos/Tulaji, we must think about the emotional mood generated by the pathetic Durga, whose every speech is punctuated by tears.

At the same time, the play does not rise to the level of tragedy—at least not in Marathi—according to Banhatti (1967), another critic, who repeatedly suggests that Deval’s translations fall short of the original on a number of counts, the first of which is Durga’s language. Deval’s translation, according to Banhatti, makes Durga’s speech more colloquial than it is in Southerne’s or Garrick’s versions (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 56). As a result of the colloquialisms, Banhatti writes, “Mulatlya isabellachya bhashanatlya udattatechi buja durgechya bhashanata rakhli geli nahi. tyatla rasa sandala”

(Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 56).<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Banhatti also criticizes Deval's decision to use "fate" [wait payaguna] since it prevents us from attributing Durga's death to anything within her control (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 55)—a point we can relate to Patankar's desire to see the development of a character's consciousness. As a result, everything about the play overflows with pathos—but not with a pathos that can be described as developing from choices characters make, since Durga is acted upon, rather than being an agent in her own right. His primary complaint about the translation, in addition to the way Deval adds a predetermined quality of the play by speaking of "fate," is with the way Deval's efforts to tailor it for an Indian audience upsets the generic qualities of the original text. After Banhatti expends quite some time further critiquing the literary merits of the play, all on the assertion that popularity does not make a text literary (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 43), he asks, "All these [qualities] are lost, so what's left" (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 58)? Even though he answers it immediately with "karunya" or "pathos", the question itself seems a little odd, since Banhatti does not seem invested in understanding the play as it functions in its own right, as *Durga*, and is more concerned with analyzing originals rather than Deval's meticulous transformation of Garrick's version.

The meticulous translation is, however, precisely what makes this play unique and commendable. While Banhatti's believes the translation and various adaptations in the play essentially upset the finer qualities of the original play, it is more important to see Deval's play as an attempt to bring an English play to a local audience, rather than an attempt to instill foreign concepts of literary merit on an Indian audience. This required

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<sup>49</sup> "Essentially, the lofty merit of Isabella's speech is lost in Durga's speech. The rasa in it has spilled."

him to change not just the language and add “fate” as an explanation for Durga’s conditions.

It also was necessary, in his translation, for Deval to ensure that the characters in the play are not Brahmins, and are most likely from some kind of aristocratic caste. At the very opening of the play, Tulaji Rao (Carlos) laments that “Amche gharane padale lekavalyanche” (Deval, *Durga* 9).<sup>50</sup> The word “lekavala” refers more specifically to the son of a concubine or a kept woman, according to the Molesworth dictionary (722), whereas the Vaze only translates it as “bastard” (488). This is not a word that seems to be in current use, and Banhatti refers to it as well, in a very specific way, as though it has a caste-oriented meaning. He says Deval set the play in the “society of lekavalas” (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 54). This is a point that returns later in the play as well, when the female servant Kondau says to the male servant Kalya, that Anand Rao is, “paishane thora, ervi kuli halkic. lekavalyanci gharani hi. tula nahi ka mahita” (Deval, *Durga* 34)?<sup>51</sup> At yet another moment, Tulaji Rao says to Durga, “Shindyanchya gharanyat pat lavaychi chala kahi navi nahi” (Deval, *Durga* 39).<sup>52</sup> “Shinde” is a specifically Maratha (of the Ksatriya caste) surname, and also a surname of a prestigious family that was politically significant under the Maratha confederacy. What is clear from these examples is that neither Anand Rao, nor Tulaji Rao, nor Durga are from Brahmin families, and Durga may even be a concubine from a performance caste. All we know from the play is that her father died of typhoid, and while he intended to give her to

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<sup>50</sup> “Our house is fallen to bastards.”

<sup>51</sup> “wealthy, but otherwise his family is lightweight. a family of lekavalas this is. don’t you know?” Here, “family” or “kuli” can be taken to mean “caste” and “lightweight” means of a lower caste.

<sup>52</sup> “In the Shinde household, widow remarriage is not a new thing.”

Anand Rao, upon his death, Chandra Rao implored her aunt to marry her off to him instead (Deval, *Durga* 33).

Widow remarriage was a contentious issue at the time, and as Banhatti mentions, widow remarriage was extremely uncommon amongst the upper castes at the time—something I speak about more in the next chapter. However, Deval’s translation lets the audience know very soon that the characters are not Brahmins, but of another caste. Creating this artificial distance while also foregrounding a socially contentious issue not only makes the play comprehensively Indian, but it does so very conscientiously, walking on eggshells (since the main dramatic action—marriage—takes place under a set of social customs that are not threatening to culturally powerful groups such as Brahmins). While Banhatti believes this to be yet another instance where Deval spoils the tragic circumstances of the play, since the characters are unexceptional and widow remarriage is a little more permissible (though not entirely permissible) in that “lekavala” caste (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 54), he ignores a later conversation between the two servants highlighting yet another aspect of widow remarriage.

After Chandra Rao returns, the two servants begin to speak amongst themselves about the legalities of a woman having two husbands. Kalya, the male servant, who is the more uneducated of the two, says that it does not matter one way or another, and that it is perfectly fine for a woman to have two husbands. To this, Kondau responds, “Garibguribata tase ushtemashte chalate. Pana tyana loka hasatil ki tase kele tara.”<sup>53</sup> Kalya’s rejoinder seems to be directed more at the audience than Kondau: “Durapatila

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<sup>53</sup> “Poor people don’t mind this sharing. But people will laugh at them if they do that.”

pac navara hot mhun bamna sangtyat. Tye khot asala nhai” (Deval, *Durga* 61)!<sup>54</sup> So while, you have a character who is there primarily for comic relief, he also speaks directly to a respectable (read “Brahmin”) audience who would have been threatened by a play about widow remarriage by directly calling their bluff: either it is ok for a woman to have two husbands and for her to get remarried, or what Brahmins say about the mythic Draupadi and her five husbands is false.

It is this moment, combined with Durga’s seven-and-half-year astrological separation from her first husband, that toys with the subjectivity a colonial education sought to produce, while also dismissing it as inauthentic; it is a moment such as this that inscribes the experience of astrology and Hindu philosophical traditions on the minds of the audience while also interrogating those very ideals. Whereas Deval does not recreate a “tragedy” in the Aristotelian sense—which is really what seems most dissatisfying to Banhatti—Deval is fastidious in his translation of an English play with English dogma into an Indian play whose mechanics, tropes, and scruples are minutely Indian. Therefore, it is not a translation per se, but an approximation, and perhaps not even a proper “adaptation.” By approximating English dogma—specifically the emotional response—Deval created a play that swindles the colonial educational apparatus that sought to create subjects who are “English in taste” and instead recalibrates English dogma on Indian terms. If colonial education was about making Indians more “English,” then sidestepping the attempts by colonial authorities to inculcate “Englishness,” by finding Indian concepts or corollaries to English ones, or even just inscribing plays that are supposedly

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<sup>54</sup> “Draupadi had five husbands, say the Brahmins. It can’t be false!” Kalya speaks in dialect, specifically a generic low-caste dialect.

secular within an Indian imaginary already destabilizes and sabotages the purpose of English education in colonial India.

At the same time, it creates Indians as subjects who are not just subjects of the queen. It creates them as thinking, feeling and acting subjects whose very motivations and desires are equal, if different, from their colonial overlords. Garrick's adaptation has Isabella lamenting, "But 'tis my lot, The will of Heav'n, and I must not complain: I will not for myself, let me bear all the violence of your wrath" (Southerne, Inchbald, and Garrick 17). Deval takes this reference to heaven and instead has Durga lament, "Purvajanmache majhech kahi patak ubhe rahile asela tar te bhogale pahije? Agadi nimutpane bhogale pahije" (Deval, *Durga* 25).<sup>55</sup> Of course the use of "nimutapane" [silently] is ironic here since the whole play is itself a protracted lament, but Deval's choice of language, interjecting Durga's "past life" into her speech follows the logic of labeling her a "sadedati" or a "pandharpayi," and creates a field of understanding, which, from our perspective today, is uniquely Indian. Deval produces this uniquely Indian understanding in the play as equivalent to the meanings in the English play. Equal in content, in understanding, but also epistemologically, in terms of the theories of the *Natyasastra* and Abhinavagupta, as the translation of "the will of Heav'n" into "past life" indicates.

Patankar's comments and Bahatti's dissatisfaction notwithstanding, I believe Deval and Kirloskar both created this field of understanding consciously—as Deval's sophisticated translation demonstrates, and as the allegorical reading of *Shakuntala*

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<sup>55</sup> If there are any outstanding sins from a past life, must I endure them? Definitely [I must] silently endure them."

suggests. Deval's is not a translation that simply translates meaning word by word, without any concern for particulars, but is one that translates ideas and concepts to create an equivalent emotional response, through paradigms of understanding that are not entirely synonymous with an English, post-enlightenment theory of subjectivity and knowledge. Dipesh Chakrabarty's chapter on "Translating Life-Worlds" is quite prescient on acts of translation such as these. He writes,

When it is claimed, for instance, by persons belonging to devotional traditions (*bhakti*) that 'the Hindu's Ram is the same as the Muslim's Rahim,' the contention is not that some third category expresses the attributes of Ram or Rahim better than either of these two terms and thus mediates in the relationship between the two. Yet such claim is precisely what would mark an act of translation modeled on Newtonian science. The claim would be that not only do H<sub>2</sub>O, water, and *pani* refer to the same entity of substance but that H<sub>2</sub>O best expresses or captures the attributes, the constitutional properties, of this substance. 'God' became such an item of universal equivalence in the nineteenth century, *but this is not characteristic of the kind of cross-categorical translations we are dealing with here* (Chakrabarty 85; my emphasis).

Chakrabarty calls this different kind of translation a "barter-economy" of translation, where concepts, especially Enlightenment era concepts, do not hold a "universal" valence.

We need to take these purposeful translations seriously, since even though Viswanathan quotes Charles Trevelyan when he remarks (somewhat ironically), '[The Indians] daily converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the medium of their works, and form ideas, perhaps higher ideas of our nation than if their intercourse with it were of a more personal kind'" (20), such a statement also suggests, if nothing else, that educated Indians did read, and quite a lot too. This is precisely the point Priya Joshi makes when she writes, "...a very different India emerges from the words of Indians

themselves and even from the pens of colonial officials...Far from being the India of caves and mosques, this India is one in which Indians passionately, powerfully, and persistently read—and often wrote—seemingly everything that the empire of print purveyed and made available...” (35–6).

In writing this chapter, my primary questions relate to Viswanathan’s assessment of education in colonial India, and I draw some inspiration from many sources such as Niranjana, and Sanjay Seth. I ask, what about when English texts were translated into Indian vernaculars? What sort of hegemonic system of meaning operated then? Furthermore, how did this all relate to definitions of class and caste? Here, in the works of Kirloskar and Deval, these questions find some directions for an answer. Kirloskar appropriated the popular, by drawing upon the formal qualities of the itinerant troupes while also creating a high literary idiom, deriving his play from classical sources, emphasizing language, poetry, and high emotional sentiments such as pathos, eros, and heroism, rather than marvelous or grotesque elements. Even on the page, his translation “looks” like the Sanskrit, with verses set off from the rest of the dialogue, and set to music, which had quite an afterlife.

Deval’s translation, while not “popular,” draws our attention to the translation of English texts into Indian vernaculars, yet the effect of his translation, in terms of the way he renders concepts into Marathi, does not always follow Viswanathan’s assertions about “English” as a language of colonial domination. Instead, Deval’s play adds another layer to her argument, and points to why English education ultimately failed to produce a modern Indian subject that was English in every way except racially. It failed, without a doubt, because for the vast majority of Indians, who were not literate in English, and in

most cases, only spoke the vernaculars, the conceptual values generated by translated texts were within a dominant regional, if not Indian, network of understanding.

In this chapter, I have attempted to present a series of ideas, some from the philosophy of English sensibility, some from Indian metaphysics and aesthetic theory, and also from literatures, both Indian and English. The many connections between them exist at a thematic level, in some of the specific choices of translation, theorization, popular and elite understandings of *rasa*, and performance as a public spectacle with “universal” appeal. Both Kirloskar and Deval consciously appropriated the theatrical space because of its “universal” appeal in an attempt to create a hegemonic idiom for the middle class, predominantly Brahmin, intelligentsia, which was in a position, by the 1880s, to exert its commercial and cultural capital (see Naregal above), and appropriate the popular sphere for its own agenda.

The field of understanding created by both playwrights, while specifically historical in both cases, attempted to create a claim to subjectivity that was not entirely contingent upon colonial education. The main emphasis of the subjectivity, by necessity, had to be aesthetic, since Indians did not enjoy any real political rights. In this regard, the displacement politics onto aesthetics must be seen as a calculated move: sensibility privileged a refinement of feeling, and an experience of emotion in a civilized way, so too the aesthetic enables the intelligentsia to posit themselves as equal to the British, at least on an intellectual level, and one of cultural achievement, if not a political one. At the same time, subjectivity without political agency finds its strongest expression in the reformation of male and female sexuality, as I indicated at various moments in this chapter, and as I will examine in the following chapter.

### Chapter Three: The Agency of Religion

If, as Partha Chatterjee has suggested, nationalism created an inner “spiritual” domain against an outer “material” domain (see Chatterjee 1989), what role did an institution such as the theatre, which was the only “outer” and secular space where women were admitted for entertainment and pleasure, play in the formation of a discourse about women, sexuality, and gender more broadly? A handful of scholars have recently critiqued Chatterjee’s notion for being overly reductive. Meera Kosambi, for example, notes, “A reading of Maharashtra’s social past on the other hand suggests that, well into the twentieth century, many aspects of ‘home’—especially marriage-related institutions—were taken by social reformers from the socio-cultural domain to the purview of negotiation with the colonial state, and thus within the political domain” (*Crossing Thresholds* 10–1). I take her word “political” to be synonymous with Chatterjee’s “material” or “outer” domain. Yet another scholar, Manu Goswami, speaking less about the dynamics of regionalism in India and more about the theoretical underpinnings of Chatterjee’s dichotomy, notes that it functions almost like an apology for his previous work, wherein he describes ‘derivative’ nature of nationalist discourse. Goswami argues that as a result, “Chatterjee’s second work tends to reify an indigenous domain as the repository of a pure difference” (24). The theatre—to return to my original question—functioned in somewhat of a liminal manner, as a venue where women had access to “material” culture, and where, despite exhortations to the contrary, the primary purpose was pleasure.

As a venue that often admitted women into the audience, the plays had to be suitable for an audience of respectable women, while at the same time providing

entertainment. Even plays with mythological plots needed refined language and could not show spectacular events like decapitations and eviscerations, but needed to depict refined emotions for a newly educated public with political aspirations. Language, structure, plots, and music needed to be suitable for a respectable audience, whose threshold of pleasure ensured that crude gestures, bodily humor, and “lowbrow” entertainment was left out of performances, as the elite intelligentsia began to patronize the theatre both as audience and practitioners. It is important to consider plays, and theatre more generally, in the wake of nascent nationalism in the late nineteenth century, since the theatre was one of the few public spaces where women were allowed to experience pleasure in a secular space. The theatre became a place where respectable audiences chose to spend some of their leisure time.

Mobility outside the home, while at the same time maintaining a domestic life—these two were the hallmarks of the “new” woman in the late nineteenth century. Women were clearly regulated within the home by in-laws, and also expected to be somewhat more companionate with their husbands (Chatterjee 1993, 128–30). This second fact alone reconfigured at least a few relationships within the household, especially given the demands of “companionship.” Theatre enables an understanding of the reformation of domestic space into one of companionate ties between husbands and wives in the late nineteenth century. Plays produced in a period of twenty years attest to the changing social fabric of gender relations, and also give voice to various debates over gender relations, especially those of companionate marriage.

The debates over companionate marriage were themselves prompted by what orthodox upper caste Hindu men saw as interference on part of the colonial government

in their domestic lives. Whereas a previous generation had been raised with the tacit understanding that the colonial government would not interfere in domestic affairs, an official policy after the 1857 revolts, the resurgence of governmental authority in private affairs raised an unwanted specter from the past which nationalists and the educated, urban middle-class found unwelcome (Sinha 140–1; Heimsath 1964). In the beginning, these debates centered more specifically on the custom of child marriage, prompted by Behramji Malabari, who published a pamphlet entitled ‘Notes on Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood’ in 1884, which was a proposal for the government to reform domestic affairs and arrangements. What ensued has been thoroughly documented by many scholars—Tanika Sarkar (1993), Mrinalini Sinha (1995; 138-80), Padma Anagol-McGinn (1992), and Meera Kosambi (2007; 235-310)—for example, and by many others. The main point in all these debates is that for the Indian “patriarchy” (broadly conceived as both orthodox Hindus and for the more reform minded ones), the occasion of these debates provided an opportunity for it to reassert its masculine privilege, in a purportedly benign way.

The four aforementioned scholars all make slightly different arguments, with the latter two writing from the perspective of western India and the Bombay presidency, and the former writing from the perspective of Bengal. Regardless, it is clear that in the deliberations over child-marriage and the Age of Consent controversy (which centered on the need to raise the age of consent for marriage and cohabitation from ten to twelve years of age—the age at which women were permitted to marry in England), whether or not women had a voice, and whether or not women were involved publicly in offering their opinions, such considerations were sidelined in favor of what men had to say on the

matter. Thus, the debate became more of a power struggle between men who wished to assert their ‘right’ to legislate women’s issues. Excluding women’s voices, Sinha concludes, “recuperated the energies of the nationalist movement and brought them into closer harmony with colonial rule” (172). The “harmony” in this case would have been a desire on the part of the nationalist intellectuals to project themselves as equal and ‘masculine’ enough to reform their own domestic space, without the need for outside interference. Without pressing social issues to deal with, by the logic of nationalism, the educated middle class could focus on “more important” issues—nationalism itself—as the play *Sharada* demonstrates.

The plays I have chosen to write about in this chapter—*Sangit Soubhadra* (1883) by B.P. Kirloskar and *Sangit Sharada* (1899) by G.B. Deval—are bookends to this debate about marriage and social reform. The generational gap between the two plays coincides with an epistemological rupture in terms of gender relations, femininities, and masculinities. As Judith Walsh points out, “by the early 1900s most Indian domestic literature of the late nineteenth century had vanished from sight. Even the many Bengali domestic manuals of the late 1880s and 1890s were mostly out of print. Nationalism had replaced social reform as the issue of greatest concern to the Westernized elites who dominated the major urban centers of British India” (Walsh 8). The plays I have selected evince something similar: it is not that they univocally portray nationalism as a transcendent movement, rising at the expense of social concerns, but the latter of the two does posit a necessity to move beyond social concerns. So, whereas the first play portrays a working ideal, the second play, *Sharada*, posits something quite different, nothing short of reformulating the social fabric of gender relations. Chatterjee’s formulation of the

material/spiritual binary, in which the colonial state, “is kept out of the ‘inner’ domain of national culture” which is reserved as a “true and essential domain” in which “the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of colonial power” enables an entryway into the plays I analyze, but the plays are a lot more disorderly than clean binary (*The Nation and Its Fragments* 6).

At the same time, companionate marriage also reconfigured masculinity and from a heterogeneity of masculine behaviors, the turn of the century saw the creation of a very specific kind of masculinity as the normative kind. As a result, these plays are a testament to reformulation of gender and space, and Ashis Nandy’s framework in *The Intimate Enemy* (1988), provides an alternative model of social change at the psychological level, which seems connected to Chatterjee’s work, but more focused and immediately topical for western India. In it, he argues that the logic of colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism devalued all forms of androgyny in order to produce a singular and undifferentiated masculinity. The plays I analyze bring these dynamics to the foreground as well. As I will demonstrate, a play such as *Sangit Soubhadra* (1883) relishes in the ambiguous sexuality of many of its characters, and those very characters are the “heroes” of the play. By contrast, a play like *Sangit Sharada* (1899) only presents us with two masculinities—an old and a new patriarchy—and there is very little difference between the two.

In this chapter, I argue that the two plays are brackets to a process of social change that redefined gender in the late nineteenth century. In the earlier play, *Sangit Soubhadra* (1883), space, gender, family, religion, and patriarchal authority all form a working whole. Conflicts are resolved *structurally* as Kirloskar’s play creates the

discursive space for all those differing interests to participate, debate, and resolve the action of the play. The performance is itself resolution, and it operates by showing a nineteenth century audience what a working ideal could be, rather than engaging in disputes over doctrine in a pedantic way. Ironically, *Soubhadra*, with all its religious and mythological overtones, posits an ideal in which women and men have agency to gain their desired end as a result of the polyvalent relations of power. The various dynamics of power and social space also foreground the ways in which this play is part of a proto-nationalist moment, in which a spiritual/material binary does not exist, and gender is more androgynous as per Nandy's observations quoted above.

*Sangit Sharada* (1899), by G.B. Deval, is significantly different, despite its similar content as a play about companionate marriage. However, unlike *Soubhadra*, there are no clean resolutions, and the play lacks a dramatic arc. With *Sharada*, it is fruitful to consider the way a *traditional* five-act dramatic structure does not produce the resolutions we expect it to produce, and its ending is "unsatisfying" from both a theory of Sanskrit aesthetics as well a theory of "comedy" or "tragedy." This disjunction between the traditional five-act structure and the way meaning and sentiment are generated, reveals a precarious resolution to questions of companionate marriage and also posits gender in a new light. And yet, its creations of space, religious authority, gender, and patriarchy are much more in line with Chatterjee's binary. The resolutions are, as I will show, heavy handed, and artificial, and while we can categorize them as neatly falling into Chatterjee's spiritual/material dichotomy, the resolutions certainly are neither clean, natural, nor do they appear stable. It is in the gap between form and content that we can most clearly see the contesting discourses of gender, both in terms of orthodox Hindus

who opposed a companionate marriage, and the “new” patriarchy that favored a more moderate view on companionate marriage.

So, in this chapter, I will first present several readings of *Soubhadra* and *Sharada*. With each play, I will analyze gender and agency—whether male or female—and also contextualize that reading in the play’s historical “moment”. It will become apparent that despite the resounding popularity of *Soubhadra* that ensured it was performed with great regularity from its first performance until the end of the nineteenth century, gender is not really an object of inquiry. The ideology of the play resolves questions of companionate marriage by positing an *ideal*, which is achieved organically, rather than through a complex reconstitution of social norms, as is the case with *Sharada*. In the world of *Soubhadra*, gender is not a “problem” because both the male and female characters get what they want, albeit with a little bargaining. *Sharada*, by contrast, foregrounds the question of gender, and the insistence on foregrounding it as a topic within the world of the play draws our attention to the inter-relatedness of gender, power, governmentality, and a sort of streamlining of the heterodoxy of Hinduism in the denouement of the play. As I will show, in the final scenes in *Sharada*, the ability to shape one's future and legislate morally right and wrong action is displaced onto religious authorities who dispute, "legislate," and arbitrate in civil matters. This final moment suggests a need to lay all social concerns over gender and companionate marriage to rest. It both allows for agency and circumscribes it within a specific definition of Hindu, “new” patriarchy. The intervening years between the plays saw the rise, and as *Sharada* demonstrates, the attempted final consolidation of discourses on gender and companionate marriage, and these two plays thus serve as prologue and epilogue to those discourses.

### Kirloskar's Sangit Soubhadra

B.P. Kirloskar's *Sangit Soubhadra* (1883) [A Musical About Soubhadra], is similar in many ways to his play *Sangit Shakuntala* (1881), which I wrote about in the previous chapter, except that *Soubhadra* is not a translation. To compose *Soubhadra*, Kirloskar took a relatively small episode from the Mahabharata and created a five-hour musical from it. In the following pages, beginning with a plot summary, I will speak about the difference between patriarchal (or temporal) authority and spiritual authority as it is depicted in the play. As the play demonstrates, while the word of the patriarch is absolute in all its temporal authority, it has to play second fiddle to spiritual authority. At the same time, I argue that those who do not wield patriarchal authority nonetheless have access to it as a result of the internal workings of an idealized joint-family. When all else fails, an appeal to spiritual authority can successfully ameliorate and change the fortunes of heroines and heroes who have run afoul of patriarchs. Most importantly, the play enables desire, especially sexual desire that men and women have for each other, rather than regulating, restricting, and ultimately removing it from the discursive space of the theatre.

At the start of the play, we find Arjuna, the ultimate epic hero, in the sixth month of a twelve-month exile and period of atonement. He and his four brothers are all married to one wife—Draupadi—and according to an arrangement between brothers, each is to cohabit with her for a period of one year, before she becomes the wife of another brother. The penalty for intruding on another brother's conjugal relations with Draupadi is a self-

imposed exile for the duration of one year.<sup>56</sup> Arjuna barges into his eldest brother's palace at an inopportune moment, for good reasons, but as a result, has to atone and purify himself before returning to the palace.

We do not have to wait for long before Arjuna's happy exile, during which he masters several new weapons techniques and marries not one, but two women, becomes a little unnerving for the hero.<sup>57</sup> After a few arias, he encounters the sage Narada, a devotee of Krishna, who teases him about an upcoming marriage in Dwarka, Krishna's kingdom. He informs Arjuna that Krishna's younger sister, Subhadra, is scheduled to marry Duryodhana, whose family is the archenemy of Arjuna's family. This has been arranged in accordance with Balarama's wishes, who has, in the past, instructed Duryodhana in various kinds of warfare. Balarama is Krishna's elder brother and also the symbol of patriarchal authority in the play. Hearing the unfortunate news, Arjuna is heartbroken, since he and Subhadra have been lovers for a long time (despite Arjuna's philandering).

Narada leaves for the wedding, consoling Arjuna only by suggesting that nobody can comprehend Krishna's motives and logic. As soon as Narada departs, Arjuna, forlorn, begins to pine away only to be interrupted by a demon (who turns out to be Arjuna's nephew Ghatotkach) carrying a maiden, leaving her in the forest, and then vanishing again. It turns out that the maiden in question is none other than Subhadra, who has mysteriously been abducted moments before her wedding, causing her to miss the

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<sup>56</sup> According to Kirloskar's play, Arjuna is destined to be in exile for another six months, for a total of twelve; this figure is a little misleading since a nineteenth century critic points out that in the original Mahabharata, Arjuna is in exile for twelve years rather than twelve months (Kolhatkar 246). According to the J.A.B. Van Buitenen, however, it can be read as either twelve months or years (*The Mahābhārata* 15).

<sup>57</sup> Kirloskar's text does not mention two wives, but audiences would have known such a fact in the nineteenth century. Also, the ambiguity of one year or twelve years also relates to this point. How would Arjuna master several weapons techniques and have time to marry twice in one year? Of course, we must suspend our disbelief.

auspicious moment when the ceremony should have been performed. After stalling for what seems like an eternity to the reader and audience, Arjuna finally approaches Subhadra, but she does not recognize him because he is bloodied from killing a beast of some sort. She asks for water, and as he goes to search for it, the demon transports her back to her palace, leaving Arjuna flummoxed about whether the whole thing was just a lucid dream. However, Subhadra does leave behind a small note, in which she suggests that Arjuna should become a *sanyasi* (an austere holy man, who has forsaken the world) atop mount Raivatak. Later on, we find out that Krishna has forged the note, which explains why Subhadra could have left Arjuna a note without recognizing him.

In any case, Arjuna becomes an ascetic with redoubled confidence that Subhadra really loves him, and also very quickly gains renown for his (fake) austerities owing to the efforts of the royal sage at Dwarka, Garga Muni. So esteemed does Arjuna become, that Krishna's elder brother, Balarama begins to notice, and suggests that the royals of Dwarka take a one-day pilgrimage to the mountain to receive the ascetic's blessing. After the blessing, Balarama is so impressed that he suggests asking Arjuna, dressed as an ascetic, to come to the palace and stay in the tabernacle adjacent Subhadra's apartments so that she may serve him and forget about her torment in the forest. Krishna counsels Balarama against such a course of action but the headstrong Balarama, as the elder brother, over-rides Krishna's counsel and Arjuna begins to live at the palace, unbeknownst to anybody except for Krishna. I will explain later why Krishna counsels Balarama thus, despite favoring Arjuna.

After living at the palace for several months, on an auspicious day, when the entire palace is to go out and bathe by the seaside, to prepare Subhadra for her now

rescheduled upcoming wedding to Duryodhana, both Arjuna and Subhadra steal away to the mountain, where he reveals himself to her. They marry there, Arjuna changes clothes and they return to the palace, where a furious Balarama is fooled into thinking that Arjuna saved Subhadra from a false ascetic, and also grudgingly accepts their marriage after Garga Muni placates his anger. There are, of course several other characters in the play, and several twists that I have not included here, but have listed the characters in the chart below, since the family relationships can be complicated, but are very important.

**Table 1: Relationships in *Soubhadra***

<b><u>Character</u></b>	<b><u>Relationships</u></b>	<b><u>Symbolism?</u></b>	<b><u>Anything else?</u></b>
Arjuna	Krishna et. al. are his maternal cousins		
Krishna	Very good friend of Arjuna	divine providence	Incarnation of Vishnu
Balarama	Elder brother of Krishna	The figure of patriarchy	Favors Duryodhana
Subhadra	Sister to Krishna and Balarama		
Rukmini	Krishna's wife	Rukmini-Krishna are ideal conjugal pair	Intercedes of Subhadra's behalf
Duryodhana	Arjuna's paternal cousin		
Narada	Sage	Reinforces belief	
Garga Muni	Royal Sage to Dwarka	spiritual authority	He sides with Krishna
Kusumavati	Subhadra's servant		loyal servant
Saranganayana	Subhadra's second servant		she spies on Subhadra for Balarama's wife, Revati

There are a few other characters who are not central to the play—the Sutradhar and an Actress, who introduce the play to the audience, for example—a comic servant of Krishna’s who is casually named “Vidushaka,” and a few others. Lastly, all the main characters in the play are Ksatriyas, except for Garga Muni and Narada, who are Brahmins. This would have been obvious to the audience of the day, and is also part of the resolution enacted in the play (see below).

Despite the religious characters and religious overtones, this play is a family drama. It contains many finely calibrated relationships between the women, men, and servants that are immediately relatable to audiences today, and would have been even more transparent to audiences in the 1880s, especially within joint families. At Dwarka, the hierarchy begins with Balarama at the top, followed by Krishna, then Balarama’s wife (who is only mentioned in passing, as Revati, the elder “vahini” or sister-in-law), followed by Krishna’s wife Rukmini, and then Subhadra at the bottom. Everybody in the family is concerned about Subhadra’s future, and yet, without the consent of Balarama, no amount of concern or intercession will amount to anything. Balarama has decided, against the wishes of all others, that his sister should marry Duryodhana. This familial hierarchy can be felt in both moments of jest as well as sententiousness, and it affects the lowliest servants as much as it affects the sages. A few examples alert us to the social constraints faced by many of the characters. Subhadra’s servant Saranganayana routinely relays information to Revati vahini, as a kind of spy, knowing which, Subhadra feels the need to find menial tasks for her to do to keep her away while Subhadra speaks candidly with Kusumavati, the loyal servant (44–5). In yet another moment, when Rukmini tries to convince Krishna to intercede more forcefully on Subhadra’s behalf, Krishna asks if she

wishes to sow discontent between him and Balarama (59). The stage direction at this moment reads “under the pretense of anger” letting us know that while he sees the import of his wife’s counsel, Krishna’s jesting is also subject to the patriarchal power structures at the palace, and he does not bear the same amount of authority as his elder brother.

While there are all these temporal and patriarchal forces constraining the characters in various ways, there is also a force of divine providence working to ensure that things resolve in an equanimous manner for all. If social hierarchies govern interactions and the fates of characters’ lives in one system, Krishna’s guiding hand works some complex machinery to ensure stability in another way. Kirloskar’s text routinely depicts characters who doubt Krishna’s benevolence, while others remind skeptics of the need to remain faithful. At the very beginning, forlorn upon hearing news of his beloved’s betrothal, Arjuna asks Narada if Krishna is content with Duryodhana as a husband for his sister. Narada replies, “tu agadi bhola aahes. tyache kapat tula kase kalanaar” [you are very silly. How can you understand his guile] (28)? And we find this sentiment repeated later when Subhadra laments her position and Kusumavati comforts her, reminding her that in her time of need the demon Ghatotkach kidnapped her to prevent her marriage to Duryodhana (45). In act four, when Rukmini scolds Krishna for not doing more to help Subhadra, he finally reveals his plans to her, mollifying any remaining concern that Rukmini harbors for the eponymous heroine of the play (61). Krishna’s counsel and plans, however, are only finalized after the approval of the royal sage, Garga Muni, who personally assures Krishna that only his guile can cure Subhadra of her fate, and Balarama of his stubbornness (37).

Therefore, on the one hand, Krishna's divine machinations provide a fitting resolution for the vast majority of situations, but only after the royal sage Garga Muni sanctions them. His authority on religious and social rites even placates Balarama's paternal anger at the end of the play. The complexity of this scheme, however, is not so simple as it appears with a Brahmin priest 'sanctioning' divine plans. While Garga Muni does give his approval for Krishna's plans, Krishna concocts them on his own, and only later tells Garga Muni about them and solicits Garga Muni's advice. As a character, therefore, Garga Muni holds a certain amount of religious 'overarching' authority in his dealings with Balarama, but he does not have an omniscient gaze into the past and future. This is precisely the impetus of the message Narada (another sage) delivers to Arjuna, when he suggests that Arjuna remain patient in the face of a situation in which the odds are stacked against him. It has quite a few implications for the dynamics between spiritual and patriarchal authority, as well as temporal dimensions within the play.

Where "spiritual" temporalities are concerned, humans seem to have less ability to change their fate and can ask for divine intervention to ameliorate the consequences of their actions. Draupadi's five husbands are a case in point in this matter, and the explanations of past lifetimes and their effects in a current lifetime have been interpreted by scholars of the *Mahabharata* such as J.A.B. van Buitenen (1973) as fundamentally lacking a system of human agency. He writes, speaking about the background stories and un-expiated offences from past lifetimes in the epic, "Such further elaborations are disappointing because they rob the human actors of much of their motivation. Bhishma's noble vow is reduced to the automatic consequence of a curse by a sage, angered over, of all things, a cow. The elaborations are disappointing also because they show little respect

for the Gods themselves” (*The Mahābhārata* xx). While he refers to the various background stories within the Mahabharata, his point is especially topical here, since S.K. Kolhatkar, a nineteenth century critic of Kirloskar’s *Soubhadra*, and playwright himself from the 1890s-1920s, provides a similar analysis of the play, if not the entire structure of the *Mahabharata*. Kolhatkar complains at length about the use of Garga Muni in the plot, as well as the need to have Arjuna sent into exile on the pretense of a robbery, and Krishna’s hand in purposefully placing Arjuna’s weapons in Yudhisthira’s chamber where Arjuna would indubitably intrude on the conjugal relations between his brother and Draupadi.

Kolhatkar asks why, if there are so many simpler ways to unite Arjuna and Subhadra, does Kirloskar recreate all the background stories that are not in the original Mahabharata, but only added later by the poet Moropant (1729-1794)? And why does Kirloskar add a part for Garga Muni, who is entirely his own invention (Kolhatkar 243–5)? These moments, according to the playwright and critic Kolhatkar, cast doubt on Kirloskar’s abilities as a playwright, and also appear disrespectful to Krishna (245), because they depict Krishna as a duplicitous manipulator. Paired together, both Kolhatkar and van Buitenen seem to be birds of a feather, and yet their critiques have some validity, and upon a first reading, it does appear that neither Arjuna nor the other human characters, nor even the semi-divine Balarama, have any agency of their own. However, van Buitenen’s point seems a little contradictory, if we consider his comment on the over-arching structure of the Mahabharata, that,

...the plot is extremely complex. The succession rights of the male descendents are a genealogist’s nightmare, and, to me at least, there is little doubt that the story was in part *designed* as a riddle. Whatever

historical realities may also have been woven into the epic, it is not an accident of dynastic history; however fortuitous its career of expansion, the epic is not an accident of literary history. The grand framework was a *design* (*The Mahābhārata* xvi; italics original).

Such a comment begs interrogation: how can something have a grand design while at the same time be critiqued for not giving its characters sufficient agency? Of course, one could say that the grand design considers the workings of an author, whereas the characters internally can be written or composed with agency, and need not have so many superfluous explanations explicating their every motive from the drawing of an arrow to the furrowing of an eyebrow. However, bringing the play *Soubhadra* into this debate—since it is, after all, a part of the epic—one can see that there is a deeper significance to Krishna’s endless conspiracies to unite Arjuna and Subhadra.

On the one hand, it is a little hypocritical for van Buitenen and Kolhatkar to ask for agency in texts that are so entrenched within a religious framework. There are, in essence, two “authors” at work here: due consideration must be given to the common understanding of the human author who composed each work, but there is also the divine author of the epic. By “divine” author I do not mean the legendary Ganesha, who wrote the Mahabharata as Vyasa narrated it to him; rather, Krishna as God who creates and concocts all things at will. This is a crucial point to consider since the logic of the text, I believe, does provide for human agency, just not a perfectly individuated agency wherein each character may do whatsoever s/he wishes. My response to these two critics is: how can we search for a “secular” ideology—of agency and human growth—in a text that is already over-determined by a religious rationale? Kolhatkar wants originality—in the sense of the original story—but that “originality” is inconsistent with what he wants to

see ideologically in the play: characters with agency. In the original case, characters are already overdetermined by the structure of the religious narrative, and “agency” seems to be anachronistic and inconsistent with the ideological paradigm enveloping such a religious narrative. In some senses, Kirloskar’s decision to append the play with his own materials falls directly in concordance with what van Buitenen also criticizes the Mahabharata for: having too much background and too little agency for the characters, but Kirloskar’s additions remain consistent with a religious paradigm, and outside the secular paradigm of “agency.”

However, as literary and dramatic devices, the background stories in the play create dramatic moments—and rather than attenuating the emotional odyssey, the background stories all heighten the various moods of the play.<sup>58</sup> Kirloskar uses near misses frequently to increase the dramatic irony of a situation, and watching Arjuna in disguise as a *sanyasi* is quite comic too, especially since Subhadra becomes his favorite attendee, and all others begin to complain about how partial he is to her. Since there is no such a thing as coincidence in fiction, and everything is always written by an author, we need to refrain from prescriptive criticism and allow Kirloskar, as the human author of this text, some freedom to compose a play that entertains conventional ways of creating dramatic moments rather than insist upon some vague secular notions of agency in what is a fundamentally religiously-inspired text.

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<sup>58</sup> In a letter dated October 21, 1882, Mahadev Chintamanaji Apte suggests that Kirloskar include more variety in the play, to offer more to the audience. He writes, “Shakuntala has all the rasas. In the summary you gave me of *Soubhadra*, there is only the anguish of separation between men and women, aside from that I did not see anything. So that there will at least be some comedy [vinod rasa] in it, I suggest to you that you imitate the conversations between Shankar and Parvati in the *Kumarasambhava*. And you should include other things too...” (Desai 23). The *Kumarasambhava* is a court epic written sometime in the fifth century CE, about how Parvati won Shiva’s love.

At the same time, in a play such as *Soubhadra*, religious ideology affirms agency through faith, if we consider the way in which various characters eventually get their way by redoubling their faith in Krishna. Neither van Buitenen nor Kolhatkar consider this point. It is not that everything is concocted from the beginning; it is more that devout characters eventually have their wishes fulfilled, whereas others are simply cast aside or ignored. This is true of both characters that are living through various reincarnations, such as Draupadi, as well as characters within a single lifetime, such as all the characters within this play. Furthermore, in this play, Garga Muni is the primary authority in the “spiritual” realm, but relies on Krishna to make decisions; within the space of “patriarchal,” authority, Krishna is always second to his elder brother Balarama. As is evident, there are rigid hierarchies within the society depicted on stage that foreground the authority various characters hold, but those hierarchies are complex and fluid too. My concern is more with the intersecting spheres of power that permit or prevent the agency of a character rather than the more minute details of that hierarchy.

The intersecting spheres of power are important to consider, because barring a few instances of criticism, 'critiques' of this play (and other plays) have largely circumvented both the idealized-epic resolution and the literariness of the text in favor of a passing reference to it as a play about companionate marriage, before going into a lengthy discussion about marriage or popular culture or some other topic for which the play serves as a convenient moment of departure. An example of this approach occurs in Raminder Kaur's otherwise very informative book, *Performance Politics and the Cultures of Hinduism*. Citing another scholar, she writes that it was much easier to watch a play about child marriage such as *Sharada* (1899; the next play I discuss, see below) than to

hear a lecture about the same topic, since the play contained meaningful songs that people could retain more easily, but then she never actually mentions anything else about the play's "performative politics" (73).<sup>59</sup> If Kaur wants to use these plays as examples to demonstrate performative politics, a detailed reading of the play's context in the performance traditions of India, as well as a literary reading is in order. The secondary material on these plays is often scattered, inaccurate, and not in English. All these problems need to be taken into account before making such bold claims about the importance of theatre (Kaur 73).

Another scholar, Jaswandi Wamburkar-Utagikar, also treats *Sharada* in a similar manner. In a nine-page article, she only begins to talk about the play six pages in, and then expends a lot of ink giving a plot summary and further context for the play (see Wamburkar-Utagikar). Sadly, this rich literature often receives this kind of hasty treatment from many scholars, and even those with the best intentions seem to disregard the popular experience of important nationalist debates and social reform by refusing to seriously consider the theatre beyond a purely historicist reading—literature that affected social discourse on many important issues, precisely because of the aesthetic pleasure of

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<sup>59</sup> Instead, she does the same thing with yet another play from 1907, *Kichak-Vadha*, where, even after citing three separate secondary sources, she still incorrectly says that Yudhisthira was dressed as Draupadi in the Kichaka episode of the Mahabharata, when it was Bhima, the more family-oriented brother, who dressed as Draupadi in order to kill Kichaka (Kaur 73). But the problems are not with a simple typo or factual error, but rather with the fact that when K.P. Khadilkar wrote the play, he changed the final battle scene between Kichaka and Bhima to a Shaivite temple, to which Draupadi herself leads Kichaka. There, Bhima is dressed as Bhairav, the destructive avatar of Shiva, and he steps into view from out of a statuesque pose. To talk about this play is to talk about how various folk traditions in India have actors and actresses who, when they play a god on stage, *are* that god incarnate. Leaving this out of her analysis about 'performative politics' seems like omitting an important detail. *Kichaka-Vadha* is a play designed to show the split between the pacifist liberals in the Indian National Congress and the more militant nationalists, where the pacifist liberals are compared to Yudhisthira, and the militant nationalists to Bhima. Kichaka represents Lord Curzon, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India from 1889-1905. Killing Kichaka, on stage, therefore, acquires a heavy handed political significance, and the play was labeled "seditious" and even made news in the Times of London ("A Seditious Drama of the Deccan"; Solomon 1994).

experiencing its liveness. As I tried to show in the previous chapter, the aesthetic is created specifically in the absence of political rights, and so the relationship between politics, and literary and theatrical aesthetics is especially close in nineteenth century India. Not only does ignoring the aesthetic, therefore, undermine the ideal of writing history—recreating human experience for a present audience—but it also undermines the ethical imperative of hearing voices from the past.

In any case, speaking about the literariness, its performance, the intersecting spheres of power as depicted in the play, and the historical circumstances in tandem, allows us to see that *Soubhadra* deserves more than a passing glance not simply because it is a complex literary text with a sophisticated method that merely reflects a historical circumstance. Rather, considering the literariness and power dynamic within the play enables an enriched historical understanding in which the play produces an ideal to which society can aspire. It transforms the fractured religious debates, certainly over marriage, and also debates over spiritual and political authority, into an ideal representation guided by the hand of God, which in turn enables the agency of various characters who are then free to pursue their choice in marriage—a choice that incorporates sexual desire as a criterion for compatibility. Finally, it is also crucial to understand the work this play does, especially in light of the next play I discuss, *Sangit Sharada*, which paints a non-epic, non-idealized resolution to the issue of companionate marriage.

An investigation of whether characters in *Soubhadra* have agency or not ought to begin with the context of this play and its title. The name of the play itself is indicative of some sort of change in the representation of characters. Around the time Kirloskar decided to adapt the episode from the *Mahabharata*, there were, according to Bhimrao

Kulkarni's introduction, many stories entitled "Arjuna-Subhadra Vivaha" [the Marriage of Arjuna and Subhadra] ("Soubhadracha Abhyas" 9). Some of these owed a lot to Moropant's (1729-1794) *aakhyan*, while others owed a lot to the *Bhagavat Purana*.<sup>60</sup> To take an episode from the *Mahabharata*, and then to change its nature from a religious text to an *aakhyan* or to a sentimental play is in itself quite important, since it denotes a shift in the expectations the playwright has of his audience—asking them to be more emotionally involved rather than have a religious experience, or learn a specific lesson. Changing the title, however, suggests also a change in the nature of the characters, from ones who are part of a religious framework, to ones who at least seem active and whose ends are not simply pre-determined. It suggests one more thing: the play that Kirloskar wrote is purportedly "A Musical about Subhadra." Even though Arjuna's name is erased from the title, one has to assume that he will be a character in the play, but shifting the focus of the play to Subhadra is a tip of the hat towards, I believe, debates over women's issues that were part of the late nineteenth century social landscape. This is particularly strange given the kind of demands van Buitenen and Kolhatkar have of a character's "agency" since Kirloskar shifts our attention away from the event—the marriage—to a character in the story, Subhadra. This shift is the only self-conscious gendering of the play: Kirloskar's title announces that Soubhadra will be the heroine of her play, rather than any of the other characters.

So what kind of agency does Subhadra have? She seems, for the most part, helpless: kidnapped by demon, at the mercy of the next auspicious astrological moment

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<sup>60</sup> A fable, story, apologue, or parable; The *Bhagavat Purana* is one of many religious texts, or *puranas*, that were composed between the third and tenth centuries CE. The *Bhagavat Purana* is widely considered one of the more important puranas, and contains the stories of the ten avatars of Vishnu, in addition to the deeds of Krishna, which are an important foundation for various *bhakti*, or faith based, movements in India.

when she will marry Duryodhana rather than her beloved Arjuna. I believe that narrowing in on the characters that are most incidental to the plot of *Soubhadra* can be a useful beginning to answer this question. Garga Muni, the chief priest, provides us with some insight into what kind of agency Subhadra has. His somewhat underdeveloped presence in the play bears the brunt of Kolhatkar's ire, and is also a point that Bhimrao Kulkarni mentions in his 2007 introduction to the play. B. Kulkarni explains that since the troupe had trouble recruiting actors who were able to sing well, the actor playing the sage Narada at the beginning had to quickly change attire to play Krishna in the second act. It would have been ideal if Narada blessed Arjuna and Subhadra at the end, but since the final scene requires Krishna's presence, and given the limited availability of talented actors, Kirloskar added the character of Garga Muni in his version order to solve his practical problems of recruiting enough talent ("Soubhadracha Abhyas" 11). However, while Garga Muni appears on stage only in the final scene, his name is tossed around earlier, and he thus looms large as a presence within the play who holds some kind of authority.

Subhadra has agency only insofar as there are people such as Garga Muni and Krishna to vouch for her, and Rukmini and Kusumavati to participate in her stratagems. That is not, however, a small amount of agency. If one considers that those intervening on her behalf are none other than Krishna and the royal sage in their spiritual capacities, but also a sibling and a religious authority in another sense. It is an ability to manipulate the double role of Krishna that gives Subhadra the ability to determine her own fate. As the youngest sibling she has little say, but is also spoiled and probably gets her way. She

is able to use that to her advantage by fending off the nosy servant who works for the elder sister-in-law and forming a kind of alliance with the other servant, Kusumavati.

While the agency posited for a woman here appears very limited, mitigated by familial obligations and religious authorities, this ideal representation depicts the ways in which a woman does have some control over her own future. It does not stand up to our standards today, nor does it posit a woman as an autonomous subject whose life is in none but her own hands. A perfectly autonomous subject (without any obligations) seems difficult to find anywhere in literature of the time period, whether male or female, except in *Sharada*, as I explain below. Instead, the kind of agency Subhadra has aligns in many ways with the standards described by Meera Kosambi in *Crossing Thresholds* (2007). Kosambi first defines agency in terms of three categories used by Ronald Inden: “‘agents who act purposively and reflectively; ‘instruments’ through whom agents fulfill their desires; and ‘patients’ who are the recipients of the acts of others, ‘to be variously pacified of punished, saved, reformed, or developed’” (*Crossing Thresholds* 16). While Kosambi goes on to suggest, as part of her own argument, that “Male reformers and anti-reformers in Maharashtra always acted as agents and constructed women as permanent ‘patients’ who, in Inden’s sense, received their acts” (*Crossing Thresholds* 16), in the idealized world of Kirloskar’s *Soubhadra*, we see quite a different phenomenon. We see a situation in which women’s agency, Subhadra’s in this case, though highly contingent upon many factors, is enabled by those factors. Despite a highly contingent ability to manipulate her own fate, Subhadra does choose her own husband, and she does so on her own, without becoming a patient, or an instrument. The play, with its ideal joint-family, seeks to concretize family bonds while also enabling personal—Subhadra’s—desires to

gain a voice, gain an audience, and gain, ultimately, the husband she desires. Agency, desire, and subjectivity are mutually reinforcing, and Subhadra has to negotiate her way through various social networks that limit and enable her to gain what she wants, and thus also maintain her sense of self and subjectivity.

I consider a play such as Kirloskar's *an ideal* not to contradict Kosambi's reading, but instead to reaffirm her theoretical insight. Kosambi's description in the chapter entitled "Home as Universe" compellingly portrays the extent to which social life *was* family life, and the pervasiveness of family as an institution, certainly beyond an immediate nuclear family, and most frequently in an extended family situation. By writing a play that depicted such an important divine family, Kirloskar attempted to placate conservative elements within Indian—mostly Brahmin—society, while also ceding some ground to liberal reformers. By contrast, *Sharada*, which I consider below, makes no attempt to envision an ideal—neither in religious terms nor familial ones. *Sharada* neither placates conservatives nor necessarily mollifies liberals, and instead critiques both extremes without any ideologically uncontentious "resolution." Kirloskar's Subhadra, however, finds herself instead in a position where "the extended family function[s] and [is] viewed as an indispensable support structure and, indeed, as the only viable way of life" (Kosambi *Crossing Thresholds* 104), thus portraying a situation wherein familial ties are not destroyed, and where the fabric of society remains intact.

Subhadra's familial bonds also find expression in the space of her residence, which is quietly sequestered, with multiple layers of separation between her individual self and "society at large." In this seclusion, however, Subhadra still has access to "society at large," where gender segregation is difficult to impose for practical reasons.

Meals would have been one such occasion, when segregation would have been impossible. As Kosambi notes, “On social occasions involving meals it was impossible to conceal the women—short of veiling them—because it was a matter of courtesy for the women of the house to serve the dinners” (*Crossing Thresholds* 109). Similarly, “two spaces outside the home were usually available to such women during their daily routine—the river bank, where they would wash clothes and fetch water for household use in the morning; and the temple, where the *puja* was held every evening, and sometimes also *kirtans*. These spaces served as legitimate meeting places for informal gatherings of neighborhood women. Here, confidences were shared and gossip exchanged, and female solidarities formed and sustained” (120; italics original). When Subhadra interacts with those outside her immediate family, she does so in precisely these spaces at during the aforementioned occasions—at temples, river banks and seashores, and during meals. She even serves Arjuna, in disguise as a *sanyasi*, during a ritual dinner.

We learn about the ritual dinner only post hoc, in a dialogue between Krishna and Balarama (Balavant Kirloskar 52). This is the first time in the entire play the two of them—Subhadra and Arjuna—interact, but it all owes to the fact that Arjuna can take liberties owing to his disguise as an austere holy man unbeknownst to anybody aside from Krishna. And what does Arjuna do during the dinner? Krishna sings about it—that Arjuna ogles her beyond belief, so much so that he nearly chokes on his food and crosses his eyes with lust (Balavant Kirloskar 52–3). As a result of this observation, Krishna counsels Balarama against favoring Arjuna-in-disguise, knowing full well that the ever so stubborn Balarama will insist on his own version of things. Krishna’s anticipation proves

correct: Balarama dismisses Krishna's advice as manipulative, and even goes out of his way to call Krishna a "nastik" or an atheist—and we as members of the audience are aware that Krishna, though manipulative, has counseled Balarama wisely.

Therefore, in order to understand the formal qualities of the aesthetics in this play, one needs a finely tuned understanding of social space, and how that social space is deployed to produce comic moments, such as these. The conversation between Krishna and Balarama describes the ritual dinner, which is not part of the play. The conversation is nonetheless written in such a way as to enable a form of social realism in the play: Subhadra does not come out to greet Arjuna the *sanyasi* in some drawing room when he comes to visit, but instead only interacts with him while performing some very specific socially ordained functions: serving a meal. It needs to be mentioned, furthermore, that all this takes place during the third act of the play, and also that Arjuna and Soubhadra construct each other as objects of sexual desire, though Subhadra does not do so in this scene.

Kirloskar's sensibility for socially ordained and acceptable spaces for women to interact with others from "outside" the home is not limited to the times Subhadra serves Arjuna at mealtime. Balarama, ever so stubborn, decides against Krishna's advice to invite Arjuna the *sanyasi* to stay at the palace, and invites him anyway. Balarama's purpose is to ensure that Subhadra will not feel despondent after her erstwhile abduction, and also to convince her that Duryodhana is a suitable spouse. Balarama believes that Arjuna, as a *sanyasi*, will have an ennobling influence on her, and suggests that Arjuna stay at the temple adjacent to Subhadra's palace. Of course, there have to be some liberties taken to write a play, but it seems significant that this is the decision the figure of

patriarchal authority, Balarama, takes. Similarly, towards the end of the play, when the entire royal entourage sets out to take a ritual bath at the seashore to observe an auspicious occasion, Arjuna and Subhadra elope to a temple. Thus, we can see that in this play, Kirloskar conforms to the gendering of space, permitting the women to interact with strangers in realistically “proper” spaces. Barring the opening act when Subhadra is abducted to avoid her wedding, at all other moments, Kirloskar choreographs the play in accord with a socially and historically accurate understanding of space, hence the resolution is idealistic and realistic at the same time.

As a result of the careful attention to social custom, Kirloskar’s play, while mythic and religious in its orchestration, also maintains an unqualified and meticulous realism when it comes to family relations and the negotiation of gendered roles and spaces. In effect, the framework of the story of Subhadra and Arjuna is brought to bear on the issue of companionate marriage, and that same framework is wrought and crafted to fit the social scenarios a bride-to-be would face. Subhadra demonstrates the aptitude to manipulate the family hierarchy—as demonstrated when she pleads her case not only to Krishna, but also Rukmini, and the faithful servant Kusumavati.

The divine status of her family adds religious significance to the play in a way that would not have been present were the play about any random pair of lovers. But the religiosity of the play is always underplayed, in terms of Garga Muni and Krishna. It is never heavy-handed, and never quotes from a religious text, nor alludes to one. It is ideal because it is didactic by example and does not contain any lengthy excursus about religion, nor a religious disputation—as Kolhatkar would like to see (Kolhatkar 243). It has obvious religious overtones without being religious, and to make it just a little less

threatening (as I mentioned earlier), the main characters of the play are Ksatriyas, even though the playwright, many actors, and portions of the audience, would have been Brahmins. Garga Muni and Narada, the only Brahmins in the play, reinforce the actions Krishna (a Ksatriya) takes, as though to sanction his actions with the weight of their doctrinal authority. Thus, *Soubhadra* entertains the notion of a companionate marriage and sexual desire as a criterion for it. In a play such as *Sangit Soubhadra*, the hand of god as Krishna is ever-present to guide his devotees to their desired end; it just so happens that his devotees in this case are his younger sister and maternal cousin, who successfully conform to the etiquette of social space, and make use of it whenever they are able. Thus, Krishna's guiding hand does not hamper agency, but rather, because of faith, empowers devotees to gain their hearts' desire. Subhadra's and Arjuna's faith thus enables them to choose and legislate their own future, without which they cannot be "true" subjects, in a way similar to the way Dushyanta must wage war in *Shakuntala*, to regain his identity.

If we take a macroscopic analysis into account, there is yet another aspect of this play that makes the social spaces of the play important. In the debates over gender and gender roles, Ashis Nandy notes that the late nineteenth century saw the creation of a kind of homogenous masculine ethos in Hinduism that displaced other systems of values. In his book, *The Intimate Enemy* (1983), he argues that the new masculinity erased "values" that stem from femininity, childhood, or old age (Appadurai 747). Nandy points out that earlier in the century, and in different schools of thought, androgyny was seen as superior to both masculinity and femininity, owing to an ability to transcend the man-woman dichotomy (53). According to him, the psychological intervention of colonial ideology reorganized relations of gender in order to displace androgyny from its superior

position and instead created the relationship as: Masculinity > Femininity > Effeminacy (52).

Contemplating the configuration of gender in *Soubhadra*, we see something akin to the ideology of *Shakuntala* from the last chapter, but one that less severely punishes Arjuna for being a little too eager—the way Dushyanta is a little too eager to marry Shakuntala. Arjuna must reconfigure his own sexuality by “purifying” his lust for Subhadra by performing a period of austerity as the sage-in-disguise, however comic it may be, and however insincere. Such a reconfiguration raises a further interrogation of Kolhatkar’s 1903 critique of the play, while also foregrounding the question of agency, yet again, but for Arjuna.

Kolhatkar finds it somewhat unsatisfying that Arjuna is depicted as “utavala”—meaning “hasty” or “impetuous”—and we can see his impatience early in the play when he interacts with the sage Narada (243). However, this literal translation of the word omits an important cultural definition. To describe someone, especially a man, as “utavala” is to suggest that he is a little effeminate and also “child like” because he cannot control himself or is overly eager. This child like nature is also seen, according to the psychology of colonial domination, as a kind of behavior to discourage and reform, according to Nandy (16).<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Kolhatkar is also unsatisfied by the way Krishna coolly hands over the reins to Garga Muni at the very end, instrumentalizing his religious authority to placate Balarama rather than doing it himself. Finally Kolhatkar feels as though Balarama’s anger is too easily placated (243), especially since Balarama’s

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<sup>61</sup> Nandy distinguishes between “child like” behavior and “childish-ness”. The former is seen, according to him, as “corrigible” whereas childish-ness has to be repressed and controlled by law and administration (16). I am not making that distinction here because I do not think *Soubhadra* substantiates such a reading, but I do think Arjuna can be read as slightly child like because of his impatience.

immediate reaction is, “Ghalin palthi pruthvi/ swarg padin khalti/ baghto jatse kothe/ dustha chandal to yati” which translates as, “[I’ll] overturn the world/ knock down heaven/ [I’ll] see where he goes/ depraved outcaste ‘holy-man’.” Such strong words are not placated so convincingly, according to Kolhatkar, nor should Garga Muni make that conciliatory gesture. Instead, Kolhatkar says, since, “Bharatat buddhivadacya joravar va pantancya vinayabalane krushna balaramace samadhan karitana dakhvile aahe...he kalecyia drustinehi cangle nahi” which translates as “In India, discussions about the confrontation between Krishna and Balarama have been carried on by the strength of pandit’s ideas and force of wisdom...so this [resolution] is not good from the point of view of dramatic art” (243).

On the one hand, these two complaints—of Arjuna’s impatience and Krishna’s refusal to take the reins—compliment Nandy’s ideas quite well: Kolhatkar is writing in 1903, about a play first performed twenty years earlier, but one that has nonetheless remained extremely popular. Kolhatkar’s dissatisfaction over Arjuna’s effeminacy and the fact that Krishna does not take responsibility for his actions highlights a shift in attitudes towards gender the end of the century. We find a wide range of male sexuality in *Soubhadra* (Garga Muni the ascetic, Arjuna the eager hero, Balarama the paternal tyrant, Krishna the god as manipulator, and those I spoke about with *Shakuntala* in the last chapter). Women’s sexuality too, has many different definitions—Subhadra is manipulative and expresses desire, Rukmini is a good sister-in-law and wife, Revati Vahini is a tyrannical sister-in-law, and the two servants also mimic the examples of the Subhadra or Revati. However, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century expectations had shifted quite dramatically, as I further demonstrate with *Sharada*. But I

wonder whether both issues cannot be thought of differently in order to further unmask the ideological work of this play. Agency—since this discussion is about male and female agency both in the world of the play and in Indian society during the late nineteenth century—seems to be enabled rather than curtailed by the way Kirloskar writes Arjuna's character. He is one of the few characters who does change in the play, and his final act of waiting for the opportune moment to marry Subhadra speaks of maturity and not child like impetuosity. As I mentioned earlier, Kolhatkar asks why Arjuna does not marry Subhadra earlier, since Arjuna is, after all, residing at the palace and Subhadra does look after him. The answer is that Arjuna must change, mature, and become an adult. He must become the epic hero he is destined to be. Kolhatkar's complaints about Krishna and Balarama, on the other hand, reveal yet another social dynamic than his dissatisfaction with Arjuna's character. As I mentioned already, Indian society in the 1880s actively debated marriage, women's improvement, and other social issues—as has been documented by many scholars, in addition to those I mentioned above. Using Garga Muni, the royal sage, to placate Balarama rather than have a serious disputation on stage, I believe, is a nod to those public debates. And it is a dismissal of those debates too, since none other than the royal sage tells Balarama to cool off, and accept the marriage that has taken place. Furthermore, by the logic of the play, Krishna does not wish to sow discontent between himself and his elder brother—as he warns Rukmini earlier.

While *Soubhadra* is broadly a play about companionate marriage, it envisions an ideal, organic society. Its organic society, wherein each member of the family has a limited access to power, also conforms to an understanding of the *Arthashastra* (approximately 400-300 BCE), which, along with the *Manusmriti* (200 BCE-400CE) and

*Kamasutra* (300-400 CE), provides a model for understanding the nature of the household in traditional Indian society. Kukum Roy points out that “The physical aspects of the ideal royal residence are laid down at great length in the *Arthashastra*, where it was conceived of as constituting the literal and figurative center of the polity” (21). Within the royal residence, she mentions that the women’s place was in the farthest interior, alongside the residence of the royal children, and was surrounded by all sorts of pleasure grounds, sacrificial precincts, and so on (K. Roy 22). These few points are important given that Subhadra is both child (as the youngest) and a woman, and she is first abducted by the demon while she takes a walk in her garden. Roy later mentions that, “If...the royal household was conceived of as providing a model for the rest of society, the model could have been interpreted in more ways than one” (K. Roy 27).

Kirloskar does not take up the torch of multiple interpretations for a household, to Kolhatkar’s disapproval, but he does conceive of his play as a model for the rest of society, without a need to have straightforward disputation of religious dogma. He instead shows us a world where power circulates with polyvalent clusters of authority, where no character has a monopoly over decisions, and one in which gender also has a number of definitions, for both men and women. In some ways, the need for a debate is unnecessary in *Soubhadra*: its characters each get a little of what they want without stepping on too many toes. It is a play wherein Subhadra and Arjuna are both able to manipulate the outcomes to their benefit, provided they learn a little patience and place a greater amount of faith in Krishna. Krishna, Balarama, and Garga Muni, therefore, represent various kinds of paternal, and spiritual authority. These valences are crucial to keep in mind as we turn our attention to *Sharada*, but there is yet another aspect of the palace or residence

that needs to be explored, returning our discussion full circle to Partha Chatterjee's spiritual and material binary.

While it is true that I used Chatterjee's scheme variously above to speak about how various authorities in the play operate, notably while speaking about the spiritual authority Garga Muni bears against the paternal authority of Balarama, the way power circulates in the world of the play seems incongruous with a material/spiritual binary. Even if we think of Krishna and Garga Muni working in tandem, we still have an idealized depiction of a polity in the play, where both political and domestic life occurs within a single location, albeit with internal subdivisions. As theorized, this play does not bear drastic divisions between inner (spiritual) and outer (material) domains. The physical spaces of the play emerge perfectly in accord with various contextual and historical interpretations—as Kosambi's and Roy's observations suggest, and as Kirloskar himself consciously creates. The inner and spiritual spaces are also somewhat hard to determine, since temples, seashores, and caves are physically “outside” the palace, are “public,” but are still coded as spiritual, especially in terms of the activities people undertake in those spaces.

Instead, I want to suggest that there are no true “material” domains in these plays, only the spaces where unrelated men and women can occasionally “interact.” These are the performative spaces where men and women dine, where religious rituals and festivals take place, at temples, seashores, riverbanks, and sometimes in caves. These spaces do not need to be controlled even though men exhibit the behavior Arjuna evinces when Subhadra serves him dinner, but are instead spaces of humor, jest, and a place to observe people in the capacity of their gender. These are spaces where men observe women's

labor, as though a test of women's fortitude and abilities, while the women are not always aware they are being watched. The gaze in these spaces is doubly coded as vocational in terms of labor as well as sexual, as is the case when Arjuna, disguised as an ascetic, ogles Subhadra. Dushyanta too, from *Shakuntala*, observes Shakuntala at work, as I mention in the previous chapter. Simply naming something outside the home as automatically part of the "material" domain or part of the "world," however, is a little theoretically unsatisfying. It seems that the spaces where non-family men and women interact are always heavily coded as part of something else—ritual meals, rituals, festivals, riverbanks, seashores, temples—and that they, certainly during this time period (around 1880), were never divorced from functions related to the "home."

To speak of a successful theatrical event that became a historical phenomenon in Maharashtra, we must address *Soubhadra* and later *Sharada* in different terms, terms that frequently overlap with those used by Chatterjee to designate specific concepts, but not always. In the case of *Soubhadra*, we can see a split between the analysis of the dramatic text, and an analysis of performance very clearly in Kolhatkar's 1903 essay. By writing *Soubhadra*, Kirloskar posits an ideal in 1883, but Kolhatkar critiques the play in 1903 as though it is a static dramatic text, rather than a work that functions at the level of performance as well. The play was by far one of the most popular written during the "golden era" of Marathi musical theatre from 1880-1920. M.S. Kanade, for example, writing in 1967 about the period from 1884-1890, lists *Soubhadra* as being performed 140 times, which required them to tour nearly constantly. The play was repeatedly performed in cities along the Konkan coast: Mumbai, Kalyan, Panvel, Goa, and as far south as Belgaon, Hubli, and Dharwad, which are in present day Karnataka, and also far

inland from Pune to Nagpur and Amravati. Furthermore, the Kirloskar Theatrical Company also performed in Indore on a number of occasions, and Gwalior and Benares, where the stay was at least one month in each city. There they performed *Soubhadra*, *Shakuntal*, and Kirloskar's incomplete play *Ramrajyaviyog* (1884; "Rama's Exile from his Kingdom").<sup>62</sup> The venues are also a testament to the play's broad appeal. While it was mostly performed in playhouses, it was also performed for private audiences in princely courts, in town halls, schools, and in colleges. Given the availability of the performance record itself, the fact that it was performed in places accessible to a large cross-section of society, and that it was performed 140 times in its first six years, it would be a little foolhardy to speak of this play as "unsuccessful". From Kanade's records, it is also clear that *Soubhadra* was nearly always more popular than the other plays performed by the troupe.

As a result, the faults Kolhatkar finds with the play seem to center more on a dramatic text, and with a literary eye to detail, rather than the view from a perspective of performance. Considering the popularity of the play as performance, we can say that even if we were to read it as directly corresponding to an outside reality, even then it does not conform to clean, functional, and gendered divisions of space. From the point of view of performance, it renders potentially contentious discourses about marriage and compatibility mute by portraying none other than Krishna, who sanctions the choice two lovers make to marry each other, against paternal whim. The play posits an ideal wherein

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<sup>62</sup> These performances were also incredibly profitable, and even in small towns the earnings for one night often exceeded 300 rupees, and in many cases in reached 600-800 rupees for a single performance (Kanade and Sathe 101-17). To put this in perspective, a lower-level civil servant earned barely 200 Rupees per annum during the same time—what would be considered comfortably middle class. See note 23 above for more.

the young lovers are rational enough to choose what's good for them in a spouse, each character gains some satisfactory end, and families remain intact. Kolhatkar's anachronistic critique therefore becomes a marker of social change, since *Soubhadra* does not adequately capture the intellectual milieu of 1903. The critique is the literary musing of someone writing in 1903, when the relationships between genders are far more rigid, as Nandy details, than they were twenty years earlier. Hence, Kolhatkar's complaints about the impatient Arjuna and the deceptive Krishna can be read in light of a broader social change that saw the erasure of heterogeneity, especially in terms of gendered behavior, in the discourse of Hinduism. With a heterogeneous model that had been reduced, the relationship between gender and the concept of agency also changed, precluding heroines from taking matters into their own hands, and reinscribing patriarchal privilege in all matters dealing with women.

Reading the text of *Sangit Sharada* (1899), however, Kolhatkar's desire to see a more masculine epic hero and a less multi-faceted, organic, ideological structure is realized. In some ways, *Sharada*'s depictions of masculinity and femininity are very cleanly and unambiguously defined, and there is less of the heterogeneity we see in *Soubhadra*. My rationale in pairing these two texts is precisely to bring the newly minted gender dynamic into play with the older version of things, and in doing so, also comment upon social change in western India in the late nineteenth century. Such a rationale allows me to comment about historical specifics at the time a play was first performed, and their relevance to a reading of a dramatic text, while also incorporating an interpretation of the performance. This is not necessarily different than the ideological conflict of a "new" and "old" patriarchy, but the social change does accentuate the

limitations of thinking in a paradigm where the spiritual/interior/feminine/superior is poised and posited against the material/exterior/masculine/inferior, especially in a rapidly changing historical climate.

### Deval's *Sangit Sharada*

Govind Ballal Deval's play *Sangit Sharada* (1899) depicts two social issues simultaneously—the marriage of young women to elderly men, and the practice of selling daughters for marriage. Deval accomplishes his task quite differently from Kirloskar. For starters, *Sharada*, is a “realistic” play, and it also does not reach for idealistic resolutions. There are no gods and goddesses, nor are there any epic heroes, demons, or miracles. It is, nonetheless, a play about companionate marriage insofar as it ridicules mismatched marriages, and pairing it with *Soubhadra* yields some interesting insight into the social consciousness of gender, marriage, and agency, just twenty years after *Soubhadra*. The historical conception of gender leading to the composition of *Sharada* was quite different from the one that led to Kirloskar's inspired retelling of the marriage of Arjuna and Subhadra. Unlike Kirloskar, Deval drew his inspiration from the Age of Consent controversy in the 1890s, which I have already described above. While the play never explicitly refers to the Age of Consent controversy, the suppressed voice of a young woman who does not wish to marry her betrothed powerfully reminded people of that controversy, as contemporary scholars such as Bhimrao Kulkarni (in his lengthy introduction to the play) and Jaswandi Wamburkar-Utagikar (2009) point out.

Following a brief summary of the play, I will discuss the split between structure, meaning, and “overall effect” in the play, arguing that while the play structurally is a

five-act play with all the elements—exposition, rising action, climax, and denouement—the meaning generated is outside the fold of that paradigm. It is also outside a paradigm of Sanskrit aesthetics, since there is no clean resolution, order is not restored, and instead the social fabric has undergone a wholesale change. To fill the void left by a social rupture, Deval imagines a situation where a *Jagadguru* literally “World guru” is invited to settle all doctrinal disputes by holding a disputation and forming a kind of council to arbitrate on civil matters such as marriage and function as a quasi-governmental authority. This governmental authority, by symbolically establishing a system for the characters to voice their grievances, functions as an allegory through which Indians can regain control over their own bodies, and over their own desires.

In the play, Sharada is a young woman who desperately seeks a way out of her impending marriage with the wealthy septuagenarian Bhujanganath. At the play’s opening, an actress and the Sutradhar frame the topic as a stain on the Brahmin caste, just before introducing us to Bhujanganath, an elderly widower who is unwilling to accept his old age. Stubbornly resisting calls from the actress, children, and others that he take *sanyas* (the final stage in a Hindu man’s life wherein he renounces worldly possessions and chooses to live an austere holy life of detachment and itinerant travel), he instead thinks of himself as young, and in the prime of life he decides, since it has been four years since his wife died, to re-enter the second stage of life ordained for a Brahmin male: the grihasthashram, or “householder” stage. As he escapes some children who are harassing him, he stumbles across the chief miscreant of the play, Bhadreshwar Dixit (Dixit hereafter), who runs a matrimonial service. Thinking that the taunting kids have been sent by his nephew who is heir the fortune (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 33), and having

never fully recovered from his late wife's death (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 35), Bhujanganath appears simultaneously foolish, stubborn, and at first, a little sympathetic—just a little. He is also the only comic figure in the play. Dixit plays along, and he is soon enlisted to find Bhujanganath a wife. Bhujanganath becomes unsympathetic a little later when Dixit asks him what kind of wife he would like, only to hear that Bhujanganath would like a young wife of fourteen. After some hesitation, Dixit agrees to go about finding him a young wife, especially upon learning that he is serious about spending a lot of money to find one.

Meanwhile, a young social reformer, Kodand, who has vowed to stay unmarried to carry out his social work—whatever it is—overhears the conversation with a friend of his, and gets it into his head that he will stop the marriage at all costs. Act one ends just after Kodand meets Sharada, in a very informal and awkward manner (see below), and just as Sharada and her girlfriends have caught wind of her father's plan to marry her off to the senile Bhujanganath. Sharada herself is in disbelief, has not seen the man in question, but her friends have some idea of him. They begin to tease Sharada, not maliciously, but in disbelief themselves. Act one ends as Sharada sings a prayer to Krishna, asking for his assistance (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 48). Act two introduces us to Sharada's father, Kanchanbhatt, who tells her mother, Indira that he has found an appropriate match for their daughter, and the act ends with Kodand's imprisonment at Bhujanganath's house, all because he asks Dixit and Bhujanganath to reconsider what they are doing.

Things finally heat up in act three, which begins with an extended conversation among Sharada and her friends. The act also contains visits between Kanchanbhatt,

Bhujanganath and Dixit, and Sharada and Bhujanganath. The meeting between Sharada and Bhujanganath is the dramatic climax of the play, and appears neatly in the third of five scenes, and in the third act of a five act play. In the meantime, Kodand escapes after being freed by a servant, and he plots an appropriate course of action to prevent the marriage. Act three ends with a long argument between Sharada and her mother on one side, and the father on the other, and as a result of this familial conflict, Sharada's disappointment, and Kodand's escape, the dramatic action begins to fall. Acts four and five contain the preliminaries before a rather protracted denouement. Kanchanbhatt remains reluctant to change his decision, smitten by Bhujanganath's wealth, and Sharada's maternal uncle tries to intercede on her behalf, but to no avail at first. At the same time, rumors spread about Kodand's planned disruption of the wedding, to the relief of Sharada's companions. And finally, he does disrupt it, by bringing Bhujanganath's nephew and heir, who mentions that Sharada has been inappropriately matched to the septuagenarian because they have the same "gotra" or "lineage," and astrologically are both related to the same Vedic Maharishi. Dixit is arrested, over a sub-plot in which he tries to steal from Bhujanganath, and the latter faints and is taken away by a doctor. Act four ends with a debate over whether or not Bhujanganath and Sharada are actually married, since they have not actually circumambulated the ritual fire.

Act five is mostly a sort of extended doctrinal denouement in which there is a disputation as Kodand invites the chief Brahmin priest of Hinduism—the Jagadguru or "World Guru"—to the small town on the banks of the Ganga to resolve the issue. Ultimately, since Kanchanbhatt is sidelined (and goes insane, psychologically speaking), the maternal uncle agrees to pay for Sharada's wedding but the question of who will

marry Sharada still remains. We find out that the Jagadguru has convinced Kodand to renounce his avowed bachelorhood and live an appropriately Hindu lifestyle by becoming a householder. Sharada and Kodand meet for only the second time on the banks of the river Ganga, when Kodand enters just as she is about to drown herself; he prevents her from drowning herself and also agrees to marry her. We hear that Bhujanganath has also decided to travel to pilgrimage sites and live in accordance with what his age demands, for all practical purposes, as a sanyasi.

In this play, one of the most important things to think about is the conversation between the *sutradhar* (a kind of meta commentator) and actress at the very beginning, that not all people admire drama for the same reasons, some preferring *shringar* (the erotic *rasa*), while others prefer *vira* (the heroic *rasa*), yet others are enamored with *hasya* (humor), or *karuna* (pity). He sings, “Ruci na eka sakalanci/eka avadate/teci dujala navadate” which translates, “taste is not alike for all/one likes/that which another dislikes” (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 31). Within the play, therefore, Deval has two characters frame the emotional climate of the play, and they “internally” theorize about what kind of a play appeals to the broadest audience—a play that contains a variety of characters, and sentiments. Thus, as we begin to watch the play, or read the text of the play, Deval immediately instructs us how to be an audience member: to realize that things we find unsavory may be pleasing to others. We begin with a strong statement about the shared understanding of emotion and Sanskrit aesthetics.

The sutradhar’s and actress’s meta commentary is crucial to keep in mind while considering Deval’s meticulous attention to the structure of the play, which conforms to a strict five-act structure. What I mean is, while elements in the plot can be neatly

designated as “expository” or “introductory” followed by a “rising action”, “climax”, “falling action” and “denouement,” the play is difficult to classify as a comedy or tragedy. There are formal structural elements that conform to a five-act structure, but they fail to generate emotional meaning in exactly the same way as one would expect were one to watch a “comedy” or “tragedy” written by Shakespeare. Deval’s initial meta commentary about *rasa* is partially to blame for this, but we can also see the failure to produce a clean resolution as an index of social change, in which Deval tries desperately to provide a working model for companionate marriage, and he successfully placates the ire of the “old” orthodox patriarchy and also the ire of the “new” patriarchy, but leaves neither party satisfied.

*Sharada* was Deval’s only original play, and it is also only one of two that are still performed with some regularity, the other being *Samshay Kallol* (1916),<sup>63</sup> but unlike the latter, performances of *Sharada* often abridge the play, and make it pure comedy rather than a strange concoction that does not neatly fall into either a purely “comic” or “tragic” mode. The reasons behind such a change in the way the play is performed is really not part of this dissertation, but I do want to think about why the play would not have been perfectly comic, nor perfectly tragic, to an audience in 1899—a point that Banhatti makes as well (*Nāṭyācārya Devala* 214–5). While it is true that many elements in the play are quite “comic” and some quite “tragic”, and the Sutradhar’s proclamation at the very

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<sup>63</sup> Deval’s other plays include *Durga* (1887), an adaptation of Thomas Southerne’s *Isabella, or, The Fatal Marriage* (1694), via David Garrick’s *Isabella* (1757); *Sangit Mrchchakatik* (1887; Little Clay Cart, the Musical), an adaptation and translation of Sudraka’s classical Sanskrit play of the same name; a translation of *Vikramurvashiya* (“Urvashi won by valor”), a fourth century Sanskrit play by Kalidasa as *Sangit Vikramurvashi* (1889); *Junjharrao* (1890), an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Othello*; *Shapa Sabhram* (1893), an adaptation of Banabhata’s seventh century Sanskrit romantic novel *Kadambari*; and *Samshay Kallol* (1916; “Swelling Suspicions”), an adaptation of Arthur Murphy’s *All in the Wrong* (1761) that was performed posthumously.

beginning of the play can be a guide to our reading; while we can find elements of heroism, pathos, erotic attraction, and comic humor throughout the play, simply thinking of the play as tragic or comic, or deriving from Sanskrit aesthetics will be a search that will never find what it is looking for (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 215). Banhatti then continues to explain various aspects of the play, leaving aside the formal aesthetic qualities as useless and ultimately inappropriate to consider, since the play is something else entirely. However, it is precisely in the inability to determine the play's emotional resonances that we must explore to find whether or not we can discern a larger historical consciousness that is nevertheless a bi-product of the aesthetic incongruities between form and content.

The structure of a traditional five-act play depends entirely upon characters who are, by and large, able to create particular outcomes for themselves. *Soubhadra*, for example, contains many such characters who work together. While such a prescriptive and inflexible reading of “tragedy” and “comedy” may seem outdated, it is important to cast *Sharada* in such a light precisely because Deval used the many plays he translated as models for how to write *Sharada*. His choice to write *Sharada* structurally as bending towards a comedy or tragedy, while at the same time using emotional modes and terms that are entirely “Indian,” reminds me of a moment when Kamlakar Nadkarni (1995) describes Indian interpretations of dramatic theory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He writes about the ideas of a well-known public intellectual, Krishnashastry Chiplunkar, and Nadkarni recounts the way Chiplunkar describes the play *Thorle Madhavrao Peshwe* (1864)<sup>64</sup> by

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<sup>64</sup> “Thorle Madhavrao Peshwe” translates as “Madhavrao Peshwa, the senior,” and refers to the Peshwa of the Maratha confederacy during the years 1761-1772.

Vinayak Janardan Kirtane: “Krishnashastry Chiplunkar commented on this play in the May 1865 issue of *Shalapatrak*. He has praised Kirtane for writing a tragedy, which is absent in the Indian tradition. While discussing the play as a tragedy he talks about the ‘overall tragic effect’ and not only the ‘sorrowful end’” (Nadkarni 27). As a play, *Sharada*, in more than a few ways, conforms to an idea of “overall effect”—but that effect is neither tragic nor comic. The overall effect of *Sharada*, despite a marriage at the end, tends to leave us emotionally flummoxed. Neither the way the *sutradhar* and actress theorize the play as one contingent upon the various *rasas* integrated into the performance, nor expectations of dramatic structure adequately provide reasons as to why the play remains so unsettling.

While speaking of Deval’s social realism alongside Henrik Ibsen, the editor of the text, Bhimrao Kulkarni, suggests that Deval’s characters are not the traditional characters of a five-act tragedy or comedy because they have an entirely different consciousness (B. Kulkarni, “Introduction” 9). At the same time, Kulkarni does not tell us exactly what that different consciousness is. The consciousness of the various characters betrays a lack of agency rather than the ability to manipulate one’s fortunes. They cannot choose their own fate, since personal “desire” is not an acceptable trait to have. Sharada is a case in point—and she is entirely aware of how isolated she is within the structure of the patriarchal family, lacking any ability to change her own fortunes. She is very well aware of the few “resources” at her disposal, and as the *sutradhar* suggests, we can only understand Sharada as pathetic, sorrowful, and designed specifically to create a deeply disturbing sense of foreboding—as her prayer to Krishna indicates.

The entire first act situates us in such a way as to believe that the only agency Sharada, the eponymous “heroine” of the play, evinces, is expressed as an incomplete desire. As Kodand addresses the girls near the end of the first act, Sharada muses to herself, “Itka tarun, sundar asun ha ajun brahmachari? Mag kay mhanayca!” The exasperated remark, which translates as, “Being so young, handsome, [and] still unmarried? What to say then!” immediately leads to a song Sharada sings:

jana khulavale / sakal ulata calale /  
 lagna kariti jarath jirna / avivahita firati taruna /  
 sukha asela tyas tyat / pari aamuci matra marana (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 47).<sup>65</sup>

This is a key moment in the play for a number of reasons. On the one hand, it follows an extended moment in which Kodand observes the girls at the temple without revealing his own presence—which I will speak about momentarily—but once he has revealed himself, Sharada constructs him as an object of desire, but nothing so crass as to actually evince any desire for him. Sharada creates Kodand as an object of desire, but her observations remain unleavened, and she herself never becomes a desiring subject. This fact alone shows how limited her agency is. She sees the larger social climate around her—elderly men who seek marriage and young men who have chosen a life of celibacy—and while it sours her views on marriage, she can never translate that dissatisfaction into something tangible. As far as character consciousness is concerned, Sharada is aware of her historical circumstances, but she is unable to translate that awareness into some form of purposive desire, by which she would see herself teleologically moving towards some desired end.

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<sup>65</sup> “People have gone crazy, everything’s upturned,  
 The old and decrepit get married, the young wander unmarried,  
 He must be happy in that, but it’s sure death for us” (my translation).

She can never name her desire, and it remains constantly deferred, and though her father, mother, uncle, and others in the play may give voice to it, Sharada never does. Unlike in the play *Soubhadra*, the eponymous “heroine” of *Sharada* can never name her desire, nor can she successfully ask others to intercede on her behalf. Others in the play speak in horror and in jest later in the play when they describe Bhujanganath’s unsteady neck, his glassy eyes, bald head, and toothless smile (*Sangit Sharada* 73–4), but that disgust and horror never translates into a kind of positive desire for another character in the play. Perhaps no other character interests her, but her inability to express any wish, let alone a desire for a suitable husband, demonstrates how limited her agency is. *Sharada* can only barely resist her father. As a result, there is no course of action for her, beyond that which is drawn by her male relatives.

One critic, S.N. Banhatti (1967), claims that several critics find the ending unsatisfying precisely because despite the incompletely expressed desire for Kodand, wherein Sharada creates Kodand as an object of desire without actually desiring him, the two still end up married.<sup>66</sup> According to those critics (whom Banhatti never mentions), seeing Sharada take her life would be a much more plausible ending (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 227). However, these critics are wrong according to Banhatti because they see *Sharada* principally as a play about social reform. Instead, he says the play ought to be understood as a play highlighting the growing consciousness of morally right and wrong action, which he labels “sadasadvivekbuddhi” (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala*

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<sup>66</sup> One could interpret the way she views Kodand and her prayer to Krishna as two moments where she does express some desire, but it is all an internal monologue (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 47), so only the audience hears what she wants.

228).<sup>67</sup> It would be impossible to have the play develop any other way, according to him, because should Sharada show any desire for Kodand, then she would lose her status as a “sugunamanjiri”—Banhatti’s epithet for her meaning a woman, literally a “flower” exhibiting “good qualities” (su-guna). Similarly, if Kodand were to show any more than a disinterested desire in Sharada’s well-being, then he too would fall short of his purportedly reformist ideals, thus opening himself up to criticism as a sort of lascivious, socially-disruptive insurrectionist. As a result, both Sharada’s and Kodand’s desire for each other must be rendered in ways that show them as desiring subjects, but not subjects who have any particular object for their desire. These are not Banhatti’s exact words, but it is the implicit understanding we must accept if we think about the ways in which he describes the balancing act Deval performs in his play. The semantics of the play, then, create Sharada and Kodand as objects of desire, but subjects whose desire always remains intransitive.

Banhatti does, however, consider Sharada an active heroine. He evaluates her thus owing to an extended argument she has with her father at the end of act three, as well as in act four. Suggesting that her outrage in act four outwits and overcomes her father, but is ineffectual owing to the status of women in Indian society, Banhatti evaluates Sharada as though she is active rather than passive (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 222). This seems somewhat of an overestimation of Sharada’s actual abilities though. She has the ability to react strongly against what she sees as an unjust situation, as she does in act two

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<sup>67</sup> A complicated term with many components, “sadasadvivek” a term with the prefix “sadasad” added to “vivek” refers to, according to the Molesworth dictionary, “Discrimination of the good and the bad or of the right and the wrong” (Molesworth 764). With “buddhi” added to the end of the word, I translated the term as the “consciousness of and ability to” discriminate between the good and the bad, or the right and the wrong.

when a stranger on the riverbank asks her why she is still unmarried, and why her father has not made some matrimonial arrangements yet (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 56). Both situations show her more than capable of reacting to perceived injustice, or even out of fear as she does with her prayer at the end of act one. At the same time, suggesting that this is a sign of her fortitude seems a little misgiven. She merely reacts, but is in no position actually carve out a future. This passive, reactive, resistance, first at the hands of a rumor, then in response to a stranger at the riverbank, and then against the wishes of her father, leaves us fully aware that Sharada is in no way permitted to have thoughts independent of outside circumstances, and cannot take any positive actions to ameliorate her situation.

A further unaddressed concern runs through Banhatti's essay, related to Sharada's inability to positively create a future for herself. It concerns the way Banhatti historicizes the play, and also with his interpretation that in the play, "human values" or "manvi bhavana" ultimately triumph. On the one hand, Banhatti easily dismisses the play's social and historical content, by mentioning that even in 1899, given the fraction of men who would have lived beyond seventy years of age, and the even smaller fraction of those who would have sought to remarry, this play needs to be taken less as social commentary, or even as a play about social reform, and more as an absurdity that nonetheless produces various responses in the audience (Banhatti, *Nāṭyācārya Devala* 223). The "social," if there is one, according to Banhatti, resides purely in the awakened consciousness of "human values" generated by the dramatic situation.

Up to this point, Banhatti's analysis seems rather sensible, especially if the other critics he dismisses argue what Banhatti says they argue. The combination of "human

values” and the absurd situation that generates it, however, is something he explains away too easily, and is, from our vantage point today, somewhat simplistic. For one, if we think about the way I described Kodand and Sharada, as subjects without an object of desire, then Kodand’s decision to marry Sharada too easily and too conveniently becomes some kind of “social work” or chivalry, in which the final act of marriage is not at all rendered from a “companionate” point of view, but as a heroic rescue mission. Kodand’s decision to break his vows and save Sharada reinforces rather than subverts orthodoxy; it does so by creating Sharada as a patient to be saved, who is incapable of making decisions or caring for herself. To suggest the marriage is an affirmation of “human values” seems a little hasty, since the ideological work done by the marriage is less naïve than a simplistic celebration of human values.

Whether chivalrous or not, the marriage does depend upon the character of Kodand—a young male of twenty-four—who has no relations. His parents are dead, and he has no siblings, nor does he seem to have any extended elderly family members to guide or question him—all things which make him undesirable on the marriage market, as Dixit so unctuously points out (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 44). He is a social reformer by “trade,” and has vowed to stay unmarried to carry out his social work. On its own, this fact seems more unrealistic than anything else about this play, since having such a socially alienated person—and only a socially alienated person—as the knight in shining armor proves that social ties of any kind are limiting in terms of social freedom and even social change. At the same time, he certainly is the undisputed hero of this play.

As a hero, Kodand actively pursues whatever objectives he sets for himself. Deval introduces us to the hero of *Sharada* immediately following a scene in which

Bhujanganath decides to remarry, and in which he enlists the matrimonial services of one man, Bhadreshwar Dixit. Our hero, Kodand, is apparently somewhere in the background. He overhears the conversation, and immediately decides, in consultation with his friend, to find any means necessary to prevent the impending marriage. Ironically, Kodand appears more of an eavesdropper than somebody engaged in serious social work. He lurks in the background yet again a little later when Sharada and her friends are about to go to temple. This time he listens overhears their conversation, and offers his own interpretations of the conversation to the audience in a somewhat extraneously didactic manner (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 46). Eventually however, he does reveal himself to the girls, asking them their town of origin, and placating any fears they may have by mentioning that he is a simply curious wayfarer (*Sangit Sharada* 47). This is the same scene in which Sharada identifies him as an object of desire.

These two situations—overhearing the matrimonial arrangements and then watching the girls at temple—are somewhat stained by the way in which Kodand actually interacts with people: what is he doing lurking in the background? His gaze appears scopophilic, anthropological, and somehow strangely observational, as though he is seeing everything for the first time. The social reformer peers into various situations as they occur “naturally,” without disturbing normal social interactions until some further information is needed to prevent the impending marriage. There is a titillating sense of spectatorship, functioning as a proxy for the masculine gaze of the audience, for whom everything on the stage, although already accessible to the audience, is only reaffirmed by Kodand’s comments. His presence both inside and outside the drama’s action at the beginning of the play compels us to interpret his position as one of spectatorship, and as a

result the audience should feel compelled to thwart an impending unsuitable marriage, in the same way that Kodand feels, after he awkwardly loiters and inserts himself into the action of the play. By the end of the play, it seems as though these voyeuristic situations all undergo a thorough reorganization.

The reorganization of various microcosms of “Indian” life evokes a disturbing theme detailed by Bernard Cohn in *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (1995). Arguing in his introduction that colonialism created new ways of representing power, and new ways of making power visible, Cohn writes about various “modalities” used by the colonial state to gather information about newly acquired territories. He lists six used by the colonial state: the historiographic modality, the observational/travel modality, the survey modality, the enumerative modality, the museological modality, and the surveillance modality (Cohn Introduction). Each of these modalities were used for collecting information about peoples, territories, objects, histories, etc...in order to govern effectively and efficiently. The way Kodand moves within and without the action of the play, the way he observes people of the play, and his own relationship to society—somewhat of a lost pilgrim of sorts—these all suggest that he is surveying, enumerating, historicizing, and of course, observing and traveling. He sees the people of the play as we *ought* to see them, and he observes the people as we *ought* to observe them. He enlists our attention and sympathies, asking us to observe Indian society from a late-colonial point of view—one in which all sorts of absurd rituals and orthodox social customs prevail.

For audiences of the nineteenth century, he asks them to observe themselves by stepping outside of the dramatic action, outside of everyday life, just as he is outside of

society because he has no relations. Once we can see from his eyes, using the tools of the colonial state, but in a specifically Hindu way, we can also understand why Sharada's impending marriage needs to be avoided. And it is not because her father is wrong to arrange a marriage, nor is it wrong necessarily because Sharada is unhappy. Rather, it all boils down to an unsuitable "gotra" that has been ignored because of greed. The "gotra" is a kind of religious lineage for Brahmins, where each family has a legendary sage as an ancestor. Marriage between the two people of the same gotra is religiously impermissible—in order to maintain exogamy. Kodand's acute powers of observation discern that things have gone awry. Fathers are selling daughters for financial gain, elderly people are marrying girls, intermediaries who run matrimonial services are running amok and wreaking havoc, and Indian society's most sacred institutions are suffering as a result. All this, because matrimonial arrangements do not follow the letter of religious law—and there is nobody to adjudicate in matters of religious law either!

From Kodand's point of view, everything is demystified, whereas nearly all other characters in the play are unaware of their own state of ignorance—the town priests, men, and women included. But upon interrogating the crux of the unsuitability for marriage further, we realize that Bhujanganath and Sharada cannot marry for one reason, and one reason alone: they have the same "gotra." That is to say, all other factors of unsuitability are completely sidelined by concerns over religious orthodoxy and doctrinal issues. Religious orthodoxy and doctrinal issues, especially in the center-less world of "old patriarchy" primarily, serve the interests of patriarchal power, and the challenge and solution Kodand poses to that power is neither indigestible nor transformative, but merely

a palliative to excise the harshest elements of patriarchal control from the acceptable norms of patriarchal control.

The “old” and harsh patriarchy has its decrees and dictates, and is able to justify itself to women of the play by resorting to perverted notions of religiosity and doctrine. Kanchan Bhatt, Sharada’s father, more than adequately represents the most malevolent aspects of the old patriarchy, which is fraught with a spatial conflation of material and spiritual realms. At first he presents himself as a caring father and husband to Indira Bai, Sharada’s mother, with an offer that is obviously too good to be true—a potential suitor who is appropriate for his daughter and is wealthy. However, Kanchan Bhatt reveals his true persona in act three, as the denouement begins. Kanchan Bhatt wishes to sell his daughter to the highest bidder, irrespective of Bhujanganath’s compatibility with his daughter. Herein lies the “material” realm problem of the play. A lowly civil servant, Kanchan Bhatt’s entire life is regulated by two ritual commitments that he cannot fulfill—his son’s thread ceremony and his daughter’s marriage. On top of it all, he owes money to moneylenders, is quite the hoarder, and insensitive enough to ask his wife how else they would recover the money from the fourteen years they have spent raising Sharada (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 89).

The impoverished situation in which Kanchan Bhatt sees himself can be improved by a perverted logic of gain and luck, as embodied in the double meaning of the word *labhane*, which can be translated as “to profit” or “to gain”, but also has religious connotations when one says by performing such and such rite, you receive a lot of *labha*, or auspicious fortune. The double entendre is carried further, quite crudely, when Kanchan Bhatt asks his wife, “*Shrimantanshi sharirasambandha karanyat kiti labha hoto*

yachi kalpana tari aahe ka tula?” (Deval 88; my italics). Roughly translated, he asks, “Do you realize how much [one] can *profit* by *associating* with *wealthy* people?” The word “shrimanta” literally means “wealthy”, but can also mean “honorable”, or “noble”, whereas “sharirasambandha” can be broken down into “sharira” meaning “body” and “sambadha” meaning “connection” or “relation”. “Sharirasambandha” as a whole, refers to sexual congress in the most clinical, unemotionally uninvolved way. Posing the question to his wife in this way, Kanchan Bhatt has setup a certain sexual economy, yes, but it also overlaps with the materialistic focus that plagues society. Thus, Deval depicts a kind of unhealthy proximity between materialistic concerns and religious occasions. We can see the doubling in the language of the play, which constantly walks the fine line between religious and spiritual overtones and materialistic concerns that provoke the conflict at the heart of this play. The language and Kanchan Bhatt’s ideology, show conflation of ideological “space” in terms of the materialistic and spiritualistic parallels. Each is inseparable from the other.

In such an ideological framework, there is no voice for women, whether wives, daughters, sisters, or any family relation, and certainly not as individuals of their own. Kanchan Bhatt quotes from some shastras—though it is not clear which religious texts—and tries to justify a marriage between a fourteen year-old girl and a man over the age of thirty-five. He says to his wife, who is quite aghast at the thought of it all, “Shastra vachun sangitla tula” (Deval, *Sangit Sharada* 56).<sup>68</sup> Later on, once his wife tries to change his mind, Kanchan Bhatt claims, “Tumhi bayka mhanje adani janavar!” (Deval,

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<sup>68</sup> “[I] read and told you the [word of the] shastras.”

*Sangit Sharada* 88).<sup>69</sup> Remarks such as these, in addition to the ambiguity of language, reinforce the marginal positions women have in Kanchan Bhatt's worldview. They also ask us to think about women's agency, and also the definition of "secular" genre theory, since as a play, *Sharada* is certainly more "realistic" than *Soubhadra* if we think about characters who are "real" people and not mythological, but its characters, aside from a few, have decidedly less agency and are much more exposed to the whims of a few individuals than in the society of *Soubhadra*. The women of *Sharada*, have husbands, brothers and extended family members who are far less supportive than those in *Soubhadra*.

Unlike Subhadra, Sharada does not find herself in a position to appeal to others within her family. There are no relatives aside from her mother to intercede on her behalf, and even the mother eventually has to bend to her husband's will. Her maternal uncle makes a brief appearance, but is as ineffectual as the rest. What makes this play so different from *Soubhadra* is the social alienation felt by Sharada—and alienation that remains entirely her own because of her position as a young woman in a household with nobody to vouch for her. The question then remains, who vouches for her? How does she accomplish anything—or does she accomplish anything? Each time we begin to speak about Sharada's agency, it has to instead be deferred to others in the play, and in general, even displaced outside of Bombay and Pune—where it gained its widest audiences—to a small town on the banks of the Ganga, just a short distance from Varanasi.

The spatial displacement creates the didactic and doctrinal occasion of this play, which both enables and circumscribes female agency—defined by desire and by having

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<sup>69</sup> "You women are just ignorant animals!"

one's desires fulfilled. On the one hand, we finally learn what it means to simply react to situations and not have a positive form of desire for oneself—it means that Sharada is forever doomed to be frustrated until somebody whom she finds suitable manages to rescue her. This is why a simplistic reading of “human values” cannot suffice for a play such as *Sharada*. If there are human values here, then they depend upon a male figure, Kodand in this case, who heroically breaks his vows of celibacy in order to rescue Sharada from her perpetual state of frustrated rebellion, the ultimate expression of which is her near-suicide attempt on the banks of the Ganga.

Setting the play in the proximity of Benaras, the center of the Hindu cosmos, becomes important for the play's resolution. All strands of the play unite in the final act of the play, when Kodand brings the Jagadguru to the small village to settle all doctrinal disputes among the local Brahmin population. This is a particularly important given the situation and historical moment of the play. First performed in 1899, this play evinces a desire to see all matrimonial problems as incontrovertibly settled, by the authority of the Jagadguru rather than a simple, organic, and idealistic resolution as we see in *Soubhadra*. Things do not work out by negotiating and scheming behind the scenes—all those avenues that should function organically, with some coercion, are closed to Sharada. Kodand therefore has to swoop in and save the day by making this play doubly about the spiritual/material binary that Partha Chatterjee speaks about. This is an important change from earlier—when Kirloskar wrote a play such as *Soubhadra*—mostly because it appears as an assertion of a particular kind of religious conservatism that is absent from Kirloskar's play.

What I mean by “religious conservatism” is that Kodand and the Jagadguru together impose a stasis on definitions of marriage and position themselves as arbiters over all religious disputes and doctrinal issues. Kodand even becomes a sort of combined religio-social authority at the end of the play as the Jagadguru gives him charge over that area in doctrinal disputes. In some ways, the way the Jagadguru holds a disputation should remind us of Kolhatkar’s dissatisfaction with the lack of doctrinal disputations in *Soubhadra*. Moreover, we believe that in the future, if women are mismatched by their fathers, they will be able to appeal to a religious authority that has, for all practical purposes, reduced the heterogeneity of Hinduism, from its polyvalent religious and social roots to one that has a fixity of definitions, and whose emanating center is none other than the Jagadguru. At the same time, the presence of Kodand enables women to have some form of control over their own lives by institutionalizing methods of seeking redress. It gives them spiritual agency, which functions as an allegory for political agency, and the ability to legislate one’s future, so long as it is within the acceptable definitions that have already been prescribed. Furthermore, whereas the Kanchan Bhatt’s worldview saw the material and spiritual intimately and indivisibly connected, Kodand’s intervention, by imposing various definitions, also marks a rupture between the two worlds. Unlike *Soubhadra*, where power (both religious and paternal) is highly relational, contingent, situational, and never absolute, the world of *Sharada* leaves us with a sense of absolute right and absolute wrong.

While we are led to believe that at the end of the *Sharada*, women and other characters gain agency to fulfill their desires and be full “subjects,” it is a false resolution. Characters only gain from the situation if their interpretations of scripture are

synonymous with those of Kodand's, thus reinforcing a narrow interpretation of the scripture, and eroding the available modes of being to produce a homogenous discourse about scripture. Whereas in *Soubhadra*, Subhadra can use her knowledge of the relations of power to find some agency, Sharada has no such recourse in a system that has coded her the victim of patriarchal powers, and then further within narrow definitions of femininity (and for Kodand, narrower definitions of masculinity). Sharada is left no option than to be saved—and caught between the option of suicide and marrying Kodand, her decision to marry Kodand seems hardly a decision that is made freely.

By imposing an artificial dramatic form on a social/historical reality, Deval attempts to produce a clean resolution to the question of companionate marriage, but the effect leaves us far from being “resolved.” Rather, the play neither satisfies us if we search for a comedy or tragedy, nor does it satisfy us entirely if we search for a kind of Sanskrit aestheticism. Even Kodand does not actively choose to marry Sharada, but is convinced by the Jagadguru to renounce his celibacy. This is because the play attempts to form an ideological matrix wherein the outcomes for various characters are desirable from the point of view of society, but not for the characters themselves. This is what it means for Kodand to interpolate the audience, and for his gaze to serve as a proxy for the masculine gaze of the audience. It means society has a stake in ensuring that women are protected from the tyrannical impulses of their male relatives, but also that society should accept redefinitions of religious doctrine, even if they come from the mouth of an alienated young man.

Overall, the ideological matrix in *Sharada* leaves us to ponder whether agency and choice are even possible, and whether characters can do more than react against

circumstances that seem to be out of their control. I argue that we are made to think characters do have some kind of agency, primarily because the play contains so many different tropes, from comedy, tragedy, from music, a five-act structure, and from Sanskrit aesthetics. These various tropes, seem to imply a development of character consciousness, but Deval's resolution suggests something else entirely. It suggests that Sharada and Kodand have not fundamentally learnt to choose, but are made to choose each other because of external circumstances.

In *Soubhadra*, external circumstances thwart the heroine's desires, but only temporarily. Both Arjuna and Subhadra, with some guidance, effectively concoct their own future; Sharada and Kodand have their destinies determined for them. The former play is a mythological place with only a passing resemblance to Indian society of the 1880s, passing because of a joint family structure. *Sharada*, on the other hand, is much more realistic, and harbors no idealism about the society it depicts. But it also fails to produce an ideal to which society can aspire. From any angle, the denouement of *Sharada* is unsatisfying because neither Kodand nor Sharada get what they want, precisely because the play's ideology makes desire itself taboo. Therefore Kodand and Sharada receive each other in artificial and unsentimental wedlock, but also in a way that is unthreatening and sanctioned by religious authority—in the way Krishna “sanctions” Arjuna's and Subhadra's marriage.

The wider historical context of both plays also evinces a steady erasure of multiple ways to be in the world as a male and female. It also complicates Chatterjee's analysis of the inner/spiritual and outer/material valences because these plays do not entirely evince such a distinct coding—a coding that marks western India quite

differently from the way Chatterjee reads the position of the *bhadramahila*, or “respectable woman,” in Bengal. Instead, in western India, the combination of mythological plays and the way that the “home” was not so easily distinguished or separated from the “world,” as Kosambi suggests, suggests Chatterjee’s binary model is inadequately equipped for a full comprehension of social change in western India. Instead, the polyvalent relations of religious and temporal authority from *Soubhadra* reduce to just one figure of religious arbitration in *Sharada*: the Jagadguru. The epic hero, the manipulative divinity, paternal tyrant, and austere devotee (Garga Muni or Narada), each of whom represents a different approach to masculinity, also disappear and give way to really just one kind of masculine hero—slightly aloof, cognitive, chivalrous, but never duplicitous or “eager.” Reading these plays is an experience akin to Ashis Nandy’s understanding of gender, in which the end of the nineteenth century saw the reconfiguration of gender, from a privileging of androgyny and heterogeneity in definitions, to a privileging of masculinity and stricter, more limited definitions of gender. From the plays, Nandy’s ideas seems more applicable to the situation in Western India especially, given the nature of the comments S.K. Kolhatkar made about *Soubhadra*, which express a desire to see a more “masculine” masculinity in Arjuna and Krishna.

In the plays, during their historical circumstances, and in our attempt to recover this tradition, it seems as though the only real observation we can make is that gender roles became more narrowly defined—for men and women—as the theatre became a more respectable form of entertainment. The need to impose stricter definitions at the end of the century, Deval’s use of a “Jagadguru” and Ashis Nandy’s understanding of how

traditions became more narrowly defined, these are all connected. But they enable women's agency only insofar as women behave as various men would like to see them behave, since all doctrinal authority rests in the hands of various men, upon whose benevolence the condition of women rests. As a result, we must read these two plays as bookends to a debate in the late nineteenth century—the earlier play more various, more accepting, and ideologically unconscious; *Sharada* (1899) is limited in its scope, ideologically over-determined, and ultimately unsatisfying in the way it attempts to produce a self-defining, desiring subject, but only if those desires and definitions are within doctrinally established norms.

## **Conclusion: Theatre, "Imagined Community," and an Alternative Understanding of the "Nation"**

During the second half of the nineteenth century, theatre became the dominant cultural form in Western India, as I demonstrated. It surpassed all other genres in popularity and access. As a result of the popularity, I argued that theatre became a site where the burgeoning middle class, upper caste, intelligentsia carefully and systematically articulated a modern Indian subjectivity. Since Indians lacked actual political rights, this subjectivity was displaced onto aesthetics. At the same time, since *rasa* and Sanskrit aesthetics are also religious theories, the ability to shape one's future and legislate morally right and wrong action was displaced onto religious authorities who dispute, "legislate," and arbitrate in civil matters. My reading of *Sharada* demonstrated this connection between the aesthetics of desire and eros as they are channeled towards socially acceptable and religiously sanctioned ends. From my readings of texts, theorization of performances, and the reception of the plays, it is clear the itinerant theatre and the later musical plays created a fabric of meaning that was vivid and variegated, but also semantically coherent. It was intertextual and "haunted" in terms of plot, character, music, and ideology. The theatre should be, therefore, fundamental to our understanding of the way Indian society saw itself and fashioned itself in the nineteenth century.

While the theatre did articulate a cogent new identity, it also, perhaps, articulated a community by virtue of its legibility to all strata of society. In my third chapter, the specter of "nationalism" repeatedly haunts my framework. We saw this with the reference to the controversy following the Age of Consent Act (1891), the way Nandy speaks about

sexuality, and the way *Sharada* creates a quasi-theocratic establishment at the end of the play. As I develop this project further, I plan on exploring the way this theatre may be seen to create a regional consciousness. What role, if any, did the theatre play in creating an emerging regional consciousness in Western India? We know, for instance, that in the first decade of the twentieth century, playwrights such as K.P. Khadilkar (1872-1948) consciously wrote plays that functioned as political allegory (Solomon, "Culture, Imperialism, and Nationalist Resistance"). Secondly, if theatre did play a role in creating an emerging national consciousness (which I believe it did), then how can we rethink well-known critiques that propound the novel form as corollary to the nation? Here, I want to posit some ways to pursue answers to these two questions.

In a 1968 article entitled "The Growth of Regional Consciousness in Maharashtra" Ellen McDonald (citing Bernard Cohn) uses a set of "cultural and social prerequisites for the growth of regionalism in India. They include: the presence of a pool of symbols 'around which the content of the idea of a regionalism can be formed for a particular region;' a means of selection, standardization, and transmission of symbols from this pool, and the formation of regional elites" (223). McDonald's argument antedates much of our contemporary understanding of the origins of a regional consciousness, which we derive primarily from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983). Instead, McDonald asserts that the work of Marathi historians such as M.G. Ranade (1842-1901), "almost certainly represent[s] a kind of regional consciousness which had been in existence in his Poona elite circle for almost twenty years." The only problem that remained was the means by which the elite could circulate new ideas among the public (236–7).

The means of circulation McDonald identifies have, in the past decade, finally received the attention due to them—print media, historical writing, and the Ganesh festival.<sup>70</sup> Each provided a pool of symbols. However, McDonald also speaks briefly about theatre. She mentions that "Vernacular drama...is a complex matter," only to make the kind of argument I critiqued in the first chapter—that because Brahmins comprised a majority of the practitioners of theatre troupes, they were always interested in imposing their caste interests on the lay public (McDonald 238–9). McDonald's brief observations aside, the theatre did provide a provide a pool of symbols (religious imagery, gesture, and historical) around which a regional consciousness could form, and while it was not always the case, regional elites did eventually utilize the theatre as a medium of communication. The theatre thus offered a platform of communication that can be seen as a viable alternative to print media, and therefore also a candidate for theorizing the development of a regional consciousness, or "imagined community."

The focus on regional identity and theatre also asks us to consider the place of literature, generally speaking, in the formation of a regional identity in India. Seen from the outside, many Indian literatures at least, are illegible given their inability to register on a capitalist scale of turnover and consumption: at 5,000 a Hindi novel is a best seller today (Orsini 84). This has less to do with the literature itself than low levels of literacy, and also the fact that the major historical literary forms in the subcontinent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were poetry, drama, and the short story (Orsini 79).

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<sup>70</sup> For the relationship between print media, public sphere politics, and regional consciousness, see Veena Naregal (2001); for historical writing and memory, see Prachi Deshpande (2007); and for the way the Ganesh festival was used, see Shabnum Tejani (2008).

Even a focus on the novel in India yields an interesting set of questions rather than answers. Dilip Menon, for instance, specifically writes against the notion that there is any connection between the lower caste Malayalam novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the nation. Instead, the novels foreground the self-fashioning individual, family, Christianity, in ways that look back to older literature in Malayalam, but not within the rubric of any kind of “nation” (Menon 71). Yet another critic, Aniket Jaaware, writing about genre in Marathi novels, questions the way we think about genre in early Marathi novels, and points towards various Indian literatures as points of influence, rather than the “Western novel.” What interests me more in his article is the way he focuses on the lyricism (75–6) and the non-sequential narration (78) of two novels, and situates these two techniques within the literary traditions of India, in which other forms such as poetry, drama, and short story are the dominant artistic forms.

Jaaware's observation about the non-sequential narration is particularly relevant to Anderson's evaluation of the way a reader experiences the novel. Anderson writes,

That all these *acts* are *performed at the same clocked, calendrical time*, but by *actors* who may be largely unaware of one another, shows the *novelty* of this imagined world conjured up by the *author* in his *readers'* minds...The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the national, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history (Anderson 26; my emphases).

As I indicated by italicizing various words, two things are noteworthy in Anderson's theorization. The first concerns Anderson's language, and how his language is split between a private experience of reading, and something that experience does to the reader. The experience of reading instigates a transformative *performance* in the reader. Secondly, the experience of reading is linear and calendrical. Given Jaaware's attention to

non-sequential narration in the two novels he writes about, Anderson's causal, linear, empty, homogeneous time paradigm also seems insufficient.

For the case of Western India—and perhaps elsewhere where levels of print literacy are low—can we replace Anderson's double focus on the newspaper and the novel with other "forms of imagining" (24–5)? What better way to interrogate the formation of regional identity and imagining than through the kind of theatre I discussed in this dissertation? And to what extent would such a theatre, with primarily mythological and some historical plots, require us to interrogate Anderson's use of empty, homogenous time, and "moving steadily down (or up) history?" Can we see popular culture of the theatre as a kind of resistance to (more) literate genres, and also against the linear experience of time, especially if the past and mythology are constantly brought into being?

These are just a few speculations about the theatre and the nation. In a future project, these are kinds of questions that will animate my research.

Appendix: The Playbills

**नाशिककर विहक्टरिया हिंदु संगीत मंडळी.**  
जागा राजेवहासनाची इतरांची  
रानिवार ता० १०माहे ~~माच~~ सन १८८८ रोजी रात्री.  
डोंगरेकृत  
**संगीत वेणीसंहार अंक १-**

सदरहु नाटकाचा प्रयोग वरील तारखेस ही मंडळी करून दाणाणिणार  
आहेत तर रासक प्रेक्षकांनी येण्याची मेहरवानी करावी.  
टिकिटांचे दर.

पुरुपांस.	रु०	स्त्रियांस.	रु०
प्रत प० डि०.....	१॥	कुलिनस्त्रियांस.....	१-
प्रत दुसरी.....	१	वेश्यांस.....	१॥
प्रत तिसरी.....	॥		
प्रत चवथी.....	॥		

प्रत्येक अंकाचे शेवटी दहा मिनिटे पडदा पडेल.  
प्रसंगी सुचना.

टिकिटा प्रयोगाचे दिवशी सकाळी सात वाजेपर्यंत  
१ रात्री नाटक गृहाजवळ सात वाजल्यापासून विकत मिळतील. ज्यांस येणे असेल त्याजवळ टिकिट असल्याखेरीज आंत घेतले जाणार नाही. व ज्या जागेचे टिकिट असेल त्याच जागेवर बसले पाहिजे; जागेवर किंवा दरवाजावर पैसे घेतले जाणार नाहीत; ज्याज्यावेळी व्यवस्थापक टिकिटा तपासण्यास येतील त्यात्या वेळी टिकिटें दाखविली पाहिजेत व मागतील त्यावेळी ती दिली पाहिजेत.

२ नाटक गृहाचे दरवाजे रात्री वाजतां उघडून प्रयोगास प्रारंभ जाणतां होईल व लागलेच दरवाजे बंद होतील,

३ आमची खुषी नसेल अशा मनुष्यास नाटक गृहांत घेतले जाणार नाही, व हरएक प्रकारची गैर वर्तणुक करणारांस पैसे परत न देता बाहेर बालविले जाईल.

४ रिझर्व्ह खुर्चीवरील नंबर व टिकिटावरील नंबर एक पाहून वजाई.

प्रसंगी दर वाढविणे व्यवस्थापकाचे मनीवर आहे.

**व्यवस्थापक.**

मुंबई-जगदीश्वर प्रेस.

Figure 5: Playbill for Sangit Venisamhar, courtesy of the Maharashtra State Archives

Translation of Figure 5:

**Nasikkar Victoria Hindu Sangit Mandali**  
**Venue:** Raje Bahadur's Dukhambi  
 Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup> March in the Year 1888 at Night

Staged by Dongre<sup>71</sup>

**The Destruction of the Braid, a Musical**

The aforementioned play will be performed by this troupe on the given day and we request knowledgeable guests to oblige us by their presence

Ticket Rates

<b>Men</b>	<b>Rs.</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Rs.</b>
First	Rs. 1, 8 annas	Ladies	4 annas
Second	Re. 1	Prostitutes	8 annas
Third	12 annas		
Fourth	8 annas		
	There will be an interval of ten minutes after each act.		
Fifth	4 annas		

A thought

On the day of the performance, tickets-----  
 and will be sold at night next to the theatre from seven pm onwards. Those who wish to come will not be admitted inside without a ticket. And [s/he] must sit according to the section indicated on the ticket; money [for tickets] will not be taken in the theatre or at the door; whenever the organizer come to examine tickets, then and when requested, the tickets must be shown.

2. The doors to the theatre will open at 8pm and the performance will commence at 10pm, and the doors will be shut immediately thereafter,

3. We reserve the right<sup>72</sup> to refuse admittance, and each and everyone causing a disturbance<sup>73</sup> will be removed from the theatre without a refund.

4. Please be seated after noting the number on your ticket and the number on the reserved seat. It is at the discretion of the organizer to raise rates according to the situation.

**Organizer**

Mumbai—Jagadishwar Press

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<sup>71</sup> This play was translated into Marathi by Purushottam Godbole in 1857 (see above), but the language of the playbill leaves it unclear as to whether this version of Sangit Venisamhar is a new translation by Dongre, or simply a new performance. The complexity lies in the word “Dongrekrut” which could mean that the play was created, written, made or performed by Dongre.

<sup>72</sup> I have translated “khushi” here as “right” owing to the spirit of the notice, even though “khushi” literally translated as “pleasure” or “happiness”.

<sup>73</sup> I translated “gair” vartanuk” as “disturbance” here, approximating the definition.

(2)

**नाशिककर विक्टोरिया हिन्दु संगीत मंडळी.**

जागा सोनेने मारीहीजनकीठार्यएरांत

शनिवार ता० माहे मार्च सन १८८८ रोजी रात्रौ.

२०  
डोंगरेकृत

**संगीतइन्द्रसभा.**

—:~\*~\*~:—

सदरहु नाटकाचा प्रयोग वरील तारखेत ही मंडळी करून दाखविणार  
आहेत तर रासिक प्रेक्षकांनी येण्याची मेहरबानी करावी.

टिकिटांचे दर.

पुरुषांस.	रु०	स्त्रियांस.	रु०
प्रत प० डि०.....	१	कुलिनस्त्रियांस.....	१-
प्रत दुसरी.....	॥	वैश्यांस.....	॥-
प्रत तिसरी.....	/		
प्रत चवथी.....	:		

प्रत्येक अंकाचे शेवटीं दहा मिनिटें पडदा पडेल.

**सूचना.**

टिकिटा प्रयोगाचे दिवशीं सकाळपासून **गोपाळरावगंगांचे इकानिनीच्या पुण्यात**  
व रात्रौ नाटक गृहाजवळ सात वाजल्यापासून विकत मिळतील. ज्यांस योग अ-  
सेल त्याजवळ टिकिट असल्याखेरीज आंत घेतलें जाणार नाहीं. व ज्या जागेचें  
टिकिट असेल त्या जागेवर बसलें पाहिजे; जागेवर किंवा दरवाजावर पैसे घेत-  
ले जाणार नाहींत, ज्या ज्या वेळीं व्यवस्थापक टिकिटा तपासण्यास येतील त्या  
त्या वेळीं टिकिटें दाखविलीं पाहिजेत व मागतील त्यावेळीं तीं दिलीं पाहिजेत.

२ नाटक गृहाचे दरवाजे रात्रौ वाजतां उघडून प्रयोगास प्रारंभ वाज-  
तां होईल व लागलेच दरवाजे बंद होतील.

३ आमची सुशी नसेल अशा मनुष्यास नाटक गृहांत घेतलें जाणार नाहीं, व  
हरएक प्रकारची गैर वर्तणुक करणारास पैसे परत न देतां बाहेर बालविलें जाईल.

४ रिझर्व्ह खुर्चीवरील नंबर व टिकिटावरील नंबर एक पाहून बसावें.

प्रसंगीं दर वाढविणें व्यवस्थापकाचे मर्जीवर आहे.

**विडी ओटण्याची सक्त प्रनाई आहे**  
**व्यवस्थापक**

सुंभर :- जगदीश्वर प्रेत.

Figure 6: Playbill for Sangit Indra Sabha, courtesy of the Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai

Translation of Figure 6:

**Nasikkar Victoria Hindu Sangit Mandali**

**Venue:** the theatre near the golden Masjid

Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> March in the Year 1888 at Night

Staged by Dongre

**Indra Sabha, a Musical**

The aforementioned play will be performed by this troupe on the given day and we request knowledgeable guests to oblige us by their presence

Ticket Rates

<b>Men</b>	<b>Rs.</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Rs.</b>
First	Rs. 1	Ladies	4 annas
Second	8 annas	Prostitutes	8 annas
Third	4 annas 2 Pies		
Fourth	4 annas		

There will be an interval of ten minutes after each act.

A thought

On the day of the performance, from morning at Gopal Rao ...his Store and will be sold at night next to the theatre from seven pm onwards. Those who wish to come will not be admitted inside without a ticket. And [s/he] must sit according to the section indicated on the ticket; money [for tickets] will not be taken in the theatre or at the door; whenever the organizer come to examine tickets, then and when requested, the tickets must be shown.

2. The doors to the theatre will open at 8pm and the performance will commence at 10pm, and the doors will be shut immediately thereafter,

3. We reserve the right to refuse admittance, and each and everyone causing a disturbance will be removed from the theatre without a refund.

4. Please be seated after noting the number on your ticket and the number on the reserved seat. It is at the discretion of the organizer to raise rates according to the situation.

Smoking bidis is strictly forbidden.

**Organizer**

Mumbai—Jagadishwar Press

**नाशिककर संगित मंडळी.**

जागा — कादरभाईचा कोठा.  
शनिवार तांदिख १२ जानेवारी सन १८८९ रोजी रात्री.  
दोंगरे कृत.

अखेरचा साग्र संगित रंगी नायकीण. अखेरचा  
प्रहसन.

सदहू नाटकाचा प्रयोग वरील तारखेस ही मंडळी करून दाखविणार आहे तर  
रामिक प्रेक्षकांनी उदार आश्रय देण्याची मेहेरवानी करावी.

टिकिटांचे दर.

पुरुपांस.	स्त्रियांस.
प्रत १ ली खुर्ची..... १	कुठस्त्रियांस राखलेली जागा 1-
प्रत २ रो बांक..... ॥	
प्रत ३ री जपीन..... 1-	वेष्ट्यांस..... ॥

विद्यार्थ्यांस ०=

टिकिटें प्रयोगाचे दिवशी सकाळपासून संध्याकाळपर्यंत आमचे विन्हाडीं विकत  
मिळतात. व शिलक राहिल्यास सायंकाळी नाटकगृहाजवळ मिळतील नाटकगृहाज  
दरवाजे ८ वाजता उघडून खेळाम आरंभ वरोबर १० वाजता होईल. प्रत्येक अं-  
काचे शक्ती १० मिनिटे पडदा पडेल.

सूचना— नाटकगृहांत सभ्य रीतेने वर्तन ठेवण्याविषयी विनंती आहे. गौरवर्तन  
करणारास पैस परत न देता बाहेर घालविले जाई. हलक्या दराचे टिकिट अस-  
न मागी दराचे नांगवर वमऱ्यास दुष्पट हशिल पडेल. ज्या ज्या वेळी व्यवस्थापक  
टिकिट तपासण्यास येतील त्या त्या वेळी त्यांस ती दाखविची पाहजेत. व मागातील  
त्या वेळी ती दिली पाहजेत. नाटकगृहांत बिडी आढण्याची सक्त मनाई आहे. सर्वद-  
प्रमाणे दर वाढविले जातल. एकदा विकत घेतलेले टिकिट कोणत्याही सवत्रांवर प-  
रत घेउन पैस दिले जाणार नाहीत व मागास नागांचे टट पुढले नाटकास  
घालणार नाही. प्रयोगाचे सोयी मठी काहीं ठिकाणा फाफार केला जाईल.

व्यवस्थापक

Figure 7: Playbill for Sagra Sangit Rangi Nayakin Prahasan, courtesy of Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai

Translation of Figure 7:

**Nasikkar Sangit Mandali**

**Venue: Kadarbhai's Kotha**

Saturday, Date 12<sup>th</sup> March in the Year 1888 at Night

Staged by Dongre

**Last A comedy about Rangi the Dancer, with Music Last**

The aforementioned play will be performed by this troupe on the given day and we request knowledgeable guests to oblige us by their presence

Ticket Rates

<b>Men</b>		<b>Women</b>	
<b>First Chair</b>	<b>Rs. 1</b>	<b>Seats reserved for Ladies</b>	<b>4 annas</b>
<b>Second Bench</b>	<b>8 annas</b>	<b>Prostitutes</b>	<b>8 annas</b>
<b>Third Floor</b>	<b>4 annas</b>		
<b>Students</b>	<b>1 anna 2 pies</b>		

Our company members will be selling tickets from morning until evening, and if there are any remaining, they will be sold near the theatre. The doors open at 8pm and the play<sup>74</sup> will commence at 10pm. There will be a 10 minute break after each act.


A thought—we request everyone to behave inside the playhouse. Those being disruptive will be ejected without a refund for their ticket. “Light” rated ticketers seated where expensive ticketers sit will be fined double. Tickets must be shown to the organizer whenever he requests, and must be given when requested. It is strictly forbidden to smoke in the theatre. Ticket rates will increase based on the occasion. A purchased ticket cannot be refunded under any circumstances. ....will not be appropriate. For the accommodation of the performance, some places will be shifted.

Organizer

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<sup>74</sup> Unlike the other two playbills, this one calls the performance a “khel” as in “game” or “play”. The other playbills use the term “Prayog” which literally translates as “attempt”.

**ALTEKER HINDOO DRAMA**  
**अळतेकर हिंदु नाटक.**



खेळ  
१५

मौजेची  
रात्र.



ता. २२ आगष्ट स. १८७३ शनिवार

**आख्यान**

देवेंद्रवृषपर्वयुद्धवृषपर्ववधश्रीयाळच  
 रित्र आणि नारायणरावपेशवेयांचा मृत्यु  
 यांत पहिल्या भागांत तरवार देखावा होईल  
 दुसऱ्या भागांत चिह्नाळाचें शीर कापून शीर आणि धडया  
 ची देखावा दाखविला जाईल. ३ रे भागांत नारायणरावाचे पो  
 टफाईन सारखे भात व आतडी हुवे हुवे दाखवूं यांत रस असून शोकर संपूर्ण होईल  
 फार्स रात्राहिल्या सचमत्कारीक होईल.  
 स्थळ पंचकचेरीनजीक बाळाचार्यपंडितांचे वाड्यांत  
 टिकिटाचे दर.

पुरुषास	२०	मत् २यी	॥ (ओटे फळ्या)
मत् १ली	१॥ (कोच)	बायकास	
मत् २ली	१ (खुर्ची)	गुरजीस	॥ आठ भाणे
मत् ३ली	१॥ (बोक)	नायकिणी व कसबिणी	॥॥ बत्ता आणि

टिकिटा खेळाचे जागी विकत मिळतील. खेळास आरंभ साडे  
 दहा वाजता होईल व चार वाजता बंद होईल. खेळाचे जागी ग  
 दा करतील अंगर कमी पतिचे टिकिट घेऊन जाऊन घेतील. जा  
 गी जातील तर पेंसाने दत्ता वादर घालविले जाईल. खेळाचे जा  
 गी विही आटण्याची मनाई आहे  
 सबंद पाहून टिकिटाचे दर कळवासा कळत जातील.

ही जाहीराने मिर्थावाळ रामानसाद विसर पावें हा. वी. अक्षय. खापिनी. मु. धारबाड

Figure 8: A playbill of the Altekar Mandali, courtesy of the Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai

Translation of Figure 8:

**Altekar Hindu Drama**  
**Altekar Hindu Drama**

khel 15

a fun-filled night

date: 23<sup>rd</sup> August year 1873 Saturday

**Aakhyan**

**Devendra vrushparva battle and vrushparva defeat, Shriyal bio/  
graphy and The Death of Narayan Rao Peshwe/  
in this, in the first part a sword fight will be shown./  
in the second part, Chilhala's will be decapitated and his head and torso/  
will be shown. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> part, Narayan Rao stomach/  
will be torn and rice and sugar and innards will be shown. There being 4 rasas  
herein, mourning rasa will be complete./  
The farce will be miraculous at night.  
Place at Balacharya Pandit's Wada near the Pancha Kacheri**

Ticket prices

Men	Rs.	Fourth	8 annas (crude bench)
First	1 Re. 8 annas (coach)	Women	
Second	1 Re. (chair)	Lady	8 annas
Third	12 annas (bench)	Nayakins and Kasbinis	12 annas

Tickets can be purchased at the place of the play. The play will commence at ten-thirty and end at four [am]. Those who quarrel about their tickets or are seated in a zone where tickets are more expensive than those purchased will be escorted out. Smoking is forbidden.

Ticket prices will be adjusted accordingly.

This advertisement has been printed at Mishrilal Ramprasad Missar's Dyna. Bo. Chhap. Mu. Dharwad.

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