



## Mockery of Idealism: A Study of G. P. Deshpande's Past One O'Clock

Dr. V. Madhavi

Assistant Professor of English

S.K.University

Anantapur

The emergence of Marathi theatre in the nineteenth century was a response given to the process of modernization. The new theatre in Marathi sought to challenge the establishment not only in theatre discourse but also against the reality outside which was characterized by unequal relations of power. Modernism in Marathi theatre found its expression in Vijay Tendulkar, Satish Alekar and G.P. Deshpande. Unlike Tendulkar's modernist perspective and Alekar's absurdist point of view, Deshpande's gender perception is essentially political. Almost all of his plays define politics especially in terms of the power structures in society and gender relations.

Deshpande's characters symbolize political forces. His plays reflect how the left parties inherit the patriarchal structures of unequal relations of power. One such play is Past One O' Clock. The present paper focuses on how the path chosen by leftists leads them to their doom ultimately.

Nanasaheb Agnihotri, the protagonist of the play, is a typical party patriarch. He calls himself a non-believer, one of the real modern people in the world. Yet he cannot stand it when Uma, his favourite daughter, expresses a doubt about the philosophy of Mao.

**Uma:** Nana, your Mao-(Pause) of course I know he is no longer yours said that making revolution is not drawing pictures. What did he know about painting any way?

**Nana:** Do not start that nonsense all over again. Mao was it from me, and carry on with your paintings, that is enough. You need not talk. right, take

**Nana:** Our politics was never for the elite. May be it was the politics of a class, the Politics of hardworking labourers and farmers. Our politics is the politics of plebeians..... (p. 63-64) Uma is in her mid-thirties, tastefully trendy. She is not beau-

tiful but has a kind of magnetic charm of which she is well aware: She has sharp differences with Nana and yet adores him. She is a fierce individualistic painter and the stubbornness in her ideas, she relates it to her painting. Her individualistic fervour is seen in her conversation with her family members who have gathered at their father Nana's residence for the celebration of Nana's seventy fifth birth anniversary:

**Uma:** A linear person (laughs). I am a painter after all. I can't help using the language of painting. Line is important, you see (Looks teasingly at Nana). For both revolutionary and the painter. If you miss the line everything is lost. (P. 63)

And this stubbornness of Uma has resulted in divorcing Vinayak, her husband. She hates her husband because he tries to imprison her in the image of her body, her physicality, her sexuality. Uma resents this. Her creative spirit refuses to be imprisoned in the traditional logic again which Nana is not really able to understand:

**Uma:** Nana, no! He has no right to be here. Today's celebration is for your children alone. There is no need for a son-in-law, and that too, an ex-son-in-law.

**Nana:** Uma, you know only too well that legal answers are not always the final answers. You are indeed a machine incarnate! Don't you know how fond I am of Vinayak?

**Uma:** But I don't like him, I mean, not anymore, and that is important. Today's celebration is for your children. A son-in-law has no role in it. Actors are selected for roles. Roles are not created to suit actors. (P. 62)

Her creative perception is reflected from the way she chooses colours for her paintings, and the way she chooses Vinayak as her husband against Nana's interests at the beginning.

**Nana:** Et cetera et cetera.... any way. You have always been stubborn, what else can I say? You didn't listen to me when you decided to get married. When you decided to separate from Vinayak, then too you didn't care for my advice....(P. 62)

Nana's Children represent different strands in the Indian polity today. Not only Uma, but Madhav, Raghav and Uddhav also represent their own respective ideologies. Madhav Nana's eldest son is a self-proclaimed "apolitical person" who can't stand political discussions. And he is the only person who constantly strives to create a congenial atmosphere in the house.

**Madhav:** No political discussion today. Uma, let it be a day for only light chit chat and lots of fun. It's Nana's day today and his favourite drink - Black Label. Do you understand Uma? I am the master of ceremonies today. (P. 63)

Raghav, Nana's second son, on the other hand, is a bureaucrat in the Government i.e. the Ministers' secretary, and a pillar of the establishment. He is politically and professionally smart enough to gain the minister's confidence.

**Madhav :** And the Chief Minister said, Raghav Rao, what shall we do without you? We shall be in trouble if you are packed off to Delhi -

**Raghav :** Oh yes! That's what he said. Nana, the boss will be speaking at the public-reception for you. In fact he asked me to write his speech for the occasion. But I said, sorry, Sir! For once I have to say, I can't do it. It is not possible for me to write anything about Nana. And you know, Madhav, he appreciated my position. (P. 64)

Uddhav, the youngest son of Nana is a naxalite and most loved by his father. Owing to his past militant career in the Party. Nana now expects Uddhav to go on with his ideology.

**Nana:** Raghav, don't take small things to heart. A person of your

standing should take such things in his stride. Uddhav is a political prisoner - he has an ideology of his own, hasn't he? (P.65) Words spoken in favour of a naxalite naturally stimulate a bureaucrat. Raghav gets furious at Nana's attitude and outbursts at once:

**Raghav :** Ideology! Why do you have to give a decent label to the irresponsible politics of a pack of idiots? What kind of ideology is there behind people flaunting a slogan like 'Chair- Madhav tries to control the awful atmosphere of the house by man Mao is our Chairman?' (P. 65)

warning all the family members: Madhav : (who has been sitting there sipping his drink quietly): No political discussion today. Let it be a day for only light chit chat and lost of fun. It's Nana's day today (P. 63)

As the arrangements for the birthday celebration go on, Nana gets into a flash back, thinks of his diseased wife Saguna and craves for her presence on the occasion. Nana acknowledges their failure to maintain congenial atmosphere at home.

**Nana:** That is not that easy, Madhav. All these fifty years we have tried and failed. Homey togetherness remained only an illusion. Saguna was so unhappy about it. Till the last she was pining for that. She had to endure a great deal. her tolerance was stretched to the extreme. (P. 69)

As Samik Bandyopadhyay views: "Nostalgic evocation in the form of an apostrophe addressed by Nana to his dead wife opens up a discourse loaded with political reverberations, the names and incidents bringing in their train phases and episodes in the history of the communist movement in India"!

**Nana:** Marches slogans, strikes and demonstrations... Yerawada, Visapur, Arthur Road.... Elections.. (Nahin rakhani! Nahin rakhani, sarkar jalim nahin rakhani!) In capitalist society we have a democracy that is curtailed. Wretched. For the minority, Communism alone is capable of providing complete democracy.... I feel drained now. (P. 68)

When Raghav asks Nana how he was initiated in to politics, Nana recollects the incident which left an indelible impression upon him. Like many others, Nana's dream of organizing resistance against British rule made him attend one of Lokamanya Tilak's speeches at the Kirloskar Theatre.

**Nana:** Lokamanya arrived at the Kirloskar Theatre. And then the words started flowing in a cascade. It was as though the entire audience was awash with his thoughts. What a quality and force his language had! I don't exactly remember what the subject was, but he probably said something about military education. The thing that I remember very well is his stress on the need for a clear Political ideology as the basic premise. I had once told Uddhav about this. (P. 71)

Nana sees a ray of hope in Uddhav though he has been away from home for a long period of six years and got arrested by the police. He is ready to contradict anybody who talks against Uddhav. Nana: You mustn't say that, Vinayak. I have produced an

Uddhav....So what if he is facing rough weather today? | see our future in Uddhav he is our hope - (P.78) When Raghav makes pungent remarks on Uddhav's ability in carrying over the 'revolution' Nana reacts furiously.

**Nana :** The meaning is crystal clear, Raghav! You have to be a Part of the revolution in order to understand revolution. Revolution is not something to be understood, it is something which is done, and I don't think we have been fortunate enough to have had that privilege. We are going to end up like this only.... dry...absolutely barren... (P. 78)

As the conversation goes on, Uddhav enters with an unkempt beard, crumpled kurta pyjama, chappals and a slingbag. He comes home freshly released from the prison. Nana is both happy and troubled at Uddhav's coming home after a long gap of six years. Talking to his daughter Uma, Nana says that may be she is destined to suffer Vinayak's torture. At this, Uddhav reproachfully questions Nana about the outcome of his seventy-five years of penance:

**Uddhav :** Destiny! ... After seventy-five years of struggle do you still use those words, Nana? Destiny is a useless, ridiculous term.

**Uddhav :** Revolution demands blood. Revolution is crude. You did not have the strength then, you do not have it even now. Now you are fit only for birthday bashes... (p. 83-85)

All the while, so far, Madhav alone is expected to have a perfect understanding of the situation. He is the only person who has been trying hard to maintain peace at home. Now he has given up playing peace-maker. He has hit a high on alcohol. He too seems to get affected by the awful atmosphere there:

**Madhav:** Nana! It took me all those years to get high on alcohol. I have been drinking for the last twenty-five years but I could not as much as get tipsy. My efforts are on. All of you got your alcohol too early- for you, your ideology, for Uma. her painting; for Vinayak, the body and for Uddhav, violence. Only I remained unaffected. Today for the first time I feel something is happening. (Pp. 85-86) Nana gets emotional thinking of his dead wife, talks to himself philosophically:

**Nana:**

Saguna, let me tell you the truth. Till now I was speaking of your support. Now suddenly the truth has dawned on me, Saguna, only you can perhaps help us hold together. The structure of our family shakes from an earth quake. The walls are crumbling down on all the four sides..... why?(P. 87)

The tension in the house grows hot. Everyone is excited. Literally Verbal duel erupts among the family members. What hurts Nana most is Uddhav's challenge, mocking at his failure to achieve anything from his lifelong political struggle:

**Uddhav (to Madhav):** These people have got over Marx and Lenin long back. (Nana is Visibly hurt.) Nana did set out for the revolution but came back from the check-post.

**Nana :** Came back from the check-post. Do all of you think the same? (Raising his voice suddenly) You ungrateful blighters.... You have set your tails afire and are all out to burn Lanka, we are ready to hail you for that, but then this deed by itself will not kill Ravana, you need something more to kill Ravana which you do not have in you.

**Uddhav :** We do not have it in us, ... do you have it in you, Nana? Speak out, Revolutionaries earlier were ready to get reduced to ashes. Now the modern artists need unhappiness, perennial unhappiness (Laughs).

**Nana:**

So our life has become that simple is it?... Uddhav, you are wrong (shouts). If the revolution is standing on its feet today, it's because of us. In this country we have made the worker conscious of the dignity of labour. We have made him rise in his self-esteem. So what if we look a bit tired now? We've given forty to fifty years of our life to build this movement. So what if the tide is against today? It will turn in our favour. I may not live to see it. But it will happen.... (Pp 88-89)

Uddhav ridicules Nana's self-esteem. He says that what all Nana has achieved is 'the philosophy of Depression'. And there is going to be a 'yajna', 'an all-consuming fire in which every one is going to burn. Nana is going to burn, Uddhav is going to burn, Uma's pictures, Madhav's stoicism, Vinayak's confusion and everything is going to burn like a swab of cotton. Nana gets confounded at the strange behaviour of Uddhav. Despite his great struggle to sustain his self-esteem, he fails to withstand Uddhav's argument. Thus, Nana confronts utter exploitation for his last ray of hope, Uddhav, turns against him and his family members ridiculing his seventy five

years of political life. Nana with his desolate heart cries his Children's names, feels as if he is sliding down into this valley. Their touch has become mute to him and nothing more is left for him to do. He crumbles down in to his chair.....

**Nana:** Past one o'clock. Go, Uddhav, go, Uma. Night's milky way flows like a sliver stream, your dreams, your roads and your thunder bolts. Word-sculptures. And the story comes to an end. The saga of Narayan Agnihotri is over.....

Go. It's past one O' clock..... (P. 91)

Samik Bandyopadhyay notes: "Deshpande's characteristic am- bivalence.... turns Uddhav's protest into yet another.... evocation of the all consuming fire that will burn everything up and Nana's de- fence into an evocation of "Night's milky way" in the ultimate disinte- gration of ideology and history- and shadows rising from their pri- vate selves over-whelming the political discourse.."

As Maya Pandit says:

"The attempt to explore the stranglehold of Patriarchial ideology on revolutionary politics is beautifully illustrated in Past One O'clock."<sup>3</sup>

In an interview by N.S.Jagannathan, Deshpande said "Tensions in relationship to the ideas and movements and not tensions as ten- sions are my obsessions."<sup>4</sup>

As Samik Bandopadhyaya argues:

"Deshpande can privilege the politics of patriarchy in politics; the way in which with in a strongly entrenched patriarchal tradition, Marxist leadership degenerates all too soon into a moribund patriar- chal authority, demanding unquestioning obedience and blinding itself to the changing reality of the political process."

## REFERENCES

Page Nos. in brackets refer to Govind Purushotham Deshpande's Politi- cal Play, "Past One O' Clock". Trans. Arundhati Deosthale, (Calcutta: Academic Research /43 Seagull Books, 1998).

1. G. P. Deshpande, Political Plays, Introduction, "Past one O' Clock", Trans. Arundhati Deosthale, (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1998), P. 151.
2. Ibid.-P. 154.
3. Maya Pandit, Theatre India, National School of Drama, ed. 4. Nov. 2001,(New Delhi: Bhawalpur House), P. 10.
4. Paul Jacob, ed., Contemporary Indian Theatre: Interviews with Play- wrights and Directors, (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1989), P 16.
5. G.P. Deshpande, Political Plays, Introduction, "Past one O'Clock", Tran. Arundhati Deosthale, (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1998), P. 153.