

Dadu Indurikar

(Dadu Indurikar, the renowned tamasha artist of Maharashtra, was the recipient this year of the Best Actor Award instituted by the Sangeet Natak Akademi. We publish here the text of an interview with him by Vijay Tendulkar, the well-known dramatist and Kumud Mehta, the Editor.)

V.T.: Shall we start right from the beginning? When did you first see a tamasha* being performed? You mentioned that your father was a tamasha artist. Can you remember the first time you saw it being enacted?

D.I. : When I was still at school. The *jatra tamasha* groups used to visit our village. I was terribly drawn to this form of entertainment.

V.T.: How old were you then?

D.I. : Maybe six or seven.

V.T.: Which means you started watching such shows before you were sufficiently old to understand most things?

D.I. : I developed a liking for such shows. The minute I learnt that a group had come to our village, I'd go to the show. I used to sit in the front row. Nobody stopped me. Because my father had been a *tamasha* artist. People would say, "Let him sit in front". My father had a disciple called Khandu Dagdu Sungane. His disciple, Kusha Umarikar, always brought his group to our village. I never missed a single performance of that troupe. This Kusha was a very clever *songadya* (clown). He had the audience laughing all the time. Naturally I used to laugh too. Then I asked myself: But why doesn't the *songadya* laugh? So even when I was quite small, I understood that the *songadya* knows one trick: Make the others laugh. Don't laugh yourself. Then there were the *bhedik lavanis* of my father in the house. I learnt them by heart. My father died when I was very small. Just after my first marriage.

V.T.: How old were you then?

D.I. : Six or seven years old. Couldn't even wear a *dhoti*! Used to wear shorts or a loin cloth. My step-mother used to wrap it round me and send me to school. I had formed one habit. As soon as school began, I used to learn by heart all the poems in our textbooks. When I was in the first

*The *tamasha* begins with the *gana*, a song in praise of Ganpati. This is followed by the *gavlana* sequence, where Krishna and his friend (the *songadya*) accost the milkmaids who are carrying curds and milk to the market at Mathura. The repartees exchanged by the *songadya* and the elderly *mowshi* provide the rather ribald humour in this sequence. The songs are known as *gavlanas*. Then *lavanis* are sung and their appeal is quite often erotic; a spectator sometimes offers cash on the spot (*daulatjada*) for a song that he fancies. In the *rangbaji* which follows there is a great deal of pungent dialogue. Farcical sequences intervene before the *vag*, which forms the main narrative of the *tamasha*. The *vag* usually deals with legendary and historical themes. The *tamasha* ends with the *mujra*, the final salutation.



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standard, I knew all those they learnt in the second standard. When in the second, I knew those they studied in the third. It was like that with me. If I listened to a song once or twice, I could remember the whole of it. That is after I had learnt to read and write.

V.T.: *These bhedik lavanis your father wrote, what are they like?*

D.I.: They are *shastra*-based. If you like, I will sing you one of my father's *lavanis*. It's called *Bailapowalachyi Bhedik*. When they adorn the bullocks for the festival, he seems then like a bridegroom. The whole ritual of decorating the bullock for the festival is described here. I used to know all the *lavanis*. And the people around would admire me. They'd say, "A tiger's cub can't go astray! You don't have to teach a baby fish how to swim in the water". Then they used to present me with a rupee. A silver rupee, or a *pagota* (an elaborate headgear) and a shawl. I would go and give it all to my mother. And she would go to the old market and buy me a vest!

V.T.: *Your step-mother?*

D.I.: No. My own mother and my step-mother. They were both alive. They used to buy me books and shorts. And my brother—the one I told you about—the one who died the day before yesterday—he used to work terribly hard all the time, hew stones to support us. He was very, very good to me. Another man in his place would have thrown me out. He was proud of me. He lived in Wowal. He has his own house there. But my father was good to him. That's why it seems as though he came and breathed his last in our house.

V.T.: *You said you were married then?*

D.I.: Yes.

V.T.: *But you were so young!*

D.I.: Seven or eight.

V.T.: *Your bride?*

D.I.: Three. She was just an infant—used to roam round half-naked in the marriage pandal. My first wife, she left me; then I married the second one, the one who is now in Khandala.

V.T.: *Why did your first wife leave you?*

D.I.: She didn't like this *tamasha* business. She died two years ago.

V.T.: *Any children?*

D.I.: Two sons. Both of them died.

V.T.: *How?*

D.I.: Now you know what this *tamasha* business is like! When they were ill, I could never manage to get there in time. Otherwise things wouldn't have taken this turn. She felt, "We had these lovely sons. And nobody to take care of them! They are dead. What's the point continuing my life with a husband like this?" That's the way she felt; but I loved my profession. That's how it was. So in 1940....

V.T.: *How old were you then?*

D.I.: Say twenty years old.

V.T.: *Your schooling?*

D.I.: I had studied upto the seventh standard. I could have got a job as a teacher. But I was mad about the *tamasha*. I just couldn't take any interest in a job. I continued with my *tamasha*. You know Kisan Kusgaokar. He helped me to make a start. In 1940 we started. Not at this Bangdiwala

- Theatre. We used to do the *Supari Tamasha* 'here' during the fairs.
- V.T.: *What do you mean when you say 'here'?*
- D.I.: I mean the *maval* area. We had Dhondiba, Ravji, Mahantbhau, Gawali. Then Dadu Indurikar, the younger Dadu Indurikar (son of this brother who died the day before yesterday). Then we had Dasharath Bhalya-rao. Then we had one of my nephews, Baban. All of us were there in that group.
- V.T.: *How much did you earn at that time? Every month?*
- D.I.: In the villages we got just our meals, nothing more. They listened to the *tamasha* and fed us. If someone was really pleased with us, he would give us two annas or more. In all we might get say two or four rupees.
- V.T.: *And all this as late as 1940?*
- D.I.: Then we got two annas. Now it goes up to a rupee. Those days they fed us. We loved doing our *tamasha*.
- V.T.: *Then you had no time for your kids?*
- D.I.: None at all. That's why my wife left me. I don't blame her.
- V.T.: *The rest of your group faced the same difficulties?*
- D.I.: Yes. In 1945 we started off at Bangdiwala's. Then we went to Nasik.
- V.T.: *You said you had formed a tamasha group in 1940. And all of you had these problems. So you did the tamasha because you loved to do it? Not for the money?*
- D.I.: Of course not. You can earn money in many ways. But we loved our art. We wanted to go on with the *tamasha*.
- V.T.: *Sometimes it is said that the tamasha artists are poor. But they can't leave the profession. They can't train themselves, develop in any way because of their miserable plight. And you insist that it wasn't just a way of earning money, that you loved to perform?*
- D.I.: It doesn't matter very much if there's no money or food to be had. But there must be a show on at night. We all agreed on that. Quite determined. So from Bangdiwala we went to Nasik. Then to Poona. Poona's the real centre. They say the students there are very intelligent, the *pehalwans* very strong, the *tamasgirs* very clever. They used to say if a *tamasha* is a hit in Poona, it will be a hit in the whole universe—not to talk of the world....
- V.T.: *That's what they used to say about plays too.*
- D.I.: The Poona audience enjoyed our show. They invited us to Sholapur. We went and stayed there for a fortnight. We were about to leave Sholapur. I remember it was a Sunday and the people there said, "Stay on. You must". I said, "We have to go". So they set on us with sticks and knives. Now my cousin Maruti, he was scared of such happenings. I wanted to go and report to the Police Chowki. But Maruti said, "People will say that we went to Sholapur and came back with a proper beating". So we stayed on. Then Maruti died. For six months I was so dejected; like a madman I was. Then that Kisan Kusgaokar came and said to me, "There were four calling themselves after Vishnu Indurikar. One has gone. But there are still three of them left to keep alive their father's name. Rahu Indurikar had just you. And you were born when he was gone in years." What Kusgaokar said was true. He said, "Now you loved Maruti, didn't you? Like a brother. Start a *tamasha* troupe in his

name". So we began and we continued as Maruti Indurikar's *tamasha* group, right till 1954.

V.T.: *Now when you started afresh, where did you find the dancers?*

D.I. : There was a girl called Soni from Sholapur. And Kometai's daughters. We started off with them.

V.T.: *But how did you find them?*

D.I. : Find? There are such girls everywhere. You go and give them the money and bring them back with you.

V.T.: *If they are already with a troupe, that's a different matter! But when you have to find fresh talent, how do you go about it?*

D.I. : Parents want their girls to learn how to dance. You go and get them. Tie the anklets round their feet and teach them. To sing, to accompany the song with the right *ada*. We used to try and teach them all these things.

V.T.: *Who? You or someone else?*

D.I. : I used to teach them. Or I used to say to them, "Watch that troupe. See how the girl goes about it".

V.T.: *You mean they learnt to dance that way?*

D.I. : Yes, of course. Now this Prabha Joglekar. She is a village girl. We taught her. That is, Shankar Shevnekar and I taught her. Now people still say there's no one like her. Even Vijayabai Mehta said, "There's a lot we can learn from her". We took pains to teach her. That's why she shone, compared to the rest. She is quite clever.

V.T.: *You mean you teach them how to dance?*

D.I. : Yes, of course. I tie those anklets round my feet and tell them how to do it.

V.T.: *Where did you learn? Or you just picked it up, watching others?*

D.I. : Mostly watching.

V.T.: *But you have to know the rhythm, the time measure both in music and dance! How did you learn that? Watching, listening since your childhood days?*

D.I. : After all, what's rhythm? Formerly we had only the *tuntuna*, our one-stringed instrument, and the *dholak*, our small drum. This harmonium is a recent thing. Before that we used to tune the *tuntuna* and adjust the *dholak* to that note. We used to begin and then sing to the tune of the instrument.

V.T.: *But till which year was this? When did the harmonium enter on the scene?*

D.I. : Bhau Mang brought it in.

V.T.: *In which year?*

D.I. : Must be in the thirties or forties. Bhau Mang brought the harmonium into the sphere of the *tamasha*.

V.T.: *You mean to say you never used it till then?*

D.I. : I think so.

V.T.: *At least not in your shows!*

D.I. : Certainly not in ours. When we were with Bangdiwala, we never had a harmonium with us. We had a *tuntuna*, the *tal*, a *halgi* and a *dhol*. My brother Maruti he played the *dhol*. He was marvellous. As soon as he entered, people would watch his face, hear him play the *dhol* and applaud him heartily. He was really good.

V.T.: *You can play the dhol yourself?*

D.I. : I can. But not as well as he could. Of course, formerly I was the one who would play the *dhol*. When I went to my sister's village, I used to play the *dhol* and sing *bhedik lavanis*. In that village there was a man called Shidba Mahar. He was a regular *ganja* man. He brought Bapurao into our *maval* area.

V.T.: *You mean Patthe Bapurao?*

D.I. : Yes. He had a long beard, wore a saffron robe and had a *lungi* tied round his waist. I thought he was some *gosavi*. When I went there, some one said, "This Laxmi's brother sings well". So they said, "Bring the *dhol*. Let's hear him". I was always game for this sort of thing. I took the *dhol*, tuned it and sang a *gavlana*. I sang it. You know whose it was? Bapurao's!

V.T.: *Which one?*

D.I. : *Eka nandachi nari*. And he brought out his *chilim* and then put it aside.

V.T.: *You mean Bapurao? Patthe Bapurao?*

D.I. : He set it aside and sat watching me. Right to the end of the *gavlana*. He didn't draw the *chilim* even once. It was extinguished. He said to Shidba Mahar, "Bring him here".

V.T.: *Who said this?*

D.I. : Patthe Bapurao! You can't imagine his style of speech! "Shidu, who's playing the *dhol*? Bring him here". Then that old fellow said to me, "Dadu, come here. He wants you". I was scared stiff. I thought, "This *gosavi*, what does he want with me?" I went up to him. I was afraid all the time. He said, "Which part are you from?" I said, "From Nilgiri". He asked, "What's your name? Who taught you this *gavlana*?" So I said, "These *tamasha* folk come to my village. I listen and try to remember". "Who taught you to play the *dhol*?" So I said, "My father died when I was a child. There was the *dhol* he had left behind. I learnt to play it just like that". Then he asked me, "You mean nobody taught you to play it?" I said, "No, nobody taught me". So he said, "Come and sit by me". So I went and sat near him and I thought, "Must have been a *tamasgir*!" He said, "Sit. Sing". And the *chilim* went on. That's how it was. That was in 1940.

V.T.: *Where was he then?*

D.I. : Near Poona.

V.T.: *When you met him the first time, how old was he?*

D.I. : Very old.

V.T.: *And you?*

D.I. : I was already married then.

V.T.: *Was he pleased when he heard you sing his gavlana?*

D.I. : Yes.

V.T.: *When you saw him first how did he seem to you? And the second time?*

D.I. : Really like a *gosavi*—the first time. I was scared. Then that Shidba Mahar he said, "Don't be scared. Come with me". People would say, "Let's go, Master". They called Bapurao 'Master'. They'd say, "Come to our village". He'd start off with the *chilim* suddenly.

V.T.: *Drawing in the chilim?*

D.I. : Yes. He was terribly fond of his *ganja*. He drew in the *chilim*, and wrote a song. Maruti and I went to him and said, "Give us something for

shubhamangala." He said, "Why?" Maruti said, "We have a *tamasha* group". He said, "Who are they?" Maruti said, "From our village. Rahu Indurikar's son". So he asked, "What does he play?" Maruti replied, "The *songadya*". So I said, "Don't you remember? At Shidba's. I sang that *gavlana*". So he said to Maruti, "This fellow's clever". And even as he finished saying this, he began to write. I watched him spellbound. I saw him write the lines and I said to Maruti, "This man is terribly clever. Here he's talking to us and writing down every word and without a single mistake". So Maruti, he says, "The man's a Brahmin. Can't go wrong". So I added that *vag* to my stock.

V.T.: You told us that when Maruti died, you began all over again.

D.I.: Yes. The troupe's name was *Dadu Maruti Indurikar's tamasha*. I had our village group: Dhondibha, Baburao and there were the girl-dancers.

V.T.: From where?

D.I.: One was from Sholapur; the other from Kawata.

V.T.: Married?

D.I.: No. We had these two and then a group of eight.

V.T.: This was in which year?

D.I.: 1948. Maruti died and we began all over again after six months.

V.T.: What did you do those six months?

D.I.: Stayed at home. Wept most of the time. Then that Kisan Kusgaokar said, "If you love him, don't weep. Start afresh".

V.T.: But in that intervening period how could your group manage?

D.I.: We all went back to the village. We had homes. We had brothers.

V.T.: You had land?

D.I.: Yes. But a *tamasgir* knows his *tamasha*. He knows nothing about what to grow on a piece of land.

V.T.: So you started after this break of six months?

D.I.: Yes.

V.T.: Did you begin earning more than you did before?

D.I.: Yes.

V.T.: But prices had begun to rise by then?

D.I.: Yes, they had.

V.T.: But what was your income on an average?

D.I.: In Poona thirteen rupees a day for one *bari*. And when we went to Nasik, sixteen rupees.

V.T.: Sixteen for the entire group?

D.I.: Yes. Only on that condition did we go to Nasik.

V.T.: That included food?

D.I.: Yes. And the extra we got during the performance—*Daulatjada*. That was what they called an addition. We had Uma Chandurikar's brother Bapu and Chandra the dancer. In 1949 we came to Bombay—not at Bangdiwala's. But at that corner near the *vad*.

V.T.: Where?

D.I.: Near De Lisle Road. We went along with Bhau Bapu Narayan Gaokar. And that was a good influence on us. His method of singing was excellent. Savlaram's method was the same. The *vag*, the *charan*.

V.T.: In what way was it different from your style?

D.I.: They were better singers. We were nowhere near them. As for me, people enjoyed my brand of humour.

- V.T.: *What did you learn from them? How to project the voice?*
D.I.: Partly that. But also the whole way of saying something.
V.T.: *Can you explain what you mean?*
D.I.: Our projection of voice or of words was not so strong. People liked my humour. I used to do the second *bari*.
V.T.: *And what did the last bari do?*
D.I.: Oh, they had the *vag* on Harischandra, or Savitri or Simhagad. We didn't have such a strong treasure of *vags*. We went along with them for six months.
V.T.: *This Bangdiwala Theatre you refer to, where is it?*
D.I.: Nothing remains.
V.T.: *It was in Bombay?*
D.I.: Those days there were thirteen or fourteen theatres. There used to be twenty-five groups here at one time.
V.T.: *Anywhere near Bhangwadi Theatre?*
D.I.: No. Near the Musafir Khana at Crawford Market.
V.T.: *Nothing there now?*
D.I.: Nothing. Shankar Shevnekar joined me in 1950. And others came to me, too.
V.T.: *Before that what were they? Tamasha artists?*
D.I.: Yes, they had their own groups. Then they joined us after their group broke up.
V.T.: *Why did their groups break up?*
D.I.: They had money problems. The *songadya* would go away or the dancer would join another group or the singer would find some other employment or sometimes they didn't get paid regularly.
V.T.: *This happens often?*
D.I.: Yes, yes. It goes on all the time. Even now. In 1953 I was with Baburao Punekar's group. My own group had broken up.
V.T.: *Why?*
D.I.: Because the younger Dadu Indurikar was not as firm in his support as Maruti was.
V.T.: *Was he related to you?*
D.I.: Yes, he was Maruti's younger brother. My cousin. He learnt everything in my group. Then he wanted to start off on his own. So he left. I disbanded the group. I mortgaged Ravji's trunk. Gave each of them ten rupees and joined Baburao Punekar. I think that was in 1953 or 1954. And the best part of it was that I learnt historical *vags* there. For instance, *Malharrao Holkar*, *Bolki Pagdi*, *Jaising Rathod*. I learnt a lot: Use humour only at an appropriate moment. There's a murder, or a funeral... then that's not the moment to make people laugh. Never let them laugh when there's sorrow in a sequence. I learnt this through my own experience, when I was working with him. I was with him for two years.
V.T.: *Did you have rehearsals?*
D.I.: No.
V.T.: *Then?*
D.I.: No rehearsals. He would just explain the situation.
V.T.: *That is?*

- D.I. : He used to say, "We are going to do this *vag* tonight". I didn't have any proper rehearsals—not even once.
- V.T. : *But surely you must have seen him do the Malharrao vag before?*
- D.I. : I used to act in it even before I saw it!
- V.T. : *You mean you began to act in it before you ever saw a performance?*
- D.I. : Yes. For instance, we are going to Lalbaug from here. Say by taxi, or we're pushing a cart, or walking. I used to feel my way.... He didn't rehearse me, not even once.
- V.T. : *What did he tell you?*
- D.I. : Nothing. "Get into your costume".
- V.T. : *Then?*
- D.I. : I wore the costume.
- V.T. : *After that?*
- D.I. : He says, "I'll speak this and you reply thus. If I say the other thing, answer me in another way". I used to keep it in mind, remember it all.
- V.T. : *Which role did you play?*
- D.I. : Mohan Singh. Once I did the part, I could go on. No problem.
- V.T. : *But all you knew was what exactly to answer in reply to his words. And he would answer you in the same spirit. So it was just playing it by the ear. But suppose you didn't get the words right, did he manage to keep it all going?*
- D.I. : Yes, yes. He would look after that and I would alter my words in the same spirit. It was all a kind of instinct that told us how to manage things that way.
- V.T. : *He would tell you what scenes there were in your vag.*
- D.I. : Not necessarily. He would say to someone else, "Tell him". So I used to listen to it all, told as a story. That's a habit with all of us. Get up in the morning and decide, "Tonight we will do *Harishchandra*". He would say, "You be *Harishchandra*". Then, "Taramati, Rohidas... Dhondya Mahar and Vishwamitra... you". Once you heard the story, you did the *vag*. This was our level of intelligence.
- V.T. : *But it's quite high!*
- D.I. : For two years there wasn't a single rehearsal and we went through the show. And I remembered every one of the *vags* and when I had my own group, we enacted them.
- V.T. : *Now tell us how you got those vags ready?*
- D.I. : In story form.
- V.T. : *But who prepared them?*
- D.I. : The writer, of course.
- V.T. : *All the ones you mentioned are old?*
- D.I. : Yes. Very old.
- V.T. : *Did Punekar stage old ones or did he prepare these?*
- D.I. : He got them ready. Read the story, then wrote out the narrative.
- V.T. : *Did he write it out? Or did he have a printed copy?*
- D.I. : He had it all written out.
- V.T. : *Now this vag of yours, Gadvache Lagna (*The Donkey's Marriage*), it's an old narrative?*
- D.I. : Yes. It's in a Navnath book. The story, I mean.

V.T.: *What's in the original story?*

D.I. : The original story. The *apsaras* are dancing in the court of Indra. The *gandharva* Chitrasen is pleased by the dance. And in his excitement he sends out flies at them. They bite these *apsaras* and they stop dancing. They say nothing to Indra. But Indra says to them, "Why did you stop dancing so suddenly?" They say, "Indra, God of our Gods, we were dancing to please you and some one set flies on us. They keep on biting us. So we can't dance any more". Indra was furious. He cursed the individual who had spoilt his fun. "May he be born a donkey among mortals!" Then the *gandharva* falls at Indra's feet. He says, "O God! I was carried away by my emotions. Don't set such a harsh curse on me. Find me a way of redeeming the curse". But Indra refuses to show him any mercy. Then Brihaspati intervenes and says, "Indra, I love this *gandharva*. You cursed him because he was in the wrong. But find some way of redeeming him. He can be a donkey by day and a man at night". They agree to this. The *gandharva* will marry Satyavati, the daughter of King Satyavarma of Tulanagri. A son will be born to them. And once the *gandharva* sees the face of the son, he will be redeemed. This is, in short, the plot of the story. We had our own versions: Holding her hand, and not the son being born. Or two women.

V.T.: *Then?*

D.I. : Sometimes we shortened it. Vadgaokar told me the plot of this story. I retained it *chhap* to *chhap*.

V.T.: *What does chhap mean?*

D.I. : What the writer writes, we call *chhap*. What I told you about Pathe Bapurao writing for us, is *chhap*. Vadgaokar wrote it out for us. How Chitrasen Gandharva was redeemed and the king was pleased. His daughter had such a wonderful husband! We mentioned our guru's name and then it ended. This is what is meant by *chhap*.

V.T.: *So before you began with Gadvache Lagna, Punekar told you how to do all those old vags. Then you formed your own group. And you performed the vags you had learnt there. When did you start with Gadvache Lagna?*

D.I. : From the very beginning. From 1940.

V.T.: *And when did you start your own group?*

D.I. : In 1955. From 1958 to 1962 the *Tamasha Mandal* of Dadu Maruti Indurikar and Shankar Shevnekar won eight of the first or second prizes in the State competitions. I have those certificates. In 1962, the competitions were stopped.

V.T.: *How many performances of Gadvache Lagna had you performed till then?*

D.I. : Thousands. Formerly we used to get our public—you know how? Find a potter, give him a rupee or two and get his donkey! Promise to allow three or four of his chaps to come and watch the *tamasha* free. Then tie all the wedding adornments round the donkey's ears, spread a *jari* piece over his back, and make him walk round the whole area to the accompaniment of a *shehnai*. Today is the day—*The Donkey's Wedding*. And people would flock to watch the show.

V.T.: *Now you employed this device. Did others do similar things?*

- D.I. : Oh, yes. They tied those adornments round the donkey's ears.
- V.T. : *In your case it was appropriate. The show was about a donkey's wedding. But if they were going to present Malharrao Holkar?*
- D.I. : No, then you couldn't do it our way. But for our show it was the right kind of advertisement. An actual donkey walking from door to door! Then fix a tent, put up boards. That was enough. The people would know that a *tamasha* group had arrived. They used to be pleased. That's the only form of entertainment in the villages. And there's dance in a *tamasha*. If a show is good, then crowds flock to see it. Which kind of show would you call good? One which has a lot of stuff in it, where you can laugh and yet learn something. Then people come. In the districts of Ahmednagar, Nasik, Satara—everywhere. Once there was an *urus* in Poona. We played in the open. The *patil* of the village was invited. He said, "There'll be women today. Don't use bad language". But he didn't have to tell me. I never used bad language on the stage.
- V.T. : *When you played in villages, what ticket rates did you have?*
- D.I. : When?
- V.T. : *From 1962 onwards.*
- D.I. : From 1962 we charged thirty-seven *naye paise*. That's six annas.
- V.T. : *The same rates for all? On what basis did you fix six annas?*
- D.I. : Formerly we had two anna tickets in Bombay. Then we raised them to four after 1940.
- V.T. : *You mean the ticket rates were lower in Bombay?*
- D.I. : Yes, outside Bombay they were higher.
- V.T. : *What was the point of fixing rates higher in the villages?*
- D.I. : No particular calculation. People never got a chance to see a *tamasha*. So...
- V.T. : *So they came to see the show, paying slightly higher ticket rates.*
- D.I. : Now we charge a rupee.
- V.T. : *Even in the villages?*
- D.I. : Yes. One rupee for one person. It began in 1970. Those who had never toured the villages before and were going there for the first time have now become very rich. They have cars—Mercedes cars.
- V.T. : *You mean tamasha artists?*
- D.I. : Yes.
- V.T. : *Mercedes cars?*
- D.I. : Yes.
- V.T. : *Where did they earn so much money? How much does one show fetch them?*
- D.I. : The tent they fix is big. Ten thousand people can watch the show.
- V.T. : *The tent is their own property?*
- D.I. : Yes, it belongs to them and when a *yatra* is on, they fix it.
- V.T. : *Ten thousand sit in a tent and watch?*
- D.I. : Yes, like in a circus.
- V.T. : *So they can earn about eight or nine thousand rupees?*
- D.I. : Now this year itself in the drought-affected areas we earned more than we had ever earned before.
- V.T. : *One rupee ticket rates?*
- D.I. : Yes. One rupee tickets.

- V.T.: *In the drought-affected areas?*
D.I. : Yes, you could earn ten thousand a show. Just one night.
V.T.: *Did the artists get good money?*
D.I. : Not always. They would give them say two or three thousand.
V.T.: *But was the payment based on payment for each performance?*
D.I. : Nothing of the sort.
V.T.: *Then how did they calculate the amount?*
D.I. : They used to get an advance. And till all that money was repaid, the artist couldn't leave the group.
V.T.: *And the advance was cut from the pay?*
D.I. : Yes.
V.T.: *And what was the pay?*
D.I. : Say ten rupees per performance. Sometimes a little more.
V.T.: *So on an average how much would it work out to?*
D.I. : In festival time to five thousand. The money was not given to the artist but sent to his family. That's the custom with us. Our artists have all kinds of habits. They want rich food; fish or mutton. They want other things too. And we tour seven months in a year. The rest of the time the artist must sit at home doing nothing. Then back to the owner. Because he's down and out by then. He will ask for an advance, say of three or four thousand rupees. And sign a receipt.
V.T.: *But otherwise the earning is say ten rupees a night?*
D.I. : Yes, ten rupees.
V.T.: *For everyone? Even for the man who plays the dholak?*
D.I. : Yes, yes.
V.T.: *The dancer? How much would she earn?*
D.I. : Depends. Sometimes fifteen, sometimes twenty.
V.T.: *But when there's no show on?*
D.I. : If there's a break, there'll be no payment. That's all decided. Part of the contract.
V.T.: *What happens in the rainy season?*
D.I. : You sit at home. Money's short. All of us have families. They have to be fed. So go back to the owner and ask for an advance.
V.T.: *Formerly we used to be told that the members of a group came from the same family? Is it the same now?*
D.I. : Not so now.
V.T.: *You mean you don't have some of your family members in the group?*
D.I. : It used to be like that in Bhau Mang's *tamasha*. But not in ours. After Shankar Shevnekar left us, I haven't a single artist from the old group left with me. The show, *Gadvache Lagna*, still draws good houses. The group hasn't gone to pieces because the old members left us. You know what people say when this happens. "Nothing in that show now. The *songadya* has left the group. Not much to see now. No force in it".
V.T.: *Who are the most important characters in the group?*
D.I. : The *sardar*, the *songadya*, the dancer, the girl-dancer, and the *dholak* player.
V.T.: *The sardar is known for his humour?*
D.I. : No. He is the hero. Then the *songadya* and the girl-dancer.

- V.T.: *You mean the sardar is more important than the songadya?*
- D.I.: Yes, the *sardar* is the one with the brains. The *songadya* is lower in the scale.
- V.T.: *The sardar doesn't sing?*
- D.I.: He can, if he is gifted by fate with a talent for music.
- V.T.: *After him the girl-dancer?*
- D.I.: Yes.
- V.T.: *Then the dholak player?*
- D.I.: Either the player who plays the *dholak* or the *halgi*. Then there's the man who plays the harmonium, then the villain and so on. Nagarkar's *tamasha* group once had fifty members in it. And when Nagarkar entered, there used to be a terrific round of applause. And when the villain Ganpat appeared, there used to be another round of applause. For two *songadyas*, two rounds of applause. Those girl-dancers they had so much 'power', they were applauded. Even the *dholak* player used to be welcomed in the same way. But this was not so with all the other *tamasha* artists. There only the *songadya* got a round of applause. There was a time when Nagarkar's *tamasha* really flourished.
- V.T.: *And in your case?*
- D.I.: The same. When I entered, there used to be a lot of applause. Before I made my entry, Maruti used to get his share of the applause. In Bombay people knew him better. He used to dance. And I used to sing the *gavhana*. Vadgaokar's music and words. A very old one. I used to sing it even in my school days.
- V.T.: *At the start you said you learnt one important thing in your childhood. The songadya must make people laugh; he musn't laugh himself. He must appear sober, serious. What other characteristics must this actor acquire? Specially the songadya in the tamasha.*
- D.I.: First, his humour must bring him laughs. If he can also play the *dhol*, so much the better. If he can play the harmonium, that's an advantage too. And if he can dance—like a girl—that is also a kind of added qualification. Only Savla in Bhau Mang's group and Shamrao Palegaonkar could manage all this. They could act the *sardar*, and the *songadya*, play the *halgi*, the *dholak*, the harmonium, the *tabla* and even dance. It's rare. And they were the best in Maharashtra. Savla is in Poona.
- V.T.: *And Shamrao?*
- D.I.: He is in Satara. They're old now. But the point is they are still in the *tamasha*. One man acting for ten hours at a stretch. That's something rare.
- V.T.: *When you designed your role in Gadvache Lagna, how did you set about it?*
- D.I.: I didn't do it the way you mean. I used to watch those *tamasha* troupes that came to our village. Dashrath Dehu, Lehu Thankar used to come from the Aryabhusana Theatre of Poona. Vadgaokar was my father's disciple. Those two dancers too. I was impressed by their performance. When they did *Gadvache Lagna* in my village, I was seven years old.
- V.T.: *In what way is your current presentation different from theirs?*
- D.I.: The difference—well, those days there used to be a lot of obscene jokes. I dropped all that. Because I saw that women used to come and watch

the show. I felt that we ought to present shows where the women in our families could come and watch us. And I felt we ought not to include jokes that they might dislike. Once eight years ago, Khedekar's *tamasha* was on in a village. The *patil* there and Narayan came to Chandrakant and said, "Must have your *tamasha*. It's as good as theirs".

V.T.: *Who is this Chandrakant?*

D.I. : Dhavalpurkar. He said, "Your *tamasha* is as good as theirs". Chandrakant said, "I'm going to Supari". So the *pehalwan* asked an old woman, "Which *tamasha* should we take?" She said, "If you want a good *tamasha*, take Indurkar's. The rest won't be of any use. You can have Bhau Mang's or Khedekar's, but this Indurkar's is very good". Now this *pehalwan* came looking for me. Said he wanted the *tamasha*. We said, "We want a hundred rupees. We won't let you down. You will get your money's worth". We went and nobody would offer us a drop of water. We didn't have a car. We had a generator. They wouldn't give us a drop of water because we had come in a hired car.

V.T.: *Which year?*

D.I. : 1969. We came here in 1970.

V.T.: *What do you mean when you say they didn't offer you a drop of water?*

D.I. : That's the custom. When the artists reach a place, the people offer them water. That was a small village. But they thought we were an inferior troupe.

V.T.: *They must have known you?*

D.I. : Who they? No. I hadn't performed there before. This was Durga. Kathyacha Durga, near Poona. So they didn't offer us water. There was a disciple of my father there. The same caste. He asked us, "Where do you come from?" "From Rahu Indurkar", we said, He said, "Go ahead. We'll get these fellows on their knees before long. Feel no concern at all for artists. All the time it is Tukaram Khedekar".

V.T.: *Tukaram Khedekar, does he belong to your caste?*

D.I. : No. He is a Maratha.

V.T.: *You mean there are such caste considerations in the tamasha? The Maratha is believed to be superior?*

D.I. : Yes, it used to be so. Not so much now.

V.T.: *Which other Maratha artists were there in addition to Tukaram Khedekar?*

D.I. : Dattoba Tambe. His father was a *tamasgir*. Now my father's disciple in this village, he said to me, "Go on. Perform. Show them. These Marathas are not at all concerned about us. All they want is Khedekar". Now I liked my drink. But that day I didn't touch a drop. These people didn't offer us food, no tea either. Not even *pan*. They thought ours was an inferior show and their money would be wasted on us. I guessed that this was how their minds worked. I didn't sleep, didn't eat. I was just pining for the *tamasha* to begin. I got after that *pehalwan*. "Let's start soon". Before dawn. The *vag* must be over before sunrise. I got after him. He couldn't understand why I was so impatient. My father's disciple—he got things ready for the show. And I started off. "Other groups have come and sung their *gavlanas* here. We respect them all. You come and watch us, pay what you can. We are here on account of our forefathers' blessings and to serve you". I started off:

gan gavhana. I made them laugh. They said it was a wonderful beginning. Then I started on the *vag* itself: *Malharrao Holkar* by Baburao Punekar. But before that I addressed the audience again. I said, "You haven't offered us water. Maybe you don't have it. We can always go to the river. But the way you treated us, it has made us all sad. You think our *tamasha* is inferior. In a school you have boys who are clever, but the parents are poor and don't have money to buy them books..." Then I said to them, "Tukaram Gadkari comes here. He's popular with you. But he worked under me at Bangdiwala Theatre. Madhu Nagarkar started off after I did. Datta Patil—Master Ururekar made a *tamagiri* out of him."

V.T.: *Datta Patil?*

D.I.: Yes, they all entered the field after me. I belong to Bhau Mang's, Dagdoba Salvi's generation—their category. I mentioned other *tamagiris* in my speech. And then I said to them, "If you like the show, pay for it. If you don't like it, we'll go back home empty-handed." We began the *vag*, *Malharrao Holkar*, and those who normally went to work in the fields at six in the morning stayed on till eight to watch it.

V.T.: *When did you begin?*

D.I.: At midnight.

V.T.: *The vag?*

D.I.: No, the whole show. *Gan, gavhana, rangbaji*.

V.T.: *And the vag?*

D.I.: At three in the morning.

V.T.: *So the vag went on for five hours?*

D.I.: About four and a half hours. But I did it with so much spirit that the *pehalwan* came and thumped my back. "The whole night there was just Dadu before us. We didn't remember that Tukaram Gadkari existed". I said, "For your *hazeri* I'll have one *vag*".

V.T.: *What does hazeri mean?*

D.I.: It means "during the day". Have the first *vag* from nine to twelve.

V.T.: *Tell us about this system.*

D.I.: See, we began at twelve and went on till eight in the morning. Then we had a wash, we drank tea and started off again at nine.

V.T.: *This is the regular thing?*

D.I.: Yes, in the villages.

V.T.: *Even now?*

D.I.: Yes, even today.

V.T.: *Then how do they go to work, if they're working in the nearby factories?*

D.I.: They take the day off. To watch a *tamasha* those people stayed away from their job.

V.T.: *And you had the hazeri?*

D.I.: I started on the *hazeri vag* and won their respect. "Tomorrow is Saturday. I'll perform free for you. The women must sit in front, the men at the back. And our artists must consider that their mothers, sisters, wives, daughters are all before them. So they must think a little and not use any kind of language. We have *Ranicha vag*. It is Patthe Bapurao's work. And it is meant for women. So the women must sit in front. That's my request to you". They applauded me. We received five hundred rupees. And I did the other *vag*. Began at ten at night and

finished at five in the morning. The women paid one rupee each... three hundred rupees in all. They liked it so much.

V.T.: Now you do Gadvache Lagna in Bombay. Is our audience very different from the one you get in the villages? Do you present your show here exactly the way you do it there? I don't mean that you do it in the open there and in a closed theatre here. I mean in relation to the audience... Say in Poona—at the Bal Gandharva you have an urban audience. In a village it's a different kind of audience. So do you change your style?

D.I.: No.

V.T.: Not even in the dialogue?

D.I.: No. Just the same.

V.T.: And the duration? They say you go on for five hours at a stretch in villages.

D.I.: Now you see if there's *tamasha* on at the time of a fair, you present two *vags*; in the case of a *lavani* you repeat the lines. But you make sure that you don't bore the audience! Now for the State competitions, I read the rules carefully. Five marks for the *dholak* player, five for the *halgi* player, five for the *tal* player; and five for the *tuntuna* player. That makes it twenty. And fifteen for the girl's *ada*.

V.T.: How much does that make? Thirty-five.

D.I.: Fifteen marks for minor roles and that makes it fifty. Fifteen for the *songadya*. That makes it?

V.T.: Sixty-five.

D.I.: Fifteen marks for the response, fifteen for the plot. I studied this break-up of marks. So I got a clock and began rehearsing. Now our *Malharrao Holkar* lasts three hours. How to fit in the *gan*, *gavlana*, *rangbaji* and the *vag* into just two hours?

V.T.: Less than two hours?

D.I.: Yes. The *vag* lasts three hours. *Gan*, *gavlana*... that takes one hour. *Rangbaji* for one hour and a half. It used to go on for more than five hours. We had to shorten it to less than two hours. I worked out a system. Nobody taught me... I would say Bapurao's first line in my mind. Shall I sing the rest?

V.T.: Do.

D.I.: I used to carry on, sing one stanza, then end the *gan*. Then I used to go on to the *gavlana*. Krishna's *gavlana*. End on a note from Pathe Bapurao. All over in fifteen minutes. That left me one hour and a half for the *vag*. I used to time it well. Everything had to go like clock-work. I decided that the *halgi* player mustn't stay too near the mike. If he did that, our words wouldn't carry. So the *dholak* and the *halgi* were shifted behind and had to play in a strictly disciplined manner. And thus we used to reduce the sequence to one hour and a half. Finish it just a little before. Then the curtain, leaving two minutes for my *Vaikunthicha ala raya Vithal* and the final bow before the spectators. From 1958 to 1962 I used to win all the prizes—the *halgi* prize, the *dholak* prize, the award for the *songadya*. Five prizes. You know how? Tatyasaheb told me, "When you do an exam, you have to put down your pen after the bell goes and hand in your answer paper. You can't say I want to write a little more. It's the same here".

- V.T.: *In the villages, do you perform without mikes? You say there are now ten thousand watching a tamasha? How can the voice reach them?*
- D.I. : Formerly it was quite different. Once a *tamasha* began, you didn't even whisper to your neighbour. Not a cough. We used to carry iron rods and tie rags at one end, dip them in kerosene and light them. Keep them burning on both sides of the stage.
- V.T.: *Till which year?*
- D.I. : 1938. We went on till 1943 the same way. Burn kerosene, light those rags, call the people... Earn a few rupees and a meal. Then start off in the afternoon for the next village. You see people loved the *tamasha* then. There was no other form of entertainment.
- V.T.: *But now you can't do without a mike.*
- D.I. : Naturally, the villagers know all about mikes.
- V.T.: *You use them?*
- D.I. : Of course. What else can you do? Your voice doesn't reach the back row and they shout, "Can't hear. Speak loudly". Then you shout louder. You think it's all a bit crude?
- V.T.: *And now they listen to film music. Do they make you sing film songs?*
- D.I. : They do. They'll bring out two annas and say, "Sing *Bugdi mazi sandli*." Formerly they used to ask us to sing a *bhedik* or some devotional piece. There's one by Vadgaokar. Our village womenfolk used to like it a lot. Really lovely lines. I used to sing this in Bombay. I knew many *lavanis* by heart. I think I have forgotten most of them; I feel the break.
- V.T.: *We had come upto 1969. Then you began again and you have gone on with the tamasha right till today.*
- D.I. : Yes. I came here right away.
- V.T.: *How?*
- D.I. : Our well-known comedian Shankar Ghanekar told Madhukarrao Nerale of Hanuman Theatre, "Get that Dadu Indurkar".
- V.T.: *But Nerale must have seen you on the stage before?*
- D.I. : Sure. Right from the time the Hanuman Theatre was built. I used to bring my group here.
- V.T.: *Then you stayed here right till now?*
- D.I. : Yes. Three years. Doing *Gadvache Lagna*. I had stopped the show for two months. They wrote to me asking me to come back. I said to myself, "I am poor. I am an artist but my art is hardly valued. I must learn to be humble". So I came back.
- V.T.: *You were talking about those girl-dancers? Do they have someone in the family acting in a tamasha troupe? Is that how they enter the profession? And what happens when they stop dancing? What do they do to earn a livelihood then?*
- D.I. : Then they find a man, get married.
- V.T.: *But what happens to a girl in the later part of her life?*
- D.I. : She becomes someone's keep. Who drives the girls to this? The owner? Nobody bothers about what will happen to them when they are old. The owner thinks of his own pleasures. Once he has finished with one woman, he runs after another.
- V.T.: *When would you say they are too old to act?*
- D.I. : Forty, forty-five.

- V.T.: *Leave aside the lot of the girls you mentioned just now, what happens to the rest?*
- D.I. : They go out during the day to clean vessels, wash clothes.
- V.T.: *These tamasha women?*
- D.I. : Yes. There's Baya Salunka who used to be in our troupe. I got her an honorarium of three hundred rupees because she had nobody to support her. It's alright when you are young. The girls begin working with a troupe, they start dancing when they are twelve or thirteen. But nobody cares once they are old.
- V.T.: *When is a dancer considered 'old'? When is she 'out' of the profession?*
- D.I. : When she hardly gets a rupee, or four annas as *nazar*. She has to stay at home then.
- V.T.: *When does this happen?*
- D.I. : When she is about forty. But if she has a slender build, she can go on till she is fifty.
- V.T.: *But the one you mentioned?*
- D.I. : She is forty. There is a small village Walvada. Her father used to live there. She came to us when she was seven or eight. We taught her to dance. She used to dance beautifully. People used to say, "No *tamasha* like Dadu Marut Indurkar's".
- V.T.: *Then what happened?*
- D.I. : As she got older, she got a lot of 'publicity'. Her father took her from one troupe to another. And the troupe would flourish. She is a grandmother now. But even now she has so much appeal. Those days one tilt and the audience responded! It can happen to anyone. Once you are old, no one has any use for you. But not in her case. People still want her. They like that 'action' of hers.
- V.T.: *You said if a woman is 'out', she has to find any kind of work, even manual work.*
- D.I. : What else is she to do? If she finds a protector when she is in her prime, then things work out well for her. Otherwise there's just misery in store for her. This has been my experience these last thirty-three years. In our line, honesty is rare—both among men and women. Cheating is common.
- V.T.: *Won't things improve?*
- D.I. : I don't know. But I would like them to.
- V.T.: *You went through a hard period, didn't you?*
- D.I. : Yes, in 1967.
- V.T.: *They say you cleaned vessels?*
- D.I. : Yes. My wife used to work as a servant in a Parsi family. She earned fifty rupees a month.
- V.T.: *And you?*
- D.I. : I helped her. We got two meals a day and her pay. The children were with her parents. The Parsi employer asked me what I did. I said, "*Tamasha*". He asked me what that meant. I replied, "Drama".
- V.T.: *Didn't you invite your employers to your show?*
- D.I. : No, they weren't interested.
- V.T.: *You worked in their house, helping your wife with the household work? For six months?*
- D.I. : Yes. But I told you I did so because I was in difficulties. They burnt down our tent and I lost everything.

V.T.: *Where did this happen?*

D.I. : We were at Khandoba's in the Satara district. The fair there is attended by the Mangs and Ramoshis.

V.T.: *This is not the Khandoba of Jejuri?*

D.I. : No. This fair is Khandoba's fair at Pali. Mangs, Ramoshis, thieves throng there. They propitiate Khandoba, entreat his blessings for the robberies they plan to undertake. And if they are successful, they come for the thanksgiving on Khandoba's wedding day.

V.T.: *Still?*

D.I. : Yes, even now.

V.T.: *Who burnt down your tent?*

D.I. : My rivals.

V.T.: *You suffered heavy losses?*

D.I. : Yes, about twenty thousand rupees.

V.T.: *What was damaged?*

D.I. : The generator worth about five thousand. Our new tent which had cost us about seven thousand. I had about three thousand rupees in the trunk. And our costumes and properties. They wanted to smash the vehicle. But I stood before it and howled out loudly.

V.T.: *When did it all begin?*

D.I. : During the performance itself.

V.T.: *But it was your crowd that came to watch the show.*

D.I. : They were spectators who came to watch my show because they were told it was good. There was a huge crowd. And a boy came and removed a wire.

V.T.: *While the show was on?*

D.I. : Yes. I was on the stage. I saw it happen. The amplifier failed and the people began to shout, *Avaz, avaz*. We tried to explain. But it was no use. I was behind the boy. I asked him, "Why did you do it?"

V.T.: *Then?*

D.I. : The people got up and broke the door, smashed the glass, pulled down the tent. We were forty. The crowd numbered two thousand.

V.T.: *Was anyone injured?*

D.I. : Yes, my uncle was hit by a stone. He bled. The rest of our artists fled.

V.T.: *And the girl?*

D.I. : Shankarraro Shevnekar quietly led her aside and took her to safety.

V.T.: *But do people really behave like this if the actors aren't heard properly?*

D.I. : Oh, yes. They did the same thing to Bhau Mang.

V.T.: *But is it all done on purpose?*

D.I. : Yes. I saw the boy start it. My rivals had their people among the spectators.

V.T.: *You say they did the same to Bhau Mang?*

D.I. : They even burnt their vehicles—Kolhapurkar's, even Tukaram Khedekar's.

V.T.: *Do the contractors engineer the trouble? Or your rivals?*

D.I. : They are all there. And members of the public, too. They can't bear to see someone else succeed.

V.T.: *Didn't the police come to your rescue? Stop this skirmish? Wasn't there any inquiry?*

D.I. : No. Nothing.

V.T.: *Didn't you lodge a complaint?*

D.I. : The local people threatened me. They told me to be more sensible and

not try anything of the sort. So I got into our vehicle and we drove to Poona. The owner there helped us.

V.T.: *You mentioned that you are a mahar. When you are on tour, you stay in a village. Do people behave differently because you are a mahar?*

D.I.: Formerly they did. Not any more. Baburao Puneekar is a Maratha. He would stay with the village *patil*. I lived in the *maharwada*.

V.T.: *Did you face a lot of difficulties during the drought?*

D.I.: Well in Marathwada people love the *tamasha*. They come in bullock carts; women, children, the whole lot. They eat their *bhakri* outside the tent. They enjoy every minute of the performance. They get to see it just once a year. There's no other form of entertainment.

V.T.: *The cinema?*

D.I.: They prefer the *tamasha*.

V.T.: *But film music?*

D.I.: Yes, they listen to the film records. If they like a particular song, they ask us to sing it.

V.T.: *You incurred a loss of twenty-seven thousand after your tent was burnt down?*

D.I.: Yes. I paid off my debts. I have yet to settle a debt of five thousand. I must think of my children. My daughter wants to become a nurse. The younger daughter is in the sixth; my son is in the fifth. My youngest is four years old.

V.T.: *Would you like them to be tamasgirs?*

D.I.: No. I would like to educate them.
