

# P. L. Deshpande

## INFORMATION CARD

### Theatre Personality

Name	:	Purushottam Laxman Deshpande
Bio-data	:	2
Photographs	:	—
Articles	:	31
Clippings	:	161
Brochures	:	—
Publicity Material	:	4
Books on	:	1
Books by	:	22

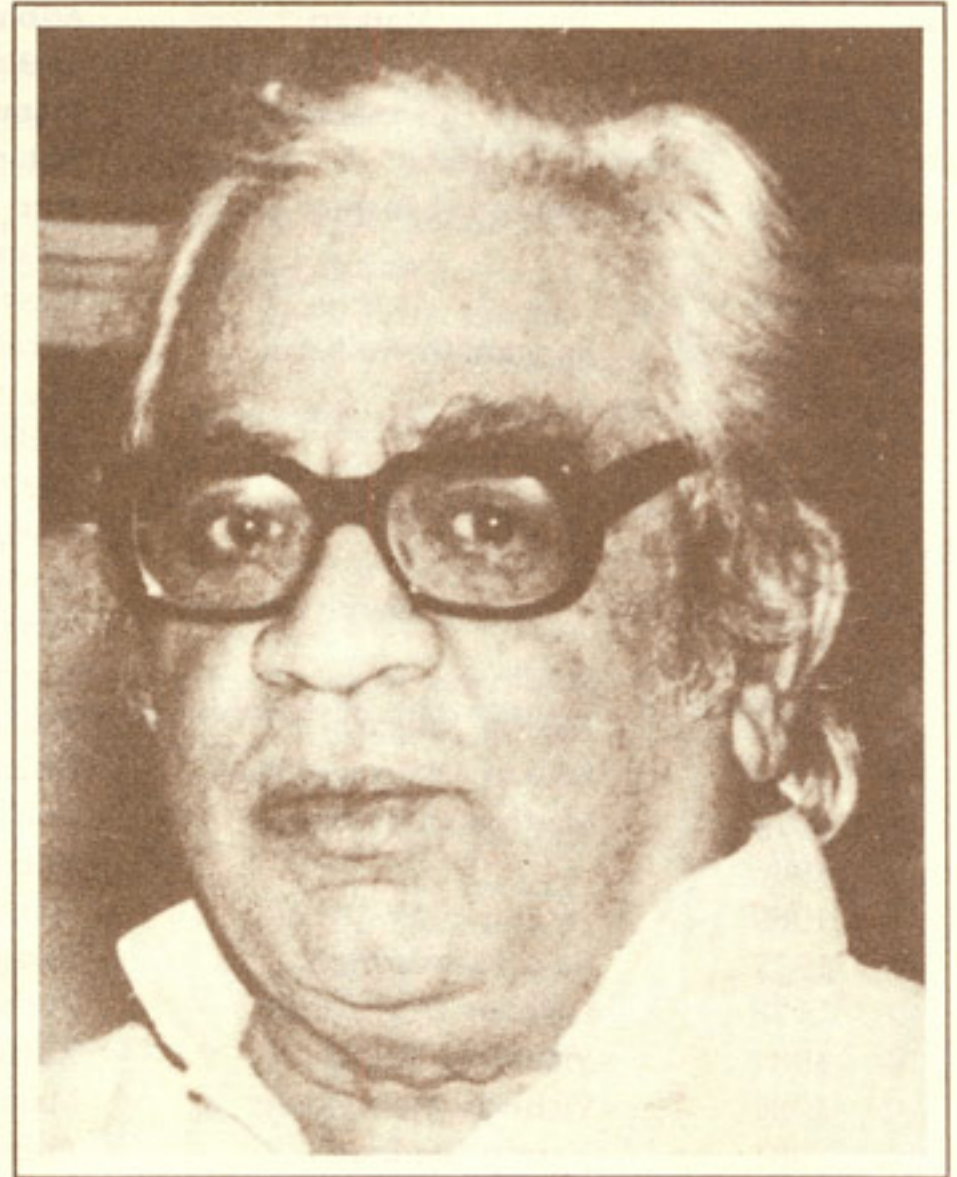
### Bio-data

<i>Name</i>	:	Purushottam Laxman Deshpande
<i>Date of Birth</i>	:	8th Nov., 1919.
<i>Residential address</i>	:	1, Roopali, 777, Shivaji Nagar, Pune 411 004.
<i>Education</i>	:	M.A., LL.B.
<i>Profession</i>	:	Humorist, Playwright, Director & Actor
<i>Awards &amp; Honours</i>	:	Sahitya Akademi Award 1965 Padmashri Award 1966 Sangeet Natak Akademi Award 1967 Sangeet Natak Fellowship 1979 D.Litt. of Ravindra Bharati 1979 D.Litt. of Pune University Kalidas Puraskar 1987 Gadkari Award 1988 Padma Bhushan 1988 Vishnudas Bhawe Award Punya Bhushan Puraskar 1993

### Awards & Honours (Contd.)

:	President of Marathi Natya Sammelan	1965
:	President of Marathi Sammelan in America	1979
:	President of Dalit Sahitya Sammelan	1989
:	President of 2nd Jagatik Marathi Parishad, Mauritius	1991

*P. L. Deshpande*



The following compilation consists of material selected from various sources, arranged thematically by Dr Shubhada Shelke.

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Source</i>
1. Childhood and Early Influences	'Survatiche Na Sampanare Divas' by P. L. Deshpande, <i>Natyadarpan</i> , 1979 and extracts taken from the interviews taken by Prabhakar Atre, Jaywant Dalvi and Vidyadhar Pundalik.
2. On the process of writing	Interview by Prabhakar Atre, 'Dipawali', 1965.
3. Theatre and Performance	'Survatiche Na Sampanare Divas' by P. L. Deshpande, <i>Natyadarpan</i> , 1979.
4. Batatyachi Chaal	'Pu.Lan.cha Natyapravas' by Mukund Tekade, 1980 and interview by Nitin Kothari, <i>Lokprabha</i> , 1989.
5. One-Person Presentation	Response to supplementary queries by Shubhada Shelke.
6. Approach to Humour	Interviews by Jaywant Dalvi and Vidyadhar Pundalik, <i>Maharashtra Times</i> , 1969. and <i>Lalit</i> , 1975 respectively.

### Childhood and Early Influences

*You have worked in so many diverse fields. Is this a coincidence or was there a plan behind it all?*

My life-experience makes me believe in the importance of coincidence. I was born in a family that responded to literature, music and drama like a connoisseur. My father, though not an artiste himself, knew how to appreciate. He never felt that music or theatre would spoil a child! He always encouraged me in my interest in the arts. Every evening I used to sing for him or play harmonium. My grandfather created an interest in *Gita*-recitation, reading, elocution etc. Vile Parle had a good atmosphere. Those years were formative. While I was in the third standard, the 1931 movement was on. By the time I was 9 or 10 years old, I used to do mimicry, sing *powada*-s, deliver lectures or play harmonium. In Ganesh Festival, or in gatherings, socials etc. my parents would be somewhere in the audience and I would be performing! In my childhood I took part in *mela*-s. Our *mela* was called Dhruv Balvir Mela.

The 1942 movement was on when I was in college. On the one hand I was impressed by the ideals which the political leaders stated before us. On the other hand were influences of Bal Gandharva, Ganpatrao Bodas, Chintamanrao Kolhatkar and other artistes. My wife Sunita has also played a role in forming my personality. She hailed from a highly cultured and sophisticated family. This too is a coincidence.

*What would you say about the earlier days?*

For anybody working in the field of art the term early days means hard labour, suffering etc. When somebody told me, 'Tell us something about the days of your

discipleship'. I said, 'I have not been a disciple!' He thought this an arrogant answer.

*Don't you accept anybody as your guru?*

I feel that to accept or to reject anybody as a guru is a mental act. What actually matters is what comes out in your art. While training yourself how much you suffered or how hard you worked etc. is absolutely of no importance. Once you are on the stage as 'Shivaji' the important thing is the strength of your presentation of Shivaji-ness that was intended by the playwright. I went to theatre with the intention of playing a game.

*You have said that your real love is music . . .*

Yes, it is so. If at all there is a likelihood of next birth I would like to be a good musician.

*From whom did you learn music?*

By listening. I began by playing harmonium, also learnt for about 3 years from Shri Dattopant Rajopadhye. I could not afford to pay fees for college and the music class at the same time. However, I listened to musicians of extra-ordinary calibre. I admire the musician's perseverance to spend years to get the expertise they have. I have no doubt in my mind that Indian music can and should be studied only through the *guru-shishya* tradition.

Perhaps it is due to my intense attraction for the element of sound that my humour too depends on like-sounding words! It is through the similarity of sounds that I can quickly think of words otherwise dissimilar. On account of the same reason, I am adept in dialects. I love all languages.

*Your writings do not seem to have been influenced by the earlier writers. Is that so?*

I think I have been influenced by Kolhatkar, Gadkari, C. V. Joshi, P. K. Atre and Shyamrao Oak to a greater or lesser extent. I have read all these with great interest. I love to read biographies and autobiographies. A humorous insight is like music one is born with. At least that is what I feel. My favourites are P. K. Atre and Gadkari. Atre's writings convinced me of the importance of the spoken word. Atre was a good speaker and he had an experience of the flow of words. For humour words have to flow. Atre's lectures and his collection of poems *Zenduchi Phule*, from his prime days, impressed me. P. G. Wodehouse is my favourite author. He used his words so precisely. One cannot suggest alternatives to his words or summarize his writings. This I think is a significant characteristic of great art. Poetry is my favourite form of literature. At one point of time *geet gayan* (singing of songs) was my part-time occupation. Poets such as B. B. Borkar, who respected the spoken and the sung word, have impressed me. G. D. Madgulkar, in my opinion, is a miracle in song-writing. In 3 or 4 words he is able to create an image. This is his great strength. Kusumagraj (V. V. Shirwadkar) is another poet who has influenced me. Pandit Bhaskarbuwa Bakhle, who collected rare compositions from different *ustad-s*—undergoing great hardship to do so—appears to me as great as Lokmanya Tilak!

*Who are your favourite authors?*

Dickens, Mark Twain and Wodehouse.

*There is no vulgarity in your humour, no character assassination. Do you owe this to your love of music?*

To an extent it is so. It is only in music that there can be no disharmony. And character assassination is ugly. It is a kind of cowardice. I have attacked tendencies, but I never feel disrespect for personalities.

*Keeping aside the Maharashtrian ego, tell us how you would compare humour in Marathi with other languages?*

I must admit that island-country, England produces great humour. I read *Punch* regularly. the *sabeb* has a wonderful capacity to laugh at himself and an art of understatement.

*What makes your writing so varied, so different from Kolhatkar's and Atre's?*

Because I am essentially a performer. Secondly, I have seen a lot. I have seen many persons and roamed in many fields of life. See the jobs I held! I was a clerk in a Department of Petrol Rationing, then I was a school teacher. This was followed by being a clerk in the Income Tax office. Later I gave tuitions in music and mathematics

too! . . . And I have a very good memory. Memory is in fact my current account.

*Why is it that we do not have humour based on fantasy in Marathi?*

The magic world needed for fantasizing does not exist here. It is not that our culture lacks fantasy . . . remember Bal Kavi's *Phulrani* or Khanolkar's *Kondura*?

## On the Process Of Writing

*How do you select themes?*

Every man is a fit subject. One becomes aware of different inconsistencies while moving in different spheres of life. That supplies the themes. Through these I have made fun of inconsistencies. May be on occasions I have exceeded my limits and yet the intention was never hostile, will never be. I always wrote about human inconsistencies seen by another human being. A common 'hurt ego' or dishonoured values can also act as motives. All the while the humorist has a deep sympathy about his subject. Sometimes I feel bad that I am not a cartoonist. Daily I get ideas for cartoons! Perhaps I try to fulfill my desire through theatre. My *baburoopi* presentations are cartoons created with my own body!

*Do you keep diaries or notes etc. about the themes you propose to write on?*

No. However, I keep notes of my travel. I feel it is important to keep them in detail. Incidents and personalities etc. — this responsibility is taken over by Sunita.

*Do you take a writer?*

No. I write myself. While writing dialogues I speak them aloud. This makes me sense the rhythms that may go wrong. It is my faith that literature is spoken. A book is a matter of convenience. A sentence is to be spoken according to the meaning and the meaning manifests as soon as you speak the sentence.

*After finishing 'writing' different authors feel differently. What is your mood like?*

The moment I finish writing I develop a craving to read it to somebody. Obviously my wife is my first reader or listener . . . In fact the moment I get any idea I cannot keep it to myself, I have to tell it to somebody. I need somebody to share my emotions with.

*Do you have an outline of a play before the actual writing begins?*

I never put down an outline etc. On account of my experience of working in different media, I have developed a good sense of timing. My experience as an actor also helps me in the writing of plays. While engaged in the process of writing, I can see a play before my eyes.

## Theatre and Performance

*What are your motives in turning to theatre?*

I do not think that I will ever know the answer to this question. Wherever I sensed or felt a source of delight I went there. How can anybody feel interested in theatre unless he believes firmly that theatre is to be performed before audiences? Who would go to theatre unless one gets joy out of it? Some of us use the word *raktadosh* (blemish in the blood). Why do you keep awake the whole night to listen to music? The answer is *raktadosh!* Why did you spend everything that you have to rehearse and produce a play? The answer is *raktadosh!* In short we cannot rest without doing theatre, music, etc. etc. This is the truth . . . In common language the craving is described as an itch! Nobody does theatre because it pays. Even a contractor. In a way he wants to earn or lose but only through theatre! Even a person sitting at the booking desk does so because of this intense desire for theatre. He does not do so to earn money 'somehow'. The moment I say theatre, the whole family of booking clerks, doorkeepers, backstage people, actors, actresses etc. comes to my mind. All these are 'stage-struck'. On stage and in the theatre they come together to play this game . . .

Earlier in my career I had directors who never made me conscious that they were my gurus! Chintamanrao Kolhatkar, Dattopant Angre, M. G. Rangnekar . . . also teacher Tarkunde in my school or Rajopadhye and Appa Thatte in the *mela*-conducted rehearsals which were a great joy in themselves. Hiranman Desai (Karuna Dev's father) taught me the technique of a microphone in

broadcasting. He was a disciple of Keshavrao Date (though like Eklavya). I learnt from all these consciously and unconsciously. I also learnt by watching others perform.

In theatre I have been a playwright, a director, as well as an actor. I enjoyed rehearsing the most. The first performance is always like a station where you get off at the end of journey. The joy is in travelling to that station . . . Every sentence reveals itself like a *mantra* . . . Every composition adds a different colour even with a slight change. A change in cadence, a pause, a slight movement, an extempore business . . . has also unexpected difficulties . . . Everything adds to the pleasure. A person who does not enjoy rehearsing is a show-off . . . and after doing all this you get a response in the theatre at unexpected places . . . or the whole auditorium may be too silent . . . this too is an experience

### Batatyachi Chaal

*How did you think of a bahuropi performance?*

When I wrote *Batatyachi Chaal* its performance was not on cards. However, reading aloud with *abhinaya* is one of my old habits. In 1958, we were in London. *Batatyachi Chaal* had already been published in book-form. Marathi-speaking people in London gathered together during the Diwali days. They pressed me to give an item of entertainment for them. Suddenly I thought of giving them an edited reading of *Batatyachi Chaal*. I did so and it was well-appreciated. As coincidence would have it, Emlyn Williams was giving his shows in those days. *Boy Growing Up* had a script by



*P. L. Deshpande in  
Batatyachi Chaal*

Dylan Thomas. With extraordinary strength Emlyn used to portray life of a boy growing up from childhood to the early teens. I felt like doing something similar in Marathi. In addition I attended a performance of Marcel Marceau in Paris. Madhav Achval, a well-known architect and aesthete from Maharashtra, was accompanying us. He immediately said, 'You can do something similar about *Batatyachi Chaal*.' This was the genesis of a one-man show, *baburoopi*. I was the author, I was the director and I was the character! I never changed from male to female voice etc. but often changed the style and gestures that go with it.

*What kind of preparations did you make?*

This kind of show is strange because the performer is really to control *everything*. The entire script of three and half hours I have learnt by heart as otherwise the performance becomes loose and spoken rhythms go awry. All the movements I used to practise in a room and for every performance I used to recite the entire script in the morning—lasting for about 3 hours. I used to keep to myself on such a day.

For such performances body movements were more important than facial gestures etc. For example, narrating the travels of the *Brahman Mandal* in a victoria to V.T. station I used to enact the jerky nature of the 'travel' through my movements. We employed spotlights but not much of a setting. Two cut-outs of the gallery, a cut-out of a building-facade, a typical *tulsi* plant in a Dalda tin and one chair . . . this was the property! The chair was replaced by a bench in the second act.

The first performance took place in 1960 in the festival organised by INT. The INT postponed the entire festival to give us adequate time. When it was realized that the performance cannot take place in the open air, the shows were arranged in the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. I was running temperature at the time of the first show!

*You never lived in a chawl and yet your depiction is so truthful!*

I have seen a *chawl*-life very closely. Most of the Marathi speaking middle-class lived those days in the Girgaum-*chawl*-s. My weekends were spent with my relatives in Girgaum. In fact, I was not aware that a *chawl* of this same name really existed! I had taken the name from a composition of Pathe Bapurao. Persons really living in that *chawl* came and asked me, 'How did you come to know of people staying in the *chawl*?'

### One-Person Presentation

*How would you distinguish between baburoopi performances and drama?*

In a play an actor is a part of a composite product. The total success or failure of the performance does not depend on him alone. Responsibility of different

aspects of theatre are in fact allotted to many different artistes, e.g. set-design, music direction, light design and the director. All these have to come to an agreement. A disharmony between them does not help. In a *baburoopi* performance the skills of an actor, a director and playwright are to be combined in one person . . . This is more or less like a *mehfil* of Hindustani music. In Indian music a composer, a conductor and a performer are all rolled into one person, unlike in western music. A knowledgeable spectator tries to assess all these roles while witnessing a one-person presentation.

*What is the difference between shows like Asa Mee Asa Mee and Batatyachi Chaal?*

From my presentations, *Batatyachi Chaal* and *Asa mee Asa Mee* approximate a stage play. On the other hand, *Hasavanyacha Maza Dhandha* is chiefly an enacted reading. While *Batatyachi Chaal* and *Asa Mee Asa Mee* illustrate *kayik* and *vachik abhinaya*. To some extent reading alone is in the tradition of *puranic* (story-tellers of myths) while *baburoopi* shows are like *kirtan*-s. Perhaps *baburoopi* shows come near to dramatic monologues.

### An Approach to Humour

*In your opinion what would be the basis of humour?*

A humorist should be well-intentioned. That diminishes hostility, enmity etc. I am greatly influenced by Tukaram's *abhanga*-s as also by Ramdas's *Dasabodh*. It is interesting that P. K. Atre also read and reread these books. The basic decency of a humorist determines his personality as a writer. For example, I get disturbed to see *morcha*-s of workers. I cannot make fun of them. Humorists have firm notions about propriety—anything which goes beyond it makes him see humour. And yet I never lose the sense of pathos. One of my obsessions is a small, desolate railway station. Somewhere in my mind a desolate railway station, an empty theatre are associated. My temperament is not suitable for fiction. I write prose as an essay. In my writing, stories or events come as metaphors. It is true there is a narrator in me. And in all my writings it is I who narrate. I cannot write in the third person.

My sense of humour is inborn. This has given me a sense of proportion, a sense of priorities . . . Humour makes one understand what is important and what is superficial. People have funny notions about humorists. They feel we must be rollicking with laughter all the time in our homes. However, we too have dreams, frustrations . . . It is true that topical humour is forgotten easily. However, if humour and humanity are kept related, then this danger does not arise. How can you say that tragedies are greater than comedies etc.? How can humour be excluded from the greater understanding of life and the point of view resulting from it? Can you

say that Charlie Chaplin's *Gold Rush* lacks in epic quality? In it he gobbles up a shoe and we laugh, but don't you feel that makes us understand the hunger of human beings? Humorists say, 'I laugh because I cannot weep.' Wodehouse was asked, 'Well Plum, do you hate Germans?' Wodehouse answered, 'I do not hate in plurals.'

I borrowed the device of taking one and the same character through different situations from P. G. Wodehouse. However, I have always felt that for an author it is more important to establish a relationship between you and your world – than creating a character.

## List of Performances

### Plays

1. Tuka Mhane Ata, 1948
2. Bichare Saubhadra, 1949
3. Pudhari Pahije, 1951
4. Ammaldar, 1952
5. Bhagyawan, 1952
6. Tuze Ahe Tujpashi, 1957
7. Sundar Mee Honar, 1958
8. Warywarchi Varat, 1963
9. Watwat Watwat, 1975
10. Ti Phulrani, 1975
11. Amhi Latike Ne Bolu, 1976
12. Pahila Raja, 1976
13. Teen Paishacha Tamasha, 1978
14. Raja Oydipaus
15. Ek Zunj Waryashi, 1988

### One-Acts

1. Mothe Mase Chote Mase 1957  
Sare Kase Shanta Shanta  
Sadu Ani Dadu
2. Vitthal To Aala Aala 1961  
Santvan
3. *Assorted:*  
Purvaj, Sari Yanchi Kripa, Khurchya,  
Shambhavi Ek Dene, Bane Bane Ha Paha  
Apla Studio, Mazi Path Dharte

### One-Person Presentations

- Batatyachi Chaal, 1960
- Asa Mee, Asa Mee, 1964
- Hasavanyacha Maza Dhanda, 1965
- Rajsanyas, 1984

### Children's Plays

- Vayam Motham Khotam, 1956
- Nave Gokul, 1958

This list is related only to theatre activities of P. L. Deshpande.