

S. Purushottam

COMPUTER CARD

THEATRE PERSONALITY

Name : Purushottam Y.
Saundalgekar
Photographs : 84
Printed Material
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Publicity material : 528
Books on : Nil
Books By : Nil
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Bio-data

Name : Purushottam Y. Saundalgekar
alias S. Purushottam
Date of Birth : April 25, 1934
Address : Ashwini Co-op. Society,
40/1421, Tilak Nagar,
Chembur, Bombay 400 089
Education : Upto matriculation
Languages : Marathi, Hindi

Major Awards and Positions

1971-1979 : Associated with
the Marathi Natya Parishad
1975 : Founder-member of the
Kalakar Sangh
1976 : Founder-member of
Rangamanch Kamgar Sangh
1990 : Natyadarpan Award
in recognition of
service to theatre
Books : Nil

Additional Information : Connected with management of
Natyavikas,
Marathi Rangabhoomi,
Natya Niketan and
Atre Theatres
Founder/proprietor of
Aapli Rangabhoomi
Regarded as one of
the impresario on the
the Marathi theatre

S. Purushottam **Interviewed by Bal Kudtarkar (excerpts)**

S. Purushottam!

That is my assumed name. My real name is Purushottam Yashwant Saundalgekar . . . It is a rather difficult name, hence the assumed one . . . I got the suggestion from V. Shantaram's name. I hail from Kolhapur as does Shri Shantaram. I was familiar with his name since my school-day . . . I used to see a lot of films. I had a liking for them . . . There also was S. Purushottam, a wellknown music composer.

Your education?

In Kolhapur, I was born in Nippani, district Belgaum . . . I lost my father when I was five years old. My sisters brought me to Kolhapur. I did not have anybody else to look up to . . . I learnt in Private School at Kolhapur . . . upto matric . . . I was fond of acting but nobody would take me . . . even in school plays! I wanted to play at least a small role, humorous one! But the director decided I was unfit!

Did any of your co-students act in plays?

Arun Sarnaik, Jagdish Khebudkar . . .

Why did you feel like entering the dramatic profession?

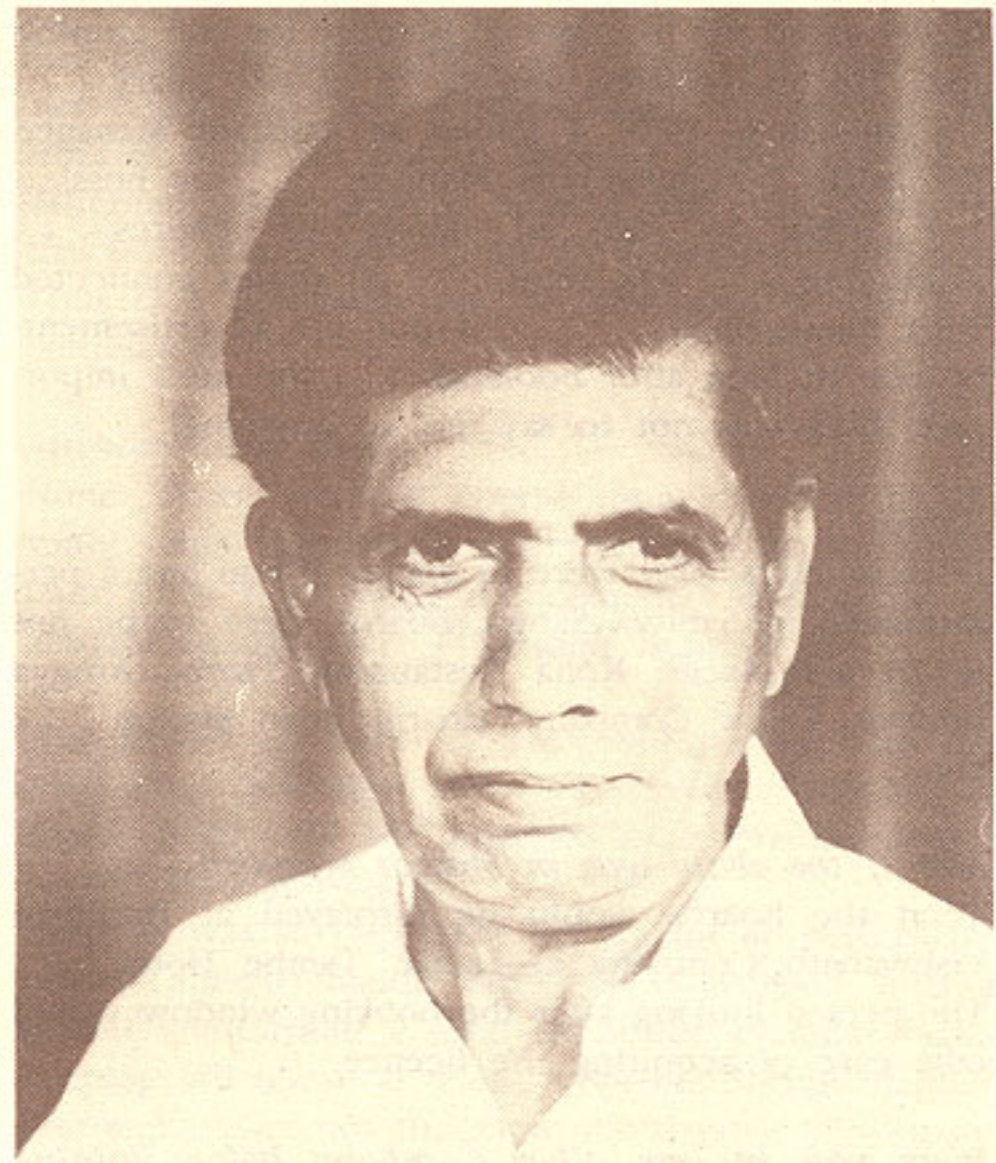
I love this profession! . . . Right from my school days I had decided to be associated with theatre and do nothing else . . . I used to act in *melas* though! Jaywant Sangeet, Sudarsh Sangeet, Adarsh Sangeet . . . all these were minor mela-parties.

In what ways you were active in theatre?

I was a 'prompter' . . . However I *did* play a role once. I was a coolie in the play *Lagnachi Bedi*. I carried luggage on the stage . . . no dialogues . . . nor movements!

True! Even today in your profession you are in a way carrying load for others!

Yes. An educated 'loader'!



S. Purushottam

How did you come to Bombay?

I had failed in matric in 1955, left my school. Nana Joshi from Kolhapur gave me small assignments . . . of prompting and doing other odd jobs. He used to call everybody for payment on the day following a performance. On meeting him the next day, he used to say 'All the artists from Bombay demanded a lot of money and I had to pay them off! After hanging about for a number of hours, Joshi would pay me two rupees from the promised 'night' of rupees five. He used to add 'Why do you need money? You get a rice-plate in 8 annas!' . . . My love for dramatics had compelled me to leave my home. And I could do nothing better than enjoy the rice-plate! This was in '56. At that time, M. G. Ranganekar was very popular. His *Kulavadhu* was running full houses . . . I used to reel-off letters after letters to Ranganekar! Arun Sarnaik, my school-friend was playing a role in *Bhatala Dili Osari*, which Ranganekar had recently produced. Ranganekar asked Arun, 'Who is this S. Purushottam from your Kolhapur? He never stops writing to me!'

During the same period, Ram Marathe, the well-known actor-singer used to be in Kolhapur quite frequently. I had told him about my desire to come to Bombay. He had assured me of help . . . Ranganekar

finally asked me to come to Bombay for one month's trial. He also offered me Rs 75 as net salary . . . On August 1, 1959, I joined as Assistant Manager. Prabhakar Panashikar was Manager . . . my boss!

I used to do all kinds of chores . . . prompting . . . odd roles . . . all duties connected with management . . . To put up advertisement-boards, to look after bookings . . . the most important thing was not to say 'no' to anything!

Boards?

In those days, they were in vogue. If you had a performance in Sahitya Sangh, boards were to be put up at six places: Kona Restaurant, Tambe Arogya Bhuvan, Tailor Company, Charni Road Station . . . etc.

And if the show was at Shivaji Mandir?

Then the boards would be displayed at Haribhau Vishwanath Company at Dadar, Tambe Hotel . . . The person looking after the booking window would take care of acquiring the licence.

Were you in any other Company before joining Ranganekar?

Yes. In 'Natyavikas' of Goa and Jayram Shiledar's 'Marathi Rangabhoomi'. Natyavikas had also offered me roles! I was 'Moru' in *Bhava-Bandhan* and one of the ten thieves in *Manapaman* . . . I stayed with Ranganekar for one year. We couldn't get along. Ranganekar was a man of strict discipline. He insisted that nothing should be done without his prior permission. For example, once, while advertising for one of his productions, I described Shripad Joshi, a prominent actor, as 'Natavarya' (King of actors). Ranganekar immediately asked me, 'With whose permission, did you employ the adjective 'Natavarya'?' I honestly confessed to him that, I have done it on my own, thinking that, to promote our own actor will do no harm! . . . Ranganekar however was not pleased. He said 'No actor should be given prominence. If you allow an inch to an actor, he will take miles from you!' This was his injunction.

In your career, since then, have you felt that Ranganekar's remarks are borne out?

Yes! If actors are given importance, they sit on your head! This is as true as the sunlight, especially in the context of financial matters! . . . After leaving Ranganekar, I served with one Mr Vakade and Mr Mazgaonkar . . . They were 'contractors'.

Contractors?

Contractors are persons who arrange shows on contract. The plays are already rehearsed and produced.

Contractors make a lump sum payment to the dramatic troupes to claim all the profits. They are distributors too . . . Mr Vadake needed a manager and I filled the slot. However I heard through the grapevine that Acharya Atre was in need of a manager for his company—'Atre Theatres'. This was around 1960. I stayed with him for about five years, as a Manager. *Sonyachi Khan* (by Shirish Pai), *Ha Kbel Savalyancha*, *Priti Sangam*, *Dr. Lagu* and *Brahmachari* were being performed. While rehearsals were on for *Brahmachari*, an actor called Padmakar Athavale did not turn up. In fact, he was always late. Shirish Pai suddenly asked me to stand in for Athavale and I became 'Zabbu' in *Brahmachari* . . . Atre used to pay me well . . . Rs 200 as a salary, and Rs 25 as a 'night' . . . but I was married and hence it was difficult to make both ends meet. And yet I never dreamt of doing anything else. I had dedicated myself to the profession, in the true sense of the word.

There are many today, who are employed elsewhere and do theatre in their spare time!

I never thought of having the best of both the worlds. I had devoted myself to the theatre. I thought even if I cannot become an actor, what does it matter? I had suffered at the hands of contractors who did not pay. I decided to become a contractor—who pays! I thought of becoming a producer much later.

How do you function as a contractor?

There are many plays now which are 'orphan'. That is, they are out of copywright. It is not necessary to take an author's permission etc. in case of plays such as *Bhavabandhan*, *Ekach Pyala*, *Sausbaykallol*, *Manapaman*. I gather together actors and actresses, who have played important roles in these plays, I choose a 'proper' day, date, venue and occasion etc. to arrange a performance. For example, till recently, Sunday afternoon used to be a 'proper' occasion. Now the television has ruined it. Secondly, when you have odd-days which are also festival days, you are likely to earn. For example, holidays such as New Year Day (Hindu) or Diwali . . . Once, on Independence day, I arranged a show of *Bebandashabi* . . . It was full house. For four to five consecutive years, I achieved this at Shanmukhananda!

Do you have your own Company?

Yes. With the name 'Apli Rangabhoomi'.

Do you produce plays?

Never. I will always be a distributor. There are many producers. People produce plays but their resources are exhausted after the

initial few shows . . . Finally they turn to us; with a request to take the show to various centres all over Maharashtra . . . even as contracted shows.

How did you think of becoming a distributor?

People out of Maharashtra, from Gujarat, Karnatak etc. like to see good Marathi plays. The producing companies rarely take the plays out of Maharashtra on their own. Except Prabhakar Panshikar and a few others . . . most producers depend on contractors for the task. I have created some subcontractors as local sponsors. I take plays and give them to these subcontractors. Right from the inception of 'Apali Rangabhoomi', I began functioning as a distributor. . . For example, we take a play . . . The producers do not need us in Bombay, unless we have the theatre on a good day. As contractors, we are entitled to some 'dates', which we can exploit. If the play is good. Why not?

What about distribution in other centres?

As I told you earlier, we take a fixed number of shows, to be subcontracted to the local sponsors. Some of these are professional, while some are not. The latter kind of sponsors are theatre lovers, employed in LIC, Banks etc. I sell the play to them keeping a margin of Rs 500.

What if the play suffers a loss?

The amateur sponsors may divide the losses amongst themselves.

What are your future plans?

To continue in the same profession.

Has anybody taken plays on contract before?

Yes. Ganpatrao Joshi (1867-1922) . . . used to do *Hamlet* then. He was in financial difficulties and a fisherman came forward to help him on a condition that Joshi would perform for the fisherman's audience. Thus that fisherman can be described as the first contractor.

Anybody after him . . . ?

None. There were of course money-lenders to advance sums. Contractors really emerged on the scene later, after 1942. After the centenary celebration of Marathi theatre (in 1943) their number grew.

(Let us discuss some of your innovations). In the early days, performances were scheduled usually at night. When did the practice of afternoon shows begin? Who started it?

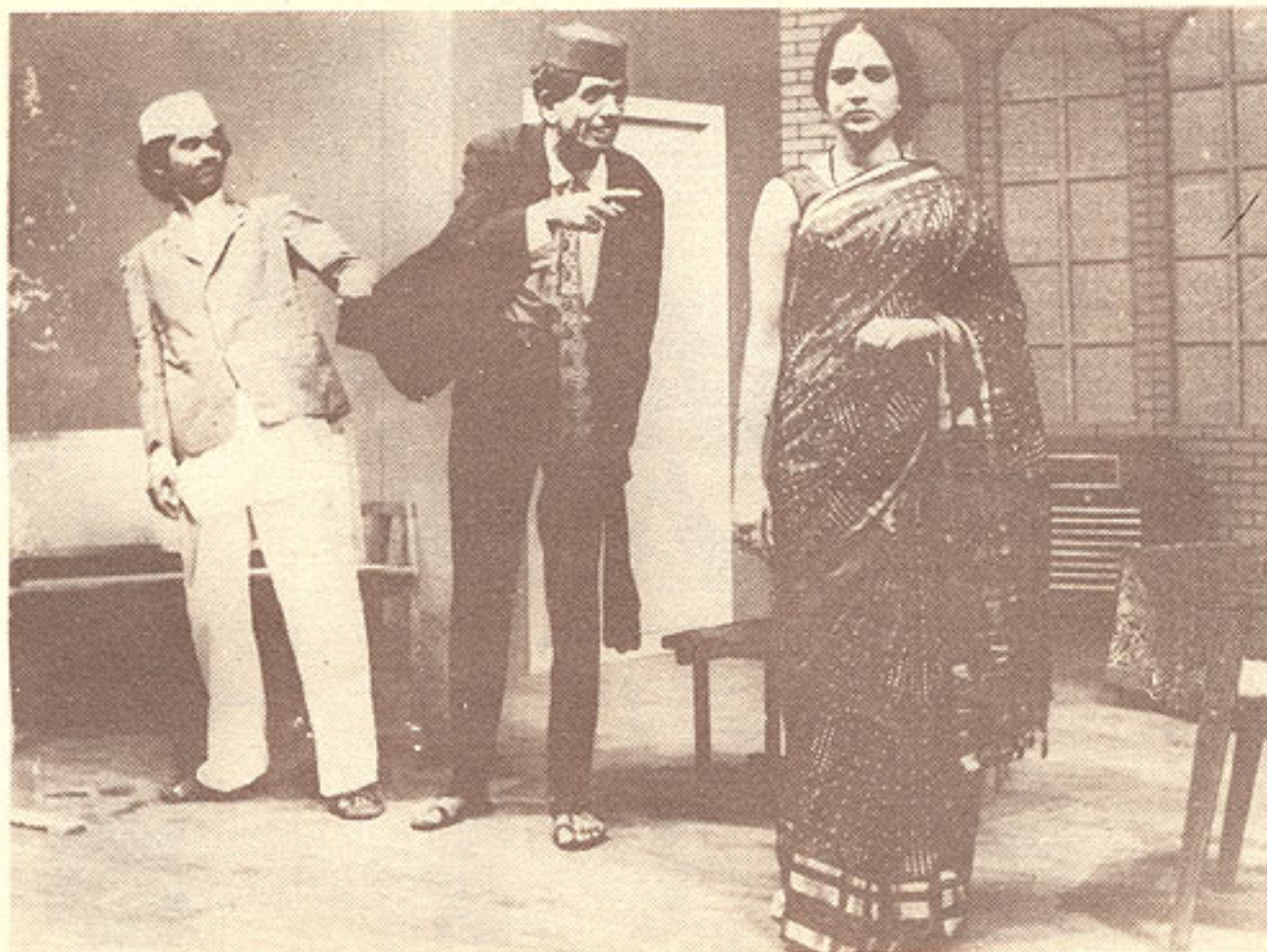
Saturday was an important day to put up performances at Shivaji Mandir after its conversion into a closed auditorium. I used to notice cinema shows running full house at 'Plaza' opposite Shivaji Mandir. I thought 'why not the same for theatre performances?' *Geet-Ramayan* was popular at that time. I approached Sudhir Phadke and put up afternoon shows of *Geet-Ramayan* at Shivaji Mandir. It was my idea and it became very successful. It was a Shraavan Tuesday and women came in great numbers. It was full-house.

Do you claim that the afternoon show is your idea?

Yes. Undoubtedly.

What other kinds of performances did you put up?

Programmes of Natya Sangeet, Sugam Sangeet, One-



*S. Purushottam (centre)
with Arun Athawale (left)
and Sushama Paudwal (right)
in Mee ek vidushak*

man shows . . . I had also organised a 'Mujara', 'Cabaret' at Shivaji Mandir! These too were well attended. However workers from some political party staged demonstrations . . . these shows were taken off . . . We also present 'Orchestras'. Younger people like them. But theatre is my first love . . . I present plays mostly.

How do the people from the interior of Maharashtra come to know of plays in Bombay?

We bring out a small booklet during the Ganapati festival every year. It contains detailed information about the new plays, one-acts and musical programmes produced by various institutions.

Do you get royalty?

Not a single paisa! But I get prior permission of the producers to publish the information.

In the early days, performances required 10 to 12 hours. Today you can get the theatre only for about 4 hours. How do you tackle the problem?

If the play starts late, for some reason or the other, it needs 'cutting'. This we leave for a senior actor. He knows what can be left out without rousing the ire of the audience.

There is a charge against you. You engage artists on increased 'nights'. This has affected business adversely.

I do not see anything wrong in paying more to a deserving artist. I will give you one example. I had put up *Tuza Ahe Tujpashi* at Shanmukhananda hall. The auditorium has a capacity of three thousand. I wanted Dr Kashinath Ghanekar to act in the play.

No replacement would have drawn a full house. Dr Ghanekar demanded Rs 2100. I knew the amount was a bit 'high'. But I agreed. Why should I refuse if my margin was assured? Same was the case with Chittaranjan Kolhatkar in *Bebandshahi*.

S. Purushottam on related matters:

*Selection of Contracted plays

Bondre had produced *Men without shadows*. It stood first in the competition and was much talked about. I took it to the interior but due to its name, people thought it to be a play in English. Noboday turned up! . . . After this failure, I decided to stick to the old plays. A new play, however good it may be, lacks popular names and fails to draw the audience.

It is said that you present these successful old plays with dilapidated scenery and assorted costumes etc. Your preference for the old successful plays, instead of the good new ones harms theatre!

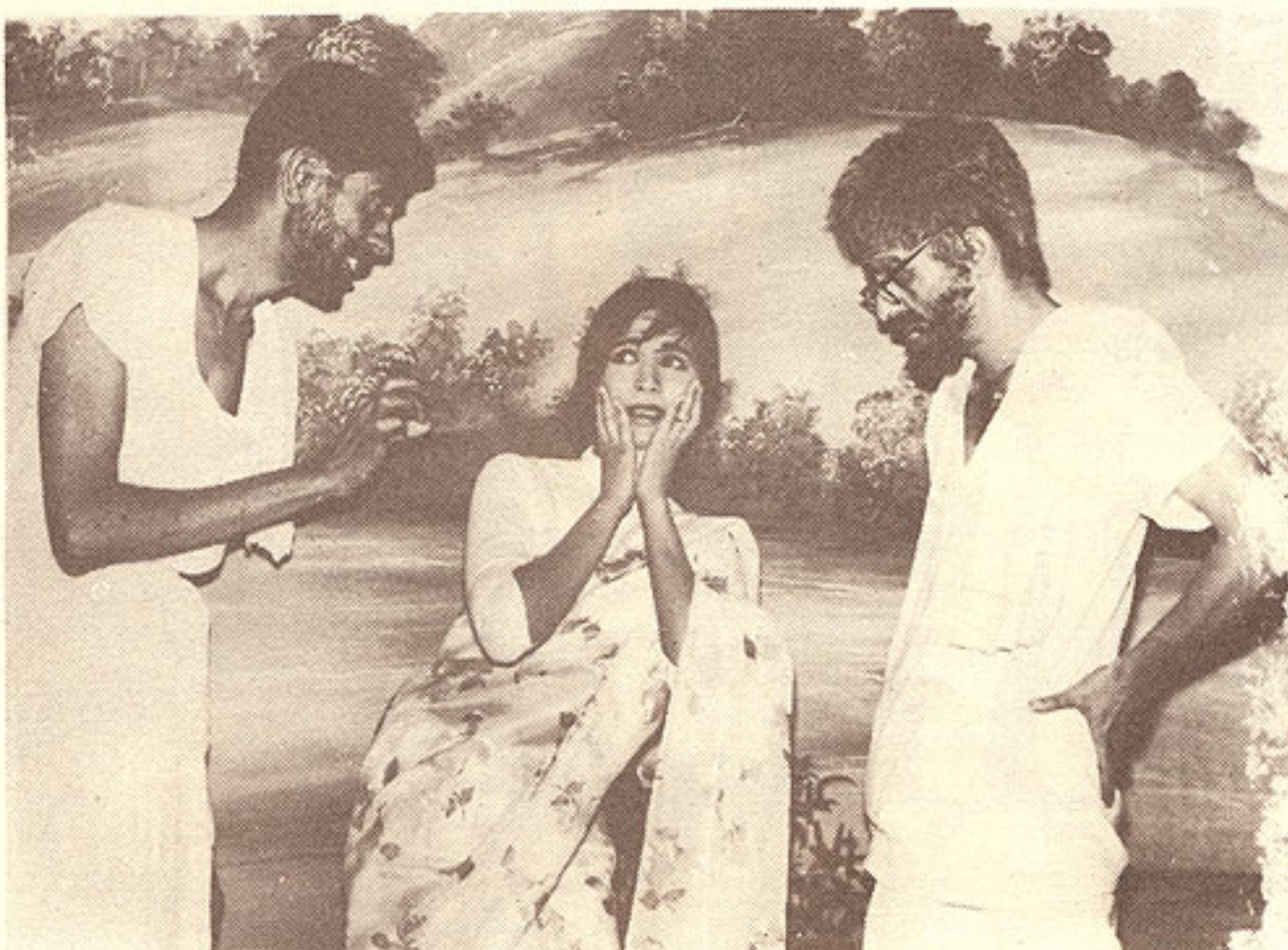
I do not think so. The old plays are supported by the people. There is nothing wrong in helping them to see their favourite plays!

Obviously a play running successfully will not need your help!

Yes. Those of good quality and not enjoying a successful run come to us, for example producers of plays such as *Kalchakra* and *Maza Kay Chukala*. We take these plays to the nooks and corners of Maharashtra.

*Non-payment of 'nights' etc.

It is true that sometimes I have not paid the artists



S. Purushottam, Aashu and Dinesh Karmarkar in *Bramhachari*

their nights! But I have also paid them 'high' nights of Rs 2100, Rs 1500, Rs 1100 when the going was good. Even the bigger companies keep about ten nights' arrears! Sometimes I have made payments by selling off my wife's bangles! I paid well when I could, I did not when I could not! I do not think I have committed a sin.

Is it that you are not able to pay the producers because their productions always suffer losses?

No. At the most there remain arrears for one out of ten performances we contract. This is so even in case of bigger companies. But we are more maligned. In fact this holds true in case of many other kinds of programmes I arrange for contract. People think I have made lot of money . . . It is not so. Nobody has been able to prove so. I am ready to donate all the property which people allege I possess!

***Future of the profession**

I do not see bright future for the profession of a contractor. This is mainly because there are really few persons in the profession today who are respected. The actors, for example, do not care a paisa for the producers . . . All are after making quick money in a short time.

***Felicitations offered to unknown performers**

The well-known actors etc. are honoured profusely, but the second-rankers, the lesser-known, who have served the stage for many years, are hardly cared for. It is my hobby to felicitate such performers. So far I have honoured Tukarambapu, Narahari Satam, Dattatreya Keluskar. These were good performers but rather unlucky. They could do any role. They knew entire plays by heart. One could ask them to prompt for any play.

***Association of Distributors**

About 1978, I gathered the distributors together to form an association. The inauguration function was followed on the same day by dissolution of the association!

There are many distributors in Maharashtra. Such as Madhavrao Kulkarni (Kolhapur), Ram Kushthe (Chiplun), Lele (Ratnagiri) and Phatak (Nagpur) etc. The Natya Parishad asked us to form an association first and then to join the Parishad. But this is impossible because the cut-throat competition prevailing among the distributors will not allow them to come together . . .

I have been associated with the Natya Parishad from 1971 to 1979. The credit to establish Kalakar Sangh and Rangamanch Kamgar Sangh also goes to me.