Chapter: I

Introduction
Mahesh Elkunchwar receives more significance being a notable playwright in the post-independence era in India due to various reasons. There are many opinions and ideas proposed by many thinkers about what exactly went into making of Marathi theatre in particular and Indian theatre at large.

Sayan Dey in his article declares that artistic talent like that of Elkunchwar was the outcome of certain circumstances that was produced after India received independence. According to Sayan, there was ‘artistic confusion’ and ‘fragmentation’ during the period and he continues, “[T]he entire nation was bifurcated over the issue of retaining Indian traditionalism or inheriting western modernism. These theatrical dialectics generated original or synthesized versions of thematic and performative principles” (Dey 18). However there had been more than single stimulus for Elkunchwar to decide on making writing plays his profession on personal and cultural level. The ‘singularization’ of view about the key factors affecting the development of theatre in India after independence may not be very fruitful as the country does not hold uniformity neither on the level of language nor that of culture and traditions. This fact makes the process to be more complicated to think on it more systematically and on the other hand it brings about more artistic and innovative form of writing with the uniqueness of experience embedded in the language and the culture of the local.

Elkunchwar banged on the screen with the exhibitions of the experiences which were considered ‘taboo’ and selected such subject matter that had been an important part of the entire section the middle class society against the rural backdrop where agriculture and traditional business were the backbone of economy of the society. It was the period of transition in India at national as well as local level. Economy was being stirred at the
levels of development caused by industrial growth, educational advancements and the nature of agricultural prosperity. Elkunchwar becomes representative of the both the typical family system in Indian villages with all those family bondages and conflicts and that of the life style affected by more and more urbanization.

There is more than one reason that makes Mahesh Elkunchwar as one of the most prominent playwright in Marathi literary writing after independence. Vijay Tendulkar was at his peak of career and it was watching his play Mi Jinkalo Mi Harlo! inspired Elkunchwar to make writing plays as his profession. He wrote finest plays in Marathi that contributed in bringing about elementary changes the scenario of Marathi play writing. It is approximately after 1960, the writings of Mardhekar, Gadgil Chitre, Tendulkar, Khanolkar and Alekar dealt with new themes and touched upon many new issues and sought clear and bold representation of them in literature. This ‘new writing’ brought larger dimensions to Marathi literature. They made experiments with forms, themes, narratives techniques and explored new and prohibited areas of human experiences. In this task of exploration, Elkunchwar stands alone with difference to that of traditional and contemporary playwrights. It takes place due to the major concern of his plays that deals with such a basic structure of family and society in Maharashtra, touching upon very common human emotions and struggles. What the common lays in his writings is distinctive nature of philosophy he propagates. It is why Dr. Kamlesh says that “ethos, core and concern of Elkunchwar are different” and he is primarily a philosopher.

Elkunchwar has strong belief regarding what mainly constitutes the process of perception of play i.e. writing, reading, watching a play being performed and a play being performed by actors and their perception of the play. He elaborates his stand regarding it
in the annexure to the play *Wada Chirebandi* entitled *Maza Ajwarcha Natyapravas*. Though there has been for a long period of time a debate about what constitutes as a prominent core of an art among text, context, author and reader, he thinks it is not the author, nor the audience but the actor who is more prominent; its his/her body that labours to express human mind. To search for the mind is the real performance. Human mind is limitless and there is no end to the agony of the mind. Performances must be executed to find out the depth of the agony of human mind.

This view of Elkunchwar bears more significance and controversy as it passes judgment challenging the authorial ‘supremacy’, contextual relevance, and importance of audience’s perception of the play. Elkunchwar is one of the few dramatists and critics who hold this view. It bears the authenticity on many grounds as actors are the most important medium that brings about the realization of author’s ideas to the audience. Randolph Goodman adds the role of other factors on the stage saying, “To bring a script successfully to life on the stage requires the skill and artistry of many professional practitioners – director; actors; scene, costume, and lighting designers; and occasionally a composer and choreographer – all working in concert” (Goodman vii).

This is perhaps more intelligible to a dramatists to recognize how his play is being transformed into performance and how meaning is more oriented to the actors and their ways of expressions. It becomes more clear to the author when he/she comes to know how there has been vital change in the meaning creation between what the author implied and what the actor expressed. It could be happening in case of play writing only. As other forms of writing may not give this idea to an author, a dramatist receives more time to contemplate and realize the transformation as he/she could sit in a theatre and watch
her/his play being performed. Elkunchwar seems to be more impressed by this phenomenon. It has a vital perception to think over as there have been multiple issues taken into consideration about as what constitutes a making of a play or a text. Though Elkunchwar talks about the significance of actors who bring about a world of change in meaning with the manners in which they enact a play, he considers positively all elements that offer their contribution in the making of a text, which could be listed as author and her/his milieu, the time, gender, politics, culture and history. At the minutest level if one attempts to observe, it is highly possible to find how the smallest gesture on the part of an actor changes the meaning of the course of the action. It builds entirely new formation of cultural associations and changes the whole schemata of the play planned by an author. Malyaban Chattopadhyay’s article entitled “A Historical Study of Ancient Indian Theatre – Communication in the Light of Natyashastra” writes about ideological perspectives as far as presentations by actors on the stage are concerned. It becomes clear that possible effects of the free expressions by the actors on the stage, were recognized and it was clearly stated ‘to control’ performances in country and Malyaban thinks that such strategy of controlling was formulated as the performers were ‘good communicators’ and they could be threats to powers of the state. Malyaban registers an important idea from the Natyasastra translated by Adya Rangacharya. It says, “Things which are not stated here should be learnt by attentively watching the talking and behavior of the people and should be used in performance” (quoted in Chattopadhyay 12).

Many a times, this view of Elkunchwar has instigated many discussions among the literary circles in Maharashtra, and occupied larger space in media too. However, it is
essential to locate Elkunchwar in a tradition of which he is one of the ‘alterers’ as far as Indian drama in general and Marathi theatrical writing in particular are concerned. This tradition at both the levels does not seem to be receiving single stimulus for it to lead in a particular direction. Colonialism and postcolonial conditions could be an umbrella term to gather whole course of process. It was not easy job for the Indians people to cope up with the change after independence. It had been complex phenomenon for them as they live under control and subjugation of the British people for more than a century. Before the white people, there had been different aristocratic regions where they fought for sovereignty their status and their people. It was the memory Indians had; the struggle for independence was a vital phenomenon that united India in better way. It was the first time, whole country lead by Mahatma Gandhi, was united as a nation and declared to be a free nation and democracy was established. This course of history has more impact on the life of common people. In addition to this, the technological, industrial and economical advancement triggered multifarious effects on the traditions, cultures, rituals and family system in India. Economy forms the base of every change in social life.

As a result, a researcher has to consider these issues more systematically in order to understand basic nature of text produced in India. Prof. T.M.J. Indamohan in his paper entitled “Post-Colonial Writing – Trends in English Drama” considers Reflection of nationalism in post colonial drama in liberated nations as a form of “resuscitating the respective nations’ socio-cultural and political dignity from the imperial compression” (Indramohan 5). For him it is matter of psychological and identity crisis level. He concludes his paper by saying that the post colonial plays “do not theorise any particular aspect but articulate the categories of social and psychic identity and their labile new
deployments across the ideological spectrum and it is discipline stands away from the superpower’s hold and carve a niche of their own in the history of race, culture and politics” (Indramohan 5).

Cravings for identity were a visible and natural trait that could be easily seen among the countries receiving political freedom. However all attempts to recover from the ‘colonized mind’ and asserting identity of their own were never devoid of exhibitions of the richness of the traditions they had. For a country like India, it was supported by and correlated with religious rituals, traditional festivals and folk arts. With the passage of time, the intensity of nationalism, explicit exhibition and assertion of identity through various forms of literature and arts started to ebb away gradually. It took for a while for Indians to make out the design of their country which had been changed due to certain course of events like religious riots, political and democratic upheavals, and constitutional provisions for under privileged people of India, establishment of Panchayat Raj and implementation of Five Year Plans. The division of the country among states on the basis of language and considerable growth of population has distinctive impact on the feelings of nationalism of the country and psychology of linguistic compartments still continues to exist.

G. P. Deshpande’s following view makes the complexity of the division of period visible. He writes in his introduction to his book entitled Modern Indian Drama: An Anthology, “Indian theatre however seemed to pursue a different path. It was not post-colonial. It was not post-modern either. It seemed to hark back to tradition and the ethnic. It seemed to celebrate the ‘Indian’ more than any other form of writing in India” (Deshpande xiv, xv).
Gradually with development of industrialization that was more associated with the intensive growth in population and consumerism, India started getting divided into two major sections i.e. rural and urban. There were more reasons to the movement of masses from rural area to the cities than that of employment. Both the places have developed a distinctive nature of lifestyle. The residents of the places have certain magnitude of psychological orientations that are characteristically different from each other. In an extreme manner, Arvind Adiga mentions village as ‘area of darkness’ and city as ‘area of light’ in his Booker award winning novel *The White Tiger*. The protagonist Balram tell Jiabao that “a man can be good in city if he wants to be but in village he doesn’t have this choice” (Adiga 98) and he adds to it saying that this difference between the two Indias is ‘the choice’. *The White Tiger* could be taken here as one of the finest examples that represents Indian life so well depicted divided among the two sections. Besides it, it is a picture of developing India presented by a person who experienced age long poverty and had been victimized by the different systems in India. This view however brings us one idea as stated earlier that a certain phenomenon like that of a typical writing cannot be studied in isolation. It has to be judged in multiple ways as there are many visible and invisible factors that go in making of a text, its perception, its realization and its popularity as well.

In this way, we can very roughly point out how the chronological order may run beginning with nationalism, politically inspired identity crisis, glorification of traditions and confrontation with modern ways of living, increasing complexities of relationships, fragmentation of traditional social structures, and institutions like marriage and family and identity crisis within a society and institutions. The chronology leads to what
generally is called as modern Indian drama. Daxa Thakor thinks that it as a “combination of tradition and modernity where tradition is equated with old outdated ideas and beliefs and customs and practices and modernity with progress and new ideas” (Thokar 2).

It is interesting to observe how dramatic critical writings in India have two distinctive levels. One deals with the production of dramatic writing in vernaculars and its translation that enabled the writing cross the borders of the states and reach out not only to the other states in India but also abroad. At another level, dramatic production originally in English like that of Mahesh Dattani is evaluated. Each language in India has its own tradition of dramatic writing in form of folk art or the other, like other form of literary genre. Translation was and is a spectacular phenomenon that functions on two levels in an affirmative way; it carries the literature of one vernacular language to English speaking people and it also facilitates authors writing in their own languages and thus maintaining their originality, best representation of their culture, social issues and conflicts in their mothertongue. As a post colonial ‘decolonization of mind’ project, it disqualifies the unnecessary burden of learning or knowing English for expression of one’s ideas.

It also becomes essential to observe vastness of literary production in India so divided in roughly three levels i.e. vernacular, translated and originally written in English. However, one might find how it is only few writings and writers who are often quoted while writing a survey of Indian drama. It tends to prompt any common reader to make out the smaller arena of Indian dramatic writing. However, this view should not ignore the rich tradition dramatic writing and performance in India that had been as old as the culture itself. It is rich with expressions, concerns and ways of presentation. A book
entitled *Indian Drama in English* edited by Kaustav Chakraborty contains articles on dramatic works of Tagore, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Mahasweta Devi, Mahesh Dattani, Habib Tanvir, Indira Parthsarathy, Asif Currimbhoy and Badal Circar. It gives an idea that less than six states in India have produced significant dramatic writing. He concludes his “Introduction: Representative Playwrights of Indian English Drama” with the following vague note on the scope English drama in India:

Writing is only one aspect of the play; the other predominant one is the performance. Does English theatre, then, exclude the majority of the populace, an audience that would otherwise have easily received a play in their own mother tongue? This is the crux of the problem that poses the major obstacle for Indian dramatic performances in English. However, with decades of English education in India, both in schools and in universities, the country is home to the largest English-knowing population in the world. Hence, there is still a large potential audience for plays written in or translated into English (Chakraborty 18).

In his article entitled “A Short Survey of Contemporary Indian Drama”, Dr. M. H. Khandagale in the book *Reflection of the Changing Indian Society in Indian English Drama*, initially makes few reference to historical background of Indian tradition of drama writing and different folk form of dramatic presentations in different states and then mentions Tagore, Aurobindo and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya as significant playwrights during pre-independence era. However, his list of contemporary drama only consists of Currimbhoy, Dharmavir Bharati, Badal Circar, Mohan Rakesh, Tendulkar and Karnad and it completes his survey. However he points out few thematic concerns that
hold together the literary production by the authors. He says, “One of the things which profoundly unite them is their mutually complementary treatment of the problematic of contemporary Indian subjectivity on the various axes of gender, sexuality, history, tradition, class and socio-cultural change (Khandagale 14-15).

The major reason for a limited and restricted list of contemporary dramatist in English and in translation is due to less serious drama writing and lack of development of culture of theatrical and professional performances of plays. As far as Marathi theatrical writing or performances are concerned, Pune and Mumbai were once few of the most outstanding producers of professional plays and the cities also had a good number of theatre goers. It was during 1900 to 1920 and 1970s & 1980s and since then there had been many declining trends.

Elkunchwar forms his very crucial role as a dramatist in Marathi writing and joins the modern Marathi dramatists like Vijay Tendulkar, Satish Alekar and C.T. Khanolkar. With the translation of his plays, he became one of the most widely read dramatist in India. Dr. Supriya Pendhari is right to observe that the emergence of Tendulkar, Elkunchwar, Satish Alekar and Khanolkar was of a literary ‘revolt’ sort against the traditional playwriting on the both levels thematic and structural mainly dominated by the authors like V.V. Shirvadkar, Vasant Kanetkar, Madhusudan Karlekar, P. B. Bhave, Bal Kolhatkar, S. G. Sathe, Vidyadhar Gokhale and Purushottam Darvhekar. If we see the thematic concerns of the plays like Silence! The Court is in Session, Sakkharam Binder, Vultures, Ghashiram Kotwal, Chanakya, Vishnugupt, Mahanirvan, Begum Barve, Suryast, Vasanakand, Atmakatha, Garbo, etc.; we can realize how they were distinctively different from the old traditional plays. They essentially contain a voice of revolt that is
asserted with a purpose that mainly intends to depict realism of gender discrimination, religious conflict and psychological problems. They rather incorporated the element of literary revolt and controversy in their plays like *Ghashiram Kotwal, Sakharam Binder* by Tendulkar and *Garbo* and *Wasanakand* by Elkunchwar.

The present study concentrates on certain elements like ‘desire’, ‘revolt’ and ‘violence’ in the select plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar. It however does become a part of larger picture that contributes in making certain writing in Marathi as modern one. Though the themes or traits like sexuality and violence are few of the major issues dealt with on the stage, they have been embedded with other issues to mainly economic, social and ideological structures. There are myriad forces that function in ways which cannot never be satisfactorily be adjusted to our predetermined categories like binary oppositions. It is also essential to recognize that such forces are not entirely independent. They are limited in particular structure which could exist in a certain way at a certain period of time. For example dramatists like Shirvadkar, Khanolkar, Tendulkar and Elkunchwar have a type of literary production in a form of dramatic writing that does not limit itself limited arena of social structure they are part of or nor is there always a constant efforts for making their writings politically correct and intentionally fortified or manufactured.

Authors like Tendulkar and Elkunchwar do attempt to present artistically realism which is both visible and invisible in the structures of various relationships. In a general sense, this act by any author becomes a particular form of a ‘gesture’ that does not necessarily go with the common perception of reality. Such gestures are always probing and encroaching the established ‘ways of seeing’. It could be called as a revolt in a
certain sense. With this understanding, it becomes necessary to realize that the use of word revolt is manifold and as far as this research work is concerned, it is used in both the ways i.e. revolt in general sense and revolt in literary sense which could be written as ‘literary revolt’. What difference does matter between the two is that of origin and inspiration of the revolt.

According to Supriya Pendhari, typical interest of an established author is nurtured on the interest of common people. “There comes a time in course of event of writing that such authors produce literature of a typical kind which would be appreciated by common readers and audiences” (Pendhari 1). There exist a tradition of perception of literature on two levels i.e. readers or audiences and authors. The former lacks creativity as a response to the improper selection of subject matter, repetition of same subjects and sacrifice of virtue and creativity for the sake of appreciation of common readers or audiences. The later takes is more seriously and attempts for systematic response in the form of creative writing. As there exists no natural or supernatural system that maintains moderations of proper proportional distribution of justice to a subject and appreciation for innovations and new ways of ‘seeing’ or ‘writing’, the literary revolt becomes necessary as it is the only way out for the people with innovations and creativity. However the established tradition and literary circle do not allow the change to take place. It prepares such a literary system which is maintained by various bodies and institutions that look after its perpetual existence and cultural, social and political circumstances become favourable to it and protect it.

Literary revolt does give birth to a literature which has more sensibility, creativity, new world of experience, new aestheticism and variety of outlook. This
process however is not easy one. It takes time to establish itself and there remains always a threat of suppression and becoming outcast. The test of appreciation by common readers becomes more essential at initial stages too. The revolt could be hopeless if it is not supported with proper and systematic literary production of higher kind. The vividness of certain superficial aspects in more vague and more trivial way reduces the life of the revolt. Dalit literature is called as a literature of revolt and protest. It marks a very productive and rich period in Marathi as well as Indian literature. Though it had its roots in the age long sufferings and suppression which is of more than mere literary experience, there are common and universal elements that form a base for all literature of revolt. It is why Hemangi Bhagwat identifies the dalit theatre as representative of all the suppressed in her article “Dalit Theatre: A Theatre of Protest”. She concludes saying that dalit theatre “can be called as the theatre of the ‘proletariat’ in the truest sense of the term. Hence its significance as ‘a social theatre’ is to be acknowledged’ (Bhagwat 384).

The literature of revolt is labeled as threat to the culture. It is feared that such type of revolt may cause damage to whole literary traditions and will limit its area of expression. Literature of revolt always leaves its water mark not only in a certain period of literary production but also it adds a chapter to the whole history of mankind. It basically strengthens the culture and also it brings revival to it. Each new trait in a culture is a sort of revolt in its miniature. Perhaps it is protest and revolt that bring about richness and strength to any kind of literary tradition and culture. Revolt becomes a very important concept in this regard. It is actually identical to the process of development of human civilization. When Datta Bhagat in his article entitled “Marathi Natak: 1975 to 2000” questions the rigidity of unchanging nature of Marathi drama, it suggest the
The validity of literary revolt. He says, “Before independence Marathi play writing acted politics and socialism and continued the same after independence. Security of them would be threatened was the main fear for them; after independence there had been fearless atmosphere. Then why had there been no picture of real politics in Marathi plays?” (Bhagat 111)

Literary revolt has its limited field of experience. It takes place within the boundaries of experience among the community of creative writing. It becomes an act by a certain group of an author that creates typical form of writing that does not follow the norms and style introduced and established by traditional mainstream authors. The inspirations for such act by new authors are of purely creative and artistic nature. It has inspirations of broader sense that act beyond the common desires for popularity and making money. It becomes a tool for bringing about a change in common taste for literature and introducing whole new world of experiences and realities. However, it is articulated based on the world of reality created by the existing authors through their writings and it acts for mainly for what T. S. Eliot calls ‘correction of taste’ in his essay Tradition and Individual Talent. Thus literary revolt becomes an aggressive gesture in terms of form and style. It firmly believes in efficacy and effectiveness of new ways of presentations, representations and expressions. It works against the known fact that certain successful formulae do function in bringing about certain positive responses from readers and audiences. This act of literary revolt at a juncture is an act of risk taking in economic and professional sense.

On the other hand, revolt in general sense means a response to particular culture or development in a culture in a way that could be aggressive, intimidating, hostile and
non-cooperative as well; it receives its origins in multiple sources like society, institutions, religion, human relationships, economic structures, political categories and systems, history, geographical orientations and disparities, technologically driven changes, environmental changes, etc.

In the modernist writings of playwrights like Dattani who writes purely in English, Mahasweta Devi, Badal Circar, Datta Bhagat, Sanjay Pawar, Tendulkar, Elkunchwar, etc. have more issues and concerns of unconventional and illegitimate nature at thematic levels in their representations on stage. Sexual issues like prostitution, incest, child abuse, extramarital affairs, rape, violent issues like communal violence, riots, domestic violence, feticide, disaster, political violence, Naxalism, murder, suicide and social and historical issues like castism, slavery, gender discrimination, exploitation, psychological disorders, etc. are the thematic body of plays of the plays of modern Indian playwrights through which three aspects are highlighted. One being the representation of realism and the second the outcry for transformation and change in the existing system and the third is activism.

Selection of issues of sexuality and violence on the stage has the element of literary revolt as well. However, it has roots more importantly in social, political and cultural orientation rather than purely literary inspirations. The inspirations of Tendulkar and Elkunchwar for writing plays differ radically. Elkunchwar’s literary forte right from inspiration writing plays to the selection of theme, subject, form and style is purely literally inspired. Though Elkunchwar admits that his has been literary inspiration to writing as his profession, it is essential to recognize that such singularity does not always
Elkunchwar’s plays have imagism as their strongest point. It is with the effective use of various images and symbols; he succeeds in presenting a structure of story imbedded with multiple possible meaning having very effective touch of metaphysics and philosophy. He seems to be representing the eternal conflict of human being caught between the trajectories like desire and satisfaction. The conflict has multiple culminations. Elkunchwar very skillfully catches them in their typical forms in various contexts. Existential crises are one of his major traits of his complete writing, which are visible in the plays like Reflection and Desire in the Rocks. It is with all the complexity of existence of human being, the inclination of events towards absurdity becomes obvious. Murder of Garbo could be the best example of such act. Treatment to the subjects like desire, revolt, violence, existentialism and absurdity by Elkunchwar is never devoid of a philosophy that is mainly affected by the culture of the local, personal history and inability of resolving psychological dilemmas and confusions.

Elkunchwar’s imagism and symbolism succeeds in conveying the idea of futility of human desire. It also succeeds in presenting subtle satire on various trends, traditions and practices in society. Sometimes it seems that it is reflection of the authors mind; his struggle to make out the meaning of various events and conflicts in life. The gravity of Elkunchwar’s ways of presentation of such human emotional crises seems to be suggesting the redundancy of human emotional, psychological and philosophical queries against the farfetched technological and industrial advancements. The social milieu depicted in his plays has a very positive impact on readers and audiences particularly
from the rural and urban area of Maharashtra. It is perhaps the most authentic and effective representation of rural parts in Maharashtra where there exist a typical system of interrelations among people of various caste and religion. Elkunchwar does not only succeeds in bring about the representation of conflict and intensity of the experience of the locale but also builds a set of the culture that each reader and audience feels a close association with it. It appeals to the both categories of the readers and audience i.e. rural and urban. For the urban, it has become a memory that is not so distant and Elkunchwar with his plays like *Old Stone Mansion, Pond* and *Apocalypse* brings a vivid picture of the life from dismantling social and family system in rural parts of Maharashtra.

The social and family system that is mainly depends on agriculture, has been crucially affected by low rainfall, scarcity of water and droughts. Each year brings a test to the patience and hopefulness of farmers and to those whose livelihood depends on agriculture. Elkunchwar’s depiction of degrading conditions at rural area especially in *Wada Trilogy* is an attempt to present a picture of helpless conditions of people caught among uninformed division of economic development and watertight compartments that does not leave space of mobility of rural area. The complexity and wilderness of decision making after losing the basement of age long traditions that formed the very basis of their psyche, and inability to gauge and adopt the technological driven changes and value system are depicted at various levels by the dramatist.

The *modus operandi* almost all of Elkunchwar’s plays could be related to the three types of reality as proposed by Lacan i.e. the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. Imaginary refers to the reality that everyone conceives and it plays an important role in deciding the world view of a person. Imaginary real is images which are so strong that
they are real. Though they still remain image, they are so strong as to have vital impact on human mind and thus they are real. The symbolic reality refers to the kind of reality which is already fixed like that of patriarchy and the real refers to the fact how reality itself is formed. It is reality of reality. It does not refer to a transcendental meaning, meaning final kind of reality. It just refers to the construction of reality in a certain situation and time that is a construction of certain forces and ‘ways of seeing’. Most of his plays’ main course is based on the three issues. The understanding the course of events is essential in order to understand the meaning of actions of the character in Elkunchwar’s plays. The idea of reality is very crucial in human life. It is complicated phenomenon which forms the base human experience without most of the times, for an individual, realizing the workings of it. It has multi layers to distinguish among what one thinks about oneself; what one thinks what others think about him/her; and what others really think about him/her. Every human gesture or action is affected by one of the above mentioned ones. On the other levels, it has to work with the two categories mentioned before i.g. the symbolic and the real. The three realities have world of web of complex interrelations in a person’s thinking capacity. They function in accordance with the systematic maintenance of equilibrium of all elements that support a glorification of the self and also a perception that the person is normal and wise. The standards of such normality and wisdom are predetermined. As long as glorification, standards of normality and wisdom are felt distinctively, there emerges no problem for an individual. As one cannot manage the course of events which possess external force beyond one’s control, it is quite difficult to realize and manage the complex structure of effects caused by imbalance among the views on the three categories of reality. They are never devoid of
the issues that actually form the base of psyche of the community or the person. Religion, gender, caste, ideology, desire, institutions, social systems, etc are few of the frequent issues that form relevance and reference for the certain culmination of a conflict. For instance, murder of Garbo by Shrimant in Garbo, suicide by Lalita in *Desire in the Rocks*, suicide by Chandrashekhar in *Sultan*, extramarital affairs of Aai in *As One Descardeth the Old Clothes…*, murder of Amrit in *Party* and suicide by Anand in *Holi*, etc. basically have the reasons among the conflicts caused by the disturbances to the different forms of reality.

Lacan calls the symbolic, the ideal or imaginary and the real as the three registers of human reality. He stressed many times since 1950s, the idea of the symbolic. It is understood as the network, social, cultural, linguistic, into which a child is born. It is why Lacan always says that language is there from before the actual moment of birth and it will act on the whole of the child’s existence. Lacan assigns more importance to the symbolic as he thinks it plays a vital role in human experience of significations. While speaking about the ideal or imaginary, he says that “there is an identification which is both beyond and in a sense prior to the identification with the image: a symbolic identification with a signifying element. He calls it is an identification with the ideal” (Leader 44). He reformulated the concept of the real several times in his works. For him the real is simply that isn’t symbolized. It is that which is excluded from the symbolic. It resists the symbolic absolutely. In this way, for us reality exists only between two levels i.e. symbolic and imaginary. The real is precisely that for Lacan, which is excluded from reality. It is a kind of boundary of what is without meaning and which we fail to situate or explore.
This excessive stress on the idea of reality is essential as far as the present research work is concerned. It is precisely the idea of reality with its three registers that matters in forming a world view and determines the course of action for each individual. It could be a major tool to understand the nature of acts, events, conflicts in the issues like desire, revolt and violence in the plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar.

_Sultan_ was the first one act play of Elkunchwar. It has four symbolic characters named Rajshekhar, Doctor, Swami and Julie along with the tiger named Sultan in the cage. The play is an attempt on the part of the playwright to depict ‘vanity of human wishes’ for ultimate satisfaction. Elkunchwar builds up the characters like Rajshekhar who faces the void of human existence, Doctor whose world of emotions and significance is limited to his self only, Swami is hypocrite who assumes satisfaction in superficial realization and Julie is always busy in embellishment of her body. Death becomes a central event of the play. Rajshekhar commits suicide. Before he shoots himself, he shoots the tiger Sultan as well. The complex structure of registers of reality gets complicated in determining the fulfillment of desires and it has many culminations among which revolt and violence are the most prominent ones. Elkunchwar present symbolic and imaginary in a certain form. The four characters along with the tiger are symbolic. Julie’s love for beautification of her body being a woman, Swami’s expected indulgence in superficial realization of self control and satisfaction and Doctor’s world that is limited to himself suggest the symbolic being perceived and resulting in the ideal. It becomes an essential condition for them or any human being for that matter, to survive in the situation. The two registers contain a sense of sustainability in them which assure continuity of existence and avoid conflicts. Rajshekhar’s restlessness and realization of
absurdity and meaninglessness of human existence leads him to uniformity of his mind that strongly formed a sense of meaning between the symbolic and the ideal. The lost of it led to suicide for him. It is precisely the conflict arising from the symbolic and imaginary for Rajshekhar that leads him to violent end. His ego does not offer him rationalization of his actions when he was restless and distrust or lost of faith in things with certain meaning brings about break to positivity of thought that advocates life. The real is beyond the symbolic and the ideal. It could be related to the ideas of Dr. Sandhya Amrute when she says, “The thoughts of death of Rajshekhar result into the death of him. It has its origin in the thought when he believes that there is no escape from this system without death and if at all there is happiness and satisfaction, it could be state after death” (Amrute 173).

In a particular sense, the symbolic traps psyche of an individual in certain manner that does not allow making any change as it is predetermined and there is hardly anything an individual can do about it. It percolates into becoming the ideal. The ideal always has an alteration on the individual level.

Naresh from Zumbar meaning chandelier has deeper levels of dissatisfaction and he probes deeper the philosophical question of certain meaning of life and events in it. The idea of beauty is artificial and culture specific. The chandelier symbolizes the world view of beauty and it is an attraction for everybody. For Naresh, the reality of life on the symbolic and imaginary levels ceases to exist on accounts of realization of meaninglessness of life on various levels. Though the play does not end in violence, it has turn of events which is not considered as normal. Of course, normality itself is symbolic. The psychological conflict that Naresh faces is in direct connection with the
symbolic and ideal order of the world. He struggles for his whole life to achieve the success he has reached to. It was the result of his firm faith in the order. It sustained his beliefs till the time when he realized the ultimate outcome of all the fame and achievements in his life. For him, it signifies nothing. He asks several questions to himself about meaning and purpose of life. He thinks if there is no such exact reason for anything, the whole existence becomes meaningless. This idea makes him restless and faces fragmentation of belief in the order.

It is interesting to watch how in most of Elkunchwar’s plays, it results into a sort of negativity and denial to existing system. Violence and death become his favourite choices. In both the cases of Rajshekhar and Naresh, the dramatist has tried to suggest the possibilities of realization of reality that has philosophical background. Both the protagonists have renunciation of worldly pleasure and it in case of Rajshekhar is renunciation of his life as well. There is a closure formed by Rajshekhar that denies all possibilities for life as he gets entangled in the web of thoughts of meaninglessness of life. No solace of certainty is provided to him. He becomes any individual on the earth, who comes to the realization of the futility of human life. There are several reasons to the denial to the ‘normal’ course of life and life itself after realization of the futility. It becomes only possible escape for an individual especially in case of self destruction as other options are closed down. Agonizing mind develops many psychological pains that are literally realized and felt by an individual. It conceives death as an ultimate escape from the trouble. The thought is assisted by ideas after life thoughts that are mainly influenced by religious thoughts. In case like that of Naresh, it becomes a sudden loss of
interest for any kind of attachment. The mind does not feel the bondages of relationships and their web of interdependence. The very base of all endeavors, which is desire, is lost.

In *Eka Mhataryach Khun*, Elkunchwar continues the strange inclination towards the idea of death. The symbolism is vivid. The four characters represent certain tendencies and class in the society. However, course of event makes the plot more complex and invites multiple layers of meanings. It is in this one act play Elkunchwar depicts a symbolism of social imbalances. It is unlike the dilemma of Rajshekhar and Naresh, a conflict felt at social level where a class, gender and a creed is slaved and whole canvas of life becomes a desert. There is an old man who has tied two men and a woman with a single rope and dragging them to a prison. Concept of revolt is at the centre in this play. Elkunchwar effectively shows how it becomes very difficult for an individual to fight back the visible agents controlling one’s freedom. Revolt could be of two types. One could be indifferent and remain passive thus registering non-operation to the system and secondly respond back violently and face the culminations. In any form of change at social or political level, there has to be certain stages. Foremost is the realization of slavery and subjugation; secondly it is expression of feelings against the situation devoid of any activism. Activism becomes necessary and it perhaps always includes violent responses. The two men and a woman initially express their objections through songs and singing. Then they try to control the old man physically and abuse him orally but fail. Eventually they kill him. Elkunchwar through this course of events signifies the subjugation in society in multiple levels. The voices that resist the oppression are heard in low level in certain context of cultural productions. Attempts are made to subvert the system or abuse it as to distort its forces. Sometimes complete
annihilation is sought. When the trio kills the old man, they visualize that it had been evil course of event and as a result they will be perished too. It seems to be a realization on the part of the three characters that their existence on the deserted land and full of futility of existence still does not receive any meaningful alternative way of living. Elkunchwar seems to be stressing the idea of necessity of certain forceful domination of a system and eradication of such ways could also be a self destruction. However, what is mainly signified through this is that certain logical and reasonable actions of human beings do not necessarily always receive positive results. For it, there should have been alternative arrangements and human mind should be able to articulate the possibility certain culminations. Thus Elkunchwar addresses the need of philosophically strong base for every kind of change one wishes to bring about.

His one act play entitled *Ek Osad Gaon* written in 1969 is commentary on

[H]uman life, making realize a constant shadow of death, looking for the gist of human relationships amidst its complexity, enability of guessing, mysticism, longings and showing deep craving of human wishes… Written in a symbolic manner, Elkunchwar expains the views about life and death through the poetic conversation between two characters” (Pendhari 148-49).

The play falls in line with the plays discussed above. A woman is sitting on heap of soil weaving with wool. It is a village with lot of deserted mansions. There comes an ascetic in the village and there takes place a poetic conversation between the two and
through this conversation, Elkunchwar presents a new distinctive form of one act play. P. N. Paranjape comments on this aspect of the play and says,

“…through the images of the woman, the ascetic, one deserted village, the play as a long poem goes on becoming deeper with meaning in search of self. ‘Woman’, ‘weaving’, ‘leaves’ and ‘flowers’ in the design, etc. become meaningful images. The way Elkunchwar has tried to make the dialogue poetic is convincing’ (quoted in Pendhari 149).

Both the characters have deep levels of life experiences. The woman has accepted the course of life with all its redundance. On the other hand, the ascetic is deeply moved by the thoughts of renunciation. His solitary life has strong devotion towards his principles of ascetics. He is caught and beaten badly after he is wrongly convicted of theft. He is released when it realized that he did not steal anything. It from the incident, he decides to have no attachment with anyone or anything. The woman who has accepted boredom of life in the form of weaving falls in love with the ascetic and offers him the shawl she has woven. But he refuses to accept it. This multiplicity of image acts in finer way to suggest how she surrenders herself to him with all she has in her life. The hermit, who does not accept this invitation, refuses to fall for the superficial attraction of worldly life. It becomes a revolt on the part of the ascetic against the common attitude in the society, the cultural traits and deeper cravings of ego for desire fulfillment.

These experiences are very close to the rural life of India and rural life experience in India is perhaps the most valuable one as it forms the larger part of the country. The issues Elkunchwar deals with are of general as well as specific level. Though the setting
of the plays like *Ek Osad Gaon, Eka Mhataryacha Khun, Wada Triology, Desire in the Rocks*, etc is with rural background, the experience and conflicts faced by the characters are of universal nature. So it becomes difficult to believe in what Deshpande G. P says in his preface to *Modern Indian Drama: An Anthology* published by the Sahitya Akademi,

> It is possible to argue … this “ethnic” element in theatre does give us some brilliant, dazzling moments of theatre-experience; the questions remain if this could at all be the modern India’s theatre. A modern, urban Indian who constitutes our principle (proscenium) theatre audience may not be interested in it in a sustained way because these plays do not relate to his experience; let alone making sense of it (Deshpande xvi).

Elkunchwar himself admits that there are images in the plays like *Zumbar* and *Sultan* which have brought in with certain magnitude which is not natural and it has been an exercise with systematic attempts. However he tells it is not the case with *Holi*. The image of hois is very strong in the play. It suggests the revolt of two sorts. It is ourburst of young generation towards the authoratative domination of the older generation and secondly it is reinforcement of new ideas and violent response as to topple it upside down. Vijay Mehata a renowned critic and director has special consideration for the play *Holi* by Elkunchwar and she thinks as she writes in the foreword of the second volume of *Collected Plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar* that in 1970 Elkunchwar got in the mainstream of theatre with his two one-act plays *Sultan* and *Holi*. He was very young then. She continues writing that “[F]rom Mahesh’s earlier writings, *Holi* went on to become – and still remains-the most path-breaking experiment on many counts. It captured the
restlessness and tragic frustration of students on a campus, an experience deeply felt by Mahesh as a young lecturer in Nagpur University” (Mehta xi).

In *Holi* there are students from different strata of society living in the college hostel. They have variety of experience pertaining to religion, caste, ideology, family background, and philosophy. They have a developed sense of right to choose, right to speak and oppose. They have clear ideas and independent thoughts for life. There is also a group of students like Shrivastav, Anand, Ranjeet, Lalu, Taimur, Gopal, Madhav, Thakur, Banerji, Vasanta, Patel, Pandey, Mumy, Kunda, etc. The protest by students against the college’s act of not declaring a *Holiday* on *Holi* festival and making them attend a program organized by the college and suicide by Anand, are the major incidents in the play. Both the incidents have different layers of meanings. It is shock for all the students that their bullying Anand for informing their names to the principal results in death of Anand. Through this one act play, Elkunchwar has succeeded in showing the deep layers in human psyche that are vividly active and can instigate many responses including that of violent ones. What matters in the one act play on level of impression and effect is the solid and firm combination of events and course of events that produces a finer impact on readers and audience.

It is outstanding depiction of revolt, desire (Anand’s homosexual attraction towards Shrivastav) and violence in the form of suicide by Anand. Right from its subject matter to the spontaneous revolt from the young students, brings ideas to the readers and audience that Elkunchwar is attempting to present the need and possibility for a change that must take place. However it is not the only change that is to be brought about on only political and social levels but it however is wished to be at deeper levels of psyche and
philosophy. Purnima Kulkarni looks at the play from different perspectives. In her article entitled “Subalterns Speak in Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Holi”, she writes that “[t]he play ends in a catastrophic state due to institutionalized heterosexism” and according to her “the discrimination against them (homosexuals) is often translated into violence” (Kulkarni 219).

While bringing critical perspectives from Lacan, Sayan Dey writes about Holi in the following way explaining the two stages as proposed by Lacan and its relevance to the acts of the students. He writes,

The semiotic stage is the first state of human were … not enough matured to communicate in an appropriate, definite form. The increase in age develops in the child the ability to understand and communicate his own thoughts and ideas which he experiences around. This transformation is interpreted as an imposition on behalf of the society as it forces an individual to lose the state for ignorance and innocence and is almost pushed into the symbolic stage. Individuals violating this norm will be either forced into or exterminated from the existing social order and this is what happens with Lalu in the play (Dey 21-22).

Elkunchwar perhaps is one of the greatest dramatists in India, who takes his writing as his passion and deeply believes that it is not only the subject matter that make a piece of writing truly good and effective but also the compactness of what is presented on the stage. Less number of characters that play crucial role in his plays is the part of his art that provides meaningful gist of incidents and content of the course of incidents by
using various techniques. It is perhaps the most beautiful aspect of his writing that he provides necessary information about the history and contemporary consciousness through dialogues and flashback techniques. The beauty of it mainly lies in the style in which it is presented naturally.

*Yatanaghar* is one of his one act plays. There are only two major characters like Baby and Kamal. Baby is physically challenged and she cannot walk. The reason behind her deformity is her father who tried to abort her unsuccessfully and she is born handicapped. Memory and flashback techniques are effective in the play to provide readers and audience necessary information about background. *Yatanaghar* meaning a torture house becomes an image of a human life which is tormented by memory, helplessness and lack of happiness. Home which means a solace for every person, for Baby, it has turned into a nightmare due to the devastating memories she has to live with. She hates her parents when she realizes that they tried to kill her. She develops attractions towards her brother Ramesh. It has layers of desires for him. Kamal takes care of her but she does not like her love for her brother as she has developed feelings for him. After death of Ramesh, Baby stops her contact with the world and closes herself in her house. Before Kamal tries to kill Baby, Keshav friend of Ramesh helps Baby to get out the house and lead a happy life with him.

There are different layers of desires with all its complexity, memory of a family, knowledge that parents tried to kill her (Baby), death of brother, feelings of love for her brother, intimate feelings and relationship developed with Kamal and her intentions to kill Baby. Amidst all this, the life in the house for Baby becomes torturous. It prompts her to close down all positive hopes in her life. There is always entirely different world of
experience for physically challenged people. It affects their every bit of consciousness. It changes everything about what they think about others and what they think that others think about them. Eventually it negatively affects their growth on every level. Her knowledge that her parents are responsible for her plight has very bad impact on her. It makes a world of difference when a person knows that someone else is responsible for lifelong deformity in one’s body. Blame to nature and one’s fate could be sometimes a factor offering certain type of strengths to such people. In case that of Baby who comes to know that her parents are responsible for her conditions has two levels of adverse effects i.e. her loss of object of desire in the form of father and mother and the void is filled with hatred and anguish for them.

*Flower of Blood* was first published in 1972. For Elkunchwar, this play was very important as we see from this play as he himself admits in an interview that there is no impact of western dramatic writings on it. With this play, he began to write plays which have images and thematic concerns which are woven in the fabric of story of the play most naturally and there are no conscious efforts on the part of the dramatist to bring in certain effects.

*Flower of Blood* does have a very disturbing situation. Bahu and Padma are husband and wife. Leelu and Shashi are their children. Shashi is killed in war. They have a paying guest Raja. Set in a very typical middle class family background, the play grows more complex with the complexity of desires on the part of the mother and the daughter when they have their own way of loving Raja. It grows disturbing and violent as the daughter does not understand her mother’s motherly love for Raja and the mother does
not understand the love feelings of Leelu for Raja. It is in this play also, Elkunchwar
depict his favourite thematic concern of futility and meaninglessness of human life.

It also becomes very clear that certain strong human traits tend to exploit the
existing human relationships and among this ‘play’ of significance two possibilities
become stronger i.e. complexities of existing relationships eventually resulting in
conflicts of severe kind and realization of feeling of loneliness and denial of life. It is not
always intelligible neither on the part of the characters nor on the part of any common
human beings to realize that the failure at coping up with the complexity of desire and
understanding the nature of conflicts emerging out of the complexity, are the major
reasons for the sorrows and pains felt by their minds. Loneliness, pain, helplessness and
disinterestedness are the results of such complex culmination of desires. Venkat Murali
Palla in his article entitled “Thematic Study of Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Flower of Blood”
talks about Padma’s ‘grasping of illusion’ and says that:

For Padma, Raja is the illusion which she tries to grasp. Sometimes, she
looks upon him as her son and sometimes her sexual urge comes to the
fore, she might have wanted him to a large extent as her sexual object in
non-physical sense. She is unable to reconcile both, the maternal as well as
sexual instincts, so she indulges in “Absurdio Reduction”. The term
reveals that though she argues illogically, she thinks that she is logical
(Palla 227).

Elkunchwar seems to be stretching this level of complexity at a different level in
his one act play Kaifiyat in the form Rajeshwar’s revenge on the world for its inability to
understand him and his art. It results in brutal killing of his son Gopu by him. By and large, the play being the last one in the collection of his one acts entitled *Yatanaghar*, remains honest in exhibiting Elkunchwar’s conscious attempt to present internal conflicts of humans on the stage. Process of creation and its complex nature are often sought by Elkunchwar as tools to present complexity of human existence. He becomes successful in showing how Rajeshwar has to lead life which meaningless and full agony that people love and enjoy his art but fail to understand him as a person. The three women that become intimate part of his life also fail to understand him. It makes him realize the futility of his life and art. In fit of anger, he kills his son Gopu who is born out of his illicit relationship. The feelings of revenge on the world and destruction of artifacts dawn on him out of the sheer hopelessness and despair. Rajeshwar pleads for to understand his standpoint and views on why he did so. On his part, it is very painful to realize that none believes in him and supports him. He is given capital punishment.

*Kaifiyat* does have the elements that touch upon issues like absurdity, violence, revolt, desire and cruelty against backdrop of the question of conflict between world of reality in arts and reality of world.

*Rudravarsha* is another example of Elkuchwar’s same line of thought. There are six characters in the play i.e. Rajiv, Jaya, Yashwant, Usha, Rajiv’s mother and his family doctor. The relationship between husband and wife is the central theme of the play. However, the image of rain does imply the external factor’s role in the plight of human beings and their submission. The complexity of desires and relationship among the two couples is driven by feelings of betrayal, underdeveloped growth of personality, inferiority complex and development of desire for a person other than one’s partner.
What make the play with much variety of themes is love of doctor for his beloved who suffers from leprosy, the image of rain and strong optimism on the part of almost all characters. They otherwise become the integral part the centre of husband and wife relationship between Rajiv and Jaya and Yashwant and Usha. Elkunchwar offers a fine depiction of state of desire between the husbands and wives and the doctor and his lover. Rajiv suffers from inferiority complex disturbed psyche largely influenced and dominated by childhood memories of father who dominated and always looked down upon him for Rajiv’s constant failure. Due to the loss of confidence, he is not able to give satisfaction to his wife. The punctured psyche of Rajiv constantly shadows his life with failures on various other fronts of life. His relationship with his wife as husband is main one. For Jaya, this fact is more complex. She loses her interest in him. There is lack of desire between the two.

For Yashwant, it had been a second marriage and he does family planning operation after the birth of first child in his first marriage. He marries Usha after the death of his first wife. But he does not tell her that he has done such operation. When she comes to know about it, she feels deceived and lost. She loses desire for him. When Yashwant returns home after fourteen years, Usha spends time with Yashawant. She starts receiving satisfaction and solace in the company of Yashawant. *Rudravarsha* becomes Elkunchwar’s one of the most significant plays that deals with man-woman relationships.

*Garbo* “an absurdist play … thoroughly contemptuous of bourgeois pretensions” (Deshpande 31) perhaps is more explicit and vivid with sexuality, violence and obscenity among all plays of Elkunchwar. He himself admits that it was written with intention that
he was a rebel in the field of creative writing. However he does not consider it a successful play on his level. He realizes that the artistic level of the play has degraded due to the lack of artistic representations. Intuc, Garbo, Pansy and Shrimant represent different sections in society. Though Elkunchwar does not rate the play as more serious, it does have thematic concerns that comment on issues like sexuality, violence and subjugation of women. The play very significantly deals with the three issues. Controversy was due to open depiction of the multiple sexual relations of Garbo with the three and others as well. She aborts the child and at the end Shrimant kills her and rest of the two are happy that she is dead.

The course of events and the dialogues of the characters reveal that arrival of new life is such a beautiful feeling and they are happy that Garbo is pregnant. She initially does not tell them the truth. She tells them it was an accident. But when they come to know that it was a conscious attempt by her to kill the child by opting for the scene in the film that included a camel ride. The dummy could have been used for the shot but she insisted on doing it herself and that resulted in the abortion. Though the play ends in murder of Garbo by the trio, it subtly values the world of reasons of the act by Garbo.

It shuns romantic ideas in society that bears a layer of void idea of sustainability in the long run. It lays bare the subjugation, plight and worsening conditions of women. The phenomenon of oppression of women is more complex than it appears. Lack of choice has been perhaps the main problems for women to continue with atrocities and violence against them. The subjugation in case of Garbo is of multiple levels. Being a woman, being poor, being jobless, having no family and financial support and sacrifice of dreams that a common woman visualizes, have some of the levels. As a result, she kills
the child but it eventually results in her death. Her death is also not grieved but rather justified by the three without understanding the conditions of Garbo. It is perhaps why Dr. Supriya Pendhari thinks that “the three had physical relations with Garbo only for satisfying their sexual desire. But when such desires are not satisfied by her, they kill her. They do not feel sad after her death because they love her only to satisfy their physical desires” (Pendhari 159). This desire also was one of the major concerns of the playwright as it is visible in the interview of Elkunchwar with Samik Bandyopadhyay. By referring to the interview, he writes about Garbo in the following way, in his introduction to the *Collected Plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar* Vol. I published by Oxford University Press.

But as the ‘filth’ proliferates, with a series of exposures and confessions, Pansy charging Shrimant with homosexual assault, Garbo takes responsibility for corrupting Pansy (‘Initially I played around with him just for fun. Then it became a habit. An entertaining game… I should have hardened my hearth at least once. Pansy, you’re still too young.’), Shrimant bringing his impotence out into the open, and Garbo giving the true story of her abortion, the illusions crash. (Bandyopadhyay xiv).

Unlike Pendhari, for Samik Bandyopadhyay, it is not only the loss of object of desire (here it is both the child and Garbo) for the three that instigates the murder but it is the loss of hope for only possibility of their being satisfied, the ability of creation of new life fulfilled and satisfaction being potent. Dr. Sidney Shirly wrote an article for Journal of English Language and Literature entitled “Sexuality versus Psychology: A Study of Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Garbo and Desire in the Rocks”. She analyses the functioning of sexuality in Intuc, Shrimant and Pansy and says, “Sexuality works in these individuals
as a mode of manifesting their inner condition whether it is frustration or a desire to control. The idea of sexuality is continuously evolving into various complex meanings (Shirly 124). She quotes E Munck’s idea from his Ethics of Sexuality – Ethics of Sexology who says that sexuality is no longer governed by rigid religious rules and taboos today but has become a very personal matter for the individual. This observation by Munck is very apt to relate with the behavior of the three male characters in the play.

Elkunchwar’s penchant for the theme of artistic creation and all aspects of process of creation is clearly visible in his *Desire in the Rocks*. The two major characters i.e. Hemkant and Lalita are sister and brother. They have sexual relationship. Hemkant is a sculptor and they have moved in a village where they have their ancestral mansion. Hemkant has busied himself in work of carving statues in the rocks around the village. Reasoning and uniformity of feelings that support the balance of mind of Lalita is sustained only till the time when she realizes that her brother does not love her truly. There was an understanding to Lalita that at a time it justified for her the incest relations of her with her brother. Memory plays an important role in the play on two event levels. The memory of Lalita of her house where she grew under the dominating authoritative regime of her father and loss of her mother has a vital role in the construction of her psyche. Hemkant for her is an only escape from the house. Her mind was so tormented that incest relationship was never to be negated by her. Another was the memory of the mansion where a beggar was buried under the basement of the mansion and a curse of the woman prevailed the mansion.

Lalita knows the taboo nature of their relationship. However, there was a strong uniformity within her mind as long as it was supported by the feelings that her brother
loves her truly. The messing up of Hemkant in distinguishing between art and life results in shaking the fortification of Lalita’s mind. And as a result, the whole social burden of social obligations, cultural constraints and cynical responses from society built a wall of despair in front of Lalita. Such type of conditions, always leave an individual to clutch certain traditional religious views and seek solace in certain rituals and acts of renunciation. It even in case of Lalita goes to the level of self torture. As far as desire between the brother and sister is concerned; Lalita’s revolt against the brother is concerned and violence in the form of suicidal end of their lives is concerned, the play offers a commentary on the thin line in human relationship that always does not hold on the ‘fine balance’. There happens an event on psychological level of Lalita as about loss of object of desire and then the loss of cause of desire. Zizek recognizes the role of fantasy in construction and activate of desire. According to him fantasy realizes a desire in a systematic way or

a fantasy constitutes our desire, provides its co-ordinates; that is, it literally ‘teaches us how to desire’… fantasy meditates between the formal symbolic structure and the positivity of the objects we encounter in reality – that is to say, it provides a ‘schema’ according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty places opened up by the formal symbolic structure (Zizek 7).

It was a failure for Litata in the ‘schema’ which otherwise intact for a longer time. It is perhaps the same process in relation with negative object in reality that function as object of desire filling in the empty places opened up by the knowledge of futility, untruth and loss of cause of desire. Initially she loses the object of desire i.e. Hemkant
and gradually the loss of cause of desire leads her to renunciation everything that she had been holding close to her. It included her body as well. Dr. Sidney Shirly in her article “Sexuality versus Psychology: A Study of Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Garbo and Desire in the Rocks” writes about the reason of frustration in the relation between the sister and brother in different manner. She says that “[t]he incomplete desires of Lalita and the objective passion of Hemkant result in their being frustrated. Incompleteness and barrenness enters their selves thereby punishing them from within” (Shirly 124).

*Party* is a quite different from the plays Elkunchwar wrote earlier. The play as far as the present research work is concerned has certain elements like revolt and violence that are used by the dramatist to suggest the workings of power and violent culmination of protest and movement against the power structures and its functioning. The party and incidents in it, offer us idea about various people and attitudes in society. For Neelam Man Singh *Party* is a play where “we see vignettes of Indian artistic life suffused with the politics of grants, trips, abroad and the tensions of manipulative power games” and according to her Elkuchwar in the play “takes a look at the members of the creative set in an Indian metropolis, with their pretentions, rivalries, aspirations, and frustration, even as they are stalked by the guilt of having betrayed one their own” (Singh 25). It is a party organized by Damayanti Rane at her house. It is a party in the honour of Barve for his achievement as an author. Many people related to the field of writing have gathered in the party. Elkunchwar succeeds in showing the hypocrisy of these party goers. Few members in the party represent fields like cinema, art and politics as well. The way the dramatist presents the course of events and the life and death of Amrit lays bare the difference
between the people who live in society as so called social workers and the people who
devote and sacrifice their lives for social cause.

A. Linda Primlyn in her article “The Sound of Silence in Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Plays Pond and Party” calls Party as an expose of “Bombay’s creative community where people live under false pretences subsiding their feelings. He tells that parties are false gaiety. Usually in parties people greet each other with wide smiles, and underneath their smiles there lies violence” (Primlyn 89). It is true that the structure of the play brings the climax with certain magnitude and leaves an impact on readers and audience. Death of Amrit proves an eye opener for all at the party. Amrit’s selflessness, renunciation and positive attitude to work for the adivasi people, brings them idea how it is more important that Amrit life is worth valuing and it had more meaning than the lives they were living full of desires and vanity of false ambitions for fame and recognitions. Though the play seems to be an outcome of harsh responses on the part of the playwright to the hypocrisy of people especially from the middle class society, Ekunchwar does not rate this play as a systematic play in its structure. In his interview in 1996 with Anjum Katyal and Paramita Banerjee for STQ, he says, “I don’t even rate it as a good play now. It’s a clever play. I observed the people around me and I wrote it out. I didn’t take any position in it, as a playwright” (Elkunchwar 9). There is a main reason behind this way of thinking of Elkunchwar and it is his reading and knowledge about the contemporary theatre and other writing. He compares it with the latest and most artistic writing. One thing must be made clear though Elkunchwar does not consider it a serious play, it has its major impact on readers and audience and relevance to contemporary politics at various levels.
Dnyaheshwar Nadkarni in his review of *Party* points about certain ‘lacks’. He writes, “Indeed the lack of ‘dramatic’ actions is the most serious flaw in this play. The many characters seem to float in limbo as literally they sail onto the three or four different sections of the acting area. There is … an attempt to present case studies … But there is very little novelty in what these case studies have to reveal to us” (Nadkarni 27).

*Reflection* by Elkunchwar falls in type of existential plays rather than absurd plays. It is a rich play with thematic concerns, representations, language, communication, structure and integrity. It is a very successful attempt on the part of the playwright to bring in novelty in structure and overall presentation. Like most of his other plays, there is minimization of characters as well. There is a widow, who is an owner of the house, a paying guest named Thokale, his friend Bawate and girl named Kersuni. Thokale is a clerk and one fine morning he stands in front of mirror and realizes that there is no *Reflection* of him in the mirror. He is confused, perplexed and troubled by the discovery. He admits that his *Reflection* is lost. The play subtly pictures the existential and identity crises in the life of middle class people. The widow helps Thokale and she has strong desire for him. Her actions clearly show the forces of desires she has bottled up within herself. Mr. Bawate also lost his *Reflection* and instead he sees a *Reflection* of a parrot in it. The fact that he lost his *Reflection*, doe not trouble Bawate as much as it troubles the mind of Thokale. There is another character who lost her *Reflection* and it is a girl Kersuni working in Thokale’s office. She has loved Thokale secretly and as she realizes that Thokale too has lost his *Reflection*, she identifies herself with him.

It is in this play, Elkunchwar has dealt with inevitable loss of identity of human beings. The technique Elkunchwar has deployed where these characters make attempts to
enter each other’s mind to find out their Reflection forms a way out. However, the failure of the characters to find out their Reflection makes the issue of loss graver. When Thokale commits suicide, the event also vanishes as if nothing has ever happened. It also becomes a commentary on today’s intera-personal relationships and their irrelevance in the society.

It could also be related to the idea of Marx where he described alienated relationship of workers in the process of production. Such relationships in a stronger sense make the structures of society in the form of religion, institutions, idea of self, love, humanity void. It as we see it in many cases, degenerate the identity of individuals in their singularity. The inability of being effective in given structure and losing one’s very base for such capability is disturbing at a very deep level of psyche. And there is every chance of having violent end to the actions and course of events. While writing review of Elkunchwar’s plays like Reflection and Autobiography, Giridhar Rathi opines that

[r]ealism, naturalism, surrealism, the absurd and such other modern trends have often taken a firm grip over out playwrights. Mahesh Elkunchwar is a fine example of a sensitive mind keeping a watchful eye on the latest developments in the psychic human history. Very briefly put, the first one is a disturbing picture of middle-class ironies, while the second one unravels layers after layers of human volition, choice, compulsions and contradictions (Rathi 35).

It is true that for Elkunchwar middle class and its psychology, love for creation and its stimuli, human desires, effects on human psyche and relationships due to
modernity and death, have been crucial issues in his plays. He seems to be at war with certainty and universality of the issues. His similar efforts could be seen very clearly as one categorizes his all plays in certain thematic structure. However, Beulah Rose in her article A Solution to the Question of Absurdity: Elkunchwar’s ‘Reflection’ thinks it an absurdist play. She writes that “[t]he vague background of the hero and his loss of identity all lead to emphasis one point – that Absurdity is a universal human condition. It cannot be circumscribed to one group or a particular region. It is the nameless … able to bring forth the terror and also a universal acceptability (Rose 27). Deepa Gahlot says that the term ‘pratibimb’ used by Elkunchwar for his play in Marathi meaning ‘Reflection’ has multiple levels of meaning. She explores that it could be seen as a comedy as well. Besides it she says that it is thought provoking. While talking on the level of force, she says that “the play kicks in the absurdist tradition of raising existential questions. At the same time it warns you not to take it too seriously” (Quoted in Amrite 241).

In the play Autobiography, Rajadhyaksha a renowned writer living alone in his late seventies in his house and being interviewed by a young girl of twenty to twenty four named Pradnya. She is working on her project of assisting Rajadhyaksha in writing his autobiography. The life of the writer can be viewed through three perspectives one being the life of his own as an author who writes with certain responsibilities and moral values imbibed from nationalism and “the absolute morality that was intrinsic to Gandhi’s political thought as well as its spiritual base” (Elkunchwar 115) particularly as an aftermath of struggle of independence and implementation of democracy in India and construction of a new nation. Secondly, the marital life of the writer with his wife Uttara does not prove to be happy as the couple is not able to beget a child of their own. And the
appearance of Uttara’s younger sister Vasanti in their family affects the life of the couple as Rajadhyaksha and Vasanti in the absence of Uttara get attracted to each other and the union result into the separation of the writer from the both the women. Thirdly, the solitude that is experienced by Rajadhyaksha after this break up, is majorly characterized by his realization nature of desire and his attempts to seek justification to it and ignorance about the fact that the child of Vasanti is his own.

Desire and revolt on the part of Vasanti has been a crucial part of the thematic concerns that affects life of both her sister Uttara and Rajahyaksha.

*As One Discardeth Old Clothes*... is perhaps one of the most important plays that reveals issue of desire which is so culture and time specific. It becomes an important document to register the function and nature of desire among the people even otherwise constrained by cultural regulations. The sway of desires is usually related with the cultural encroachment and modernism. The agents that affect strong actions instigated by desires at deeper level have effects externally caused by society, media, politics and visual productions of reality. They are rather different than the ones from within one’s psyche and world of emotions.

The play has at least three levels of human experiences embedded in the life of traditionally fortified social structure of family and marriage institutions. In India, the institutions are the both guardians of Indian culture and values and also the main cause of sustenance of gender, social and economic discriminations. Aai’s acts of extra-marital affairs suggest the possibilities of challenges a tormented woman can give. Elkunchwar chooses to deal with this aspect at the level of Aai’s extra-marital affair and Baba’s secret
love for Kaku and vice versa. The three levels as mentioned earlier are set in Aai’s act of affair, Baba’s love for Kaku and Baba’s obsession for Raghu and waiting for his death as he renounces everything and has no desire except for Raghu. Raghu remains a mystic figure throughout the play. At one level, it indicates a common experience as recounted by many people while being on deathbed. For Baba, it is a figure that he thinks has been there in his life and he could visualize him during certain incidents. The figure is nothing but his longings for a personality. It could be the desire of Baba for seeking solace in the company of a supernatural which could be a godly figure as the name suggests it. However, it could also mean as his alter ego that is visualized by him. It is a self that he always craved to live like.

Baba remains a central character in the play. As far as the structure of the play is concerned, Elkunchwar has woven a fine fabric of story, in which different characters that are the members of the same family, reveals their stories in way that keeps Baba in the centre. The authenticity of the play perhaps lies more in not only in the showing complexity of human experiences but in laying bare the invisible undercurrents in a culture, that otherwise would have been ideologically protected or neglected.

_Wada Triology_ includes _Old Stone Mansion, Pond and Apocalypse_. _Old Stone Mansion_ was published in 1982 after seven years of his writing _Party_. It is perhaps the best creation among his writings. Besides many other reasons, the depiction of life and culture in villages with all its poverty, fragmentation of family systems, regional disparities caused due to drought conditions. The play talks of more issues that are related to psychological orientations of people from the rural areas. The trilogy is much appreciated in Maharashtra and it had been quite successful on stage as well. Elkunchwar
is known all over the world for the writing of these plays. There is also a line of critics who relate the structure and background of the play to the writing style that of Anton Chekov and his play Cherry Orchard. Kirti Jain registers that with writing of Old Stone Mansion, “[t]he rebellious writer seems to have grown up into a mature artist who now makes an epic sweep in recording the plight of a society in transition” (Jain 186).

Many critics have appreciated the trilogy and it has been major concentrations for the critics writing on Marathi plays in particular and Indian plays in general. As mentioned above, the trilogy holds significance on various levels that materializes certain untouched and abstract human experiences. Kirti Jain in her review list some of the levels as she says that the play Old Stone Mansion reminds her of Chekov’s Cherry Orchard, “with its delicately etched characters, its ambience which itself is the meaning, and the subtle interplay between four generations as well as two worlds – those of the city and villages” (Jain 186). Jain rightly observes the scope of the thematic concern of the play though she connects it with that of Chekov’s. Sudhanva Deshpande in his review of Collected Plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar, talks about Elkunchwar as a rebellious playwright and says that in Old Stone Mansion, Elkunchwar turns to the same ‘realism’ that he seemed ‘loathe earlier’. He comments that “[w]ith a sensitive, almost anthropological gaze, he dissects the inner dynamics of a family that disintegrates as the village economy that sustained it hitherto crumbles” (Deshpande 31).

It is true that out myriad aspects, economic aspect that the play highlights is crucial one. It is the major issue that seems to be instigating and generating other responses through the character. At a certain level, they even shape and form emotional responses. Through the generations of Deshpande of Dharangaon, Elkunchwar has
presented a complete picture of a family the unfortunately deteriorates and reaches to sad culmination. The trilogy does have the potentials that crosses the boundaries of the experiences of certain Brahmin family and with the richness and commonness of the experience through generations it remains applicable to many other families in Maharashtra. Perhaps it is the universality of experience that makes the play one of the most successful creations by Elkunchwar both on and off the stage. With the writing of Pond and Apocalypse, Elkunchwar succeeds in making it as an epic. As mentioned by Kirti Jain, Elkunchwar grows more mature and perhaps offers the best play to Marathi theatrical traditions. In his article (Dis)locating Theoretical Catachresis in Mahesh Elkunchwar: A Playwrights Re-creative Journey from the Western Pages to the Practical World, Sayan Dey relates the theme of the play with existential debate. He says that this work of Elkunchwar:

Undertakes a steep journey into the rural chore exploring, investigating and evoking the multi-dimensional binaries of individual/clustered, eternal/external, male/female that has always been occupied the nucleus of post-modern existential debate. The Deshpandes of Dharangaon have been crippled by both geographical and economical aridity that has cruised into their life with the advent of post-independent progressive ethics of urbanization, modernization and industrialization (Dey, 287).

The play proved to be a milestone not only for the writing career of Elkunchwar. It also formed a major episode in whole Marathi tradition of playwriting. Chandrashekhar Jahagirdar observes that the modernist tradition gave major playwrights and plays in sixties. But all of them seemed during seventies to reach a dead end by creating its
stereotype. He considers that Elkunchwar and Shyam Manohar these two playwrights made a way out of ‘frozen tradition of modernism’. He considers *Old Stone Mansion* an important play for the use of very naturalistic tradition rejected by modernism. He further writes that *Old Stone Mansion* portrays tension in a joint family belonging to decadent aristocracy. For Prof. Jahagirdar the exploration “of love and conflict, emotional distance and proximity in familial relations, is so subtle and delicately powerful” (Jahagirdar 66) unlike others it reminds him one of Satyajit Ray’s films *Shaka-Prashakha*.

Somnath Barure in his article “Mahesh Elkunchwar’s *Old Stone Mansion* – End of an Ethos” talks about issues of ‘influence’ and ‘borrowing’ investigate the ‘end of feudalism in India’. Like many other critics, Mr. Barure registers the all pervasiveness of cultural aspect in the play. He concludes his article saying that the ethos in the form of the fall of the age’s long *wada* culture in India has “ill practices of not keeping pace with time that turned its enemy in Th future… The mansion seems to be caught into the mesh of tradition and modernity” (Barure 74). On the other hand the views of Nazneen Khan who rather didatively suggests Wada Trilogy as a form of Indian philosophy. The pervasiveness as suggested by Mr. Barure could be associated with the Holistic idea proposed by Nazneen Khan in her article “Myriad Themes Immaculately Crafted in a Family Saga: Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Wada Trilogy”. She believes that the playwright through the trilogy “advises indirectly to seek one’s origins, establish bonds with them, learn to look at one’s suffering in a detached manner and prepare oneself to be one with the larger entity. This is a philosophy… very close to the ancient Indian philosophy” (Khan 40). These speculations bring a very clear idea that the trilogy certainly is a literary forte of Elkunchwar. Madan Lal in his introduction to the second volume of *Collected*
Plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar published by Oxford University Press writes about the differentiation between Elkunchwar’s ‘realism/naturalism on the one hand, and his absurdism/symbolism on the other’. According to him these ‘isms’ “rests merely on the surface, for his philosophical concerns remain at heart the same, as we shall. As a director, I am much more intrigued stylistically by the potential pontency of puses and silences amidst his dialogue (Lal xxii). He goes on making very valuable observations that talk more meaningfully about Elkunchwar as a playwright and his literary productions. He says that there is “one strong cord unites all of Elkunchwar’s drama: the individual’s quest for fulfillment, or its social denial, with disillusionment waiting at every step of the way” (Lal xiii). He also recognizes a crucial trait of the art of the playwright that the individual in his plays is physically never alone. He populates his stage world with family or society and still the individual ‘invariably feels lonely and it is also when he says that the ‘empathy’ does not come externally.”
Works Cited


Kulkarni, Purnima. “Subalterns Speak in Mahesh Elkunchwar’s Holi”.


