CHAPTER VII
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THE ACHIEVEMENT

Any writer, who is brave enough to write for the medium of theatre in India, knows that his most formidable challenge comes from the Marathi Playwrights. In fact if a novice Indian playwright writing in a language other than Marathi has the temerity to believe that he has written an original play, the theme or essence of which has never been attempted before, he is bound to stand corrected whenever he refers to the rich legacy of “experimental” theatre in Maharashtra. The legendary trio of playwrights Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Elkunchwar and Satish Alekar have been at the helm of redefining meaning as well as substance in Indian theatre.

Marathi theatre has been one of the most fertile grounds for the expression of modernity.

The playwrights are placed at a complex position as writers and producers of texts. To understand a writer is therefore to understand his ideological perceptions of class, caste, gender and nation. Mahesh Elkunchwar says, “Writing can include so many things, it can be autobiographical, it can be confessional, it’s an act of understanding one
self and others, it’s an act of forgiving who may have hurt you, it’s an act of retribution all rolled into one.”

Wada is a series of memories; a social history of Indian feudalism; a theatrical presentation of moments from the past, the recent past, and the present; a series of impressions; a story of a family seen through the points of view of outsiders, Prabha, Chandu, Parag, and Abhay; all of them want to break away from the system in their own ways, but fail.

One of the several linking devices used is the disintegration of relationships within the Deshapande family where in the first part of Old Stone Mansion, the scattered family comes together for the funeral of their father Venkatesh but ends up fighting over who should get how much share in the family from the ‘wada’ that has been left behind by the deceased while no one is ready to spend on the post funeral rites. Vahini says: “But can’t everyone share the cost? Wasn’t he everybody’s father? Or are we alone responsible for keeping up the Deshpande name?”

The mother or Aai as she is known as is a witness to all the bickering that goes on in the house about who would take charge of the post-funeral expenses of her husband. A truce is reached when she decides to sell her share of wada to meet the expenses and says: “Do you
all think I don’t know what is going on? But things were different when he was alive”.

She can see the old wada crumbling and with it would collapse an entire network of relationships and an entire culture of living together in a community. Indian readers can immediately relate to such fights that go on in many families where everyone wants to shirk responsibility and just grab his or her share of land and money. A reader is able to relate to the disparities of a family deeply rooted in a region and such discrepancies carry a meaning for the reader which is beyond the Wada cultural traditions.

Elkunchwar also makes comments on how the whole family believes in outward show and pretentiousness. He also brings to light the typical Indian sensibility where families are more bothered about their reputation in the society no matter how hard they try to make the ends meet. Scene II of Old Stone Mansion brings out this kind of hypocrisy when Vahini says: “The Deshpandes decided to be modern and put a tractor there. Forget about usefulness as long as we can make a show of wealth”.
At the opening of The Pond, the sequel to Old Stone Mansion, the wada is dead and disintegrated. The second part celebrates the post-Wada culture exemplified in all its complexity in Parag’s alignment with the underworld, in Abhay’s brooding contemplation of settling down abroad, and in Nandini’s firm assertion of her independence. The family is seen coming together again in part two—this time, for a couple of weddings. Hence, weddings and funerals become metaphors that move beyond cultural connotations where a reader can relate to the concept of rituals and customs that are carried out in marriage ceremonies which are culturally specific but still identifiable as in each Indian culture. The functions have to be performed with a lot of outward show and pomposity to keep their name in their community and where the focus is more on pleasing the people than on fulfilling the customs and rituals. The crisis is more than a family crisis- it is a crisis of traditional culture against commercial culture. As Elkunchwar says, “Wada is not simply a family drama; it is more than that, a document of social change...” At the opening of The Pond, “the old mansion looks different, bearing obvious signs of change in the financial status of the inmates...so also in the taste.” The wada does not have the dilapidated, dying looks that come
from poverty. It is well painted and hints at the improved conditions of the family but all wealth and status of the family is acquired through wrong means by Parag who takes the help of people from the underworld to move up the ladder of success and for him there is nothing wrong in acquiring money even though it may be by wrong means. He has to pay for his wrong deeds as he is arrested towards the end and loses all his money. In The Pond, the wada gradually loses its status and Elkunchwar uses the metaphor of the pond as a site of childhood memories of Parag and Abhay and the pond grows into a state of mind that determines the course of life of the two friends as Parag is left to struggle in the village and Abhay leaves for the U.S instead of settling down with his parents in Mumbai.

At the beginning of the third part of the trilogy-Apocalypse (Yugant), the wada is reduced to a pile of stones and empty walls with just Parag, his wife, and their child living in the wada and struggling to make the ends meet. Despite all hardships, Parag refuses to leave the wada and settle in Mumbai with Abhay. He says: “This is my choice. To stay here... I can’t tear myself away from this village, Abhay...” Abhay who has been struggling to find roots all the while, agrees with Parag:
“This terrifying drought, these collapsing walls...how happy your home is in the midst of all this...You... have an impregnable house of your own...” Readers can relate to the attachment that Parag has for the wada and his village. This reflects upon the typical Indian psyche of looking back to one’s own roots in spite of all the riches one might have accumulated elsewhere.

Thus, the entire trilogy explores issues that are talked about in a particular community but these issues also become the issues that are experienced by most communities in India. In focusing upon the Marathi community in particular, Elkunchwar focuses upon the Indian condition generally. He transforms the local into extra-local, and creates a broad Indian perspective on the socio-cultural issues concerning the people of various backgrounds at large.

To conclude one can say that the playwright is driving home the point that though the play is specifically about the Wada culture, the specificities of this culture are used to comment on the reality that most cultures in India represent. It also records the invasion of urban values and corrupt business practices into this feudal culture, destroying
everything that resists change. The trilogy, thus, is a microcosm that represents a macrocosm.

Garbo is undoubtedly an existential character. She is an alienated individual who does not believe in social principles or gives importance to conventional middle class life. She chooses to live a life of her own with no restrictions. Yet she never finds happiness in it for she is conscious of her single status that gives her no scope for transcendence.

Garbo doesn't make struggle against sexual oppression even though she is conscious of her victimization. The three boys try to adjust to the situations but find difficult to erase the feeling that they are complete strangers with less efficiency to interact freely with her. What results is an intriguing display of their existential predicaments.

Having no clear set goal in their mind, without making use of the choice available to make their life meaningful and not availing the freedom to get redeemed from absurdity, these boys continue living in the world. They are self-deceptive and pretentious. They hide their true self.

Almost all the characters, except the protagonist Garbo, show very less symptoms of positive progress in their disposition or in their thinking. They hold contemptuous attitude towards life and existence, and
they rebel only psychically against the societal forces that hinder them and their pursuit of self identity. They continue their search in the absurd universe to find the meaning and value through self-probing, retrospection of the past and alienating experience of the present without realizing that the solutions for all their problems are within themselves.

In Sonata the vulnerability and delicacy of the relationship among the three is played out simultaneously in terms of the continuing shifts in the position and the private obsessions that they cherish and project to hide their raw sores. Dolon's attachment to bottles of perfume and Rabindranathsangeet, Subhadra's adoration of the male Stanley and Aruna's intellectual-creative pretentions are obsessions that manifest themselves in intensely private spaces.

Physical discomfort is considered to be the major modern marital agony that women experience. Mahesh Elkunchwar through his characters Aruna, Dolon and Subhadra in Sonata, reveals the truth that educated, modern working women shall never desire to physically exert them and slog for the family. There is certainly boldness in them as they take what they desire without hesitation.
All this leads us to the clear conclusion that Elkunchwar expects women to understand that there are choices to make even in the society that constrains women in the name of tradition and culture. It is also understood from his plays, that the moment of realization of one’s own difficulties must give way for revolution, replacement and reformation for making the existence meaningful.

A detailed analysis of Mahesh Elkunchwar’s characters in the fifth and sixth chapters has shown that the ideas that are present in the Sartre’s and Camus’ philosophy of existentialism are unconsciously captured by Elkunchwar. His sharp surveillance of women's conditions in the modern world intensifies his sensibilities to explore the turbulent territory of women thronged with existential crisis. He finds that even the educated Indian women believe, that their society is compelling them to be culture bound and unchanging in their concept of life and their roles as individuals obligated towards family and society. These beliefs in turn bring about internal and external conflicts and moral confusions affecting their psychic conditions. They become existentialists treating the universe absurd and their lives meaningless.
Thus Mahesh Elkunchwar's plays reveal a preoccupation with death, loneliness, creativity, the illusion of wealth, and the apparent purposelessness of choice or an action while the ultimate goal of life remains unknown.