PREFACE

Mahesh Elkunchwar’s name is now synonymous with the great tradition of playwriting in Marathi. His name is often invoked in the same breath as that of playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar and Satish Alekar. His plays in The Wada Trilogy had a very successful run and have come to be regarded as the canonical texts of Marathi literature.

Elkunchwar has lived and worked in Nagpur, away from the centre of Marathi Theatre in Pune and Mumbai. Maybe it is this perspective of an “outsider” that enables his plays to work not just as good theatre but powerful social commentary as well.

Even though families like the Deshpandes are on their last legs, The Wada Trilogy is a set of important plays, because it deals with the sense of tradition that is so deeply rooted in the Indian psyche. His plays question the cohesiveness of a joint family by telling the story from the point of view of the “outsiders” or characters forced to leave the family at various points. With this trilogy, Mahesh Elkunchwar achieves a feat unique to playwriting in this country: developing a cycle which moves between many registers to unfold the evolving history of a family in present-day India mirroring the social and cultural shifts and changes that mark the twentieth century. From Old Stone Mansion to The Pond, and to
Apocalypse, we follow the fortunes and struggles of the Deshpandes of Dharangaon, once highly respected and well-off landed gentry, now caught between the memory of their own genteel past and the financial penury of the present. As members of several generations come to terms with their past and future in drastically different ways, we see an image of India negotiating its way through modernity.

Collected Plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar is a collection of six critically acclaimed plays - Garbo, Desire in the Rocks, Old Stone Mansion, Reflection, Sonata, and An Actor Exits. Despite the vastly different nature of the six works contained in the collection, one common thread seems to bind all of them. In all the plays the characters represent not just their own reality but also hold a mirror to the class and community they belong to. This is Elkunchwar’s greatest strength as a playwright. He seamlessly depicts the macro reality by engaging the audience in a story that has to do with a handful of characters. Another distinctive feature of his plays is his projection of the sexual politics between men and women. He can leave the audience reeling with the way his characters use their sexuality to communicate their rage as well as their helplessness.
The first chapter of the study gives a brief introduction of development of Indian English Drama followed by an evaluation of Indian playwrights and an analysis of Marathi playwrights in general and Mahesh Elkunchwar in particular.

Mahesh Elkunchwar’s plays have been staged in several languages. In The Wada Trilogy he presents the issues of the Wada community in a way to help the reader relate with those issues even when he/she is located in a different culture. The Wada Trilogy comprises three plays in sequential order: Old Stone Mansion (Wada Cherebandi), The Pond (Magna Talyakathi) and Apocalypse (Yugant). The basic issues dealt with in the trilogy are that of rural/urban divide, migration and disintegration of the Deshpande family and how these social and cultural metaphors are used and employed to comment upon the realities of not just the region but the entire Indian community as a whole.

The second chapter on Old Stone Mansion explains the disintegration of a Brahmin family in a village. It also takes a close look at one of those families still struggling against time in some small town or village. The elderly men are lazy drones, the elder women are the patient upholders and preservers of the system, the younger men of the same generations are as subservient as the women in their submission to
authority. It is only the new generation that bristles-in several variations of rebellion ranging from bitter cynicism to escape and irresponsibility.

The third chapter on The Pond, the sequel of Old Stone Mansion, 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 fourth chapter on Apocalypse focuses on the question of concrete human existence and the conditions of this existence rather than hypothesizing a human essence. It also presents Elkunchwar’s analysis of the human situation which provides the central theme of contemporary existentialism.

The fifth chapter Garbo is the story of four outsiders who come together with their 'outsiderness' as a bond between them, and try to find purpose, beauty, and meaning in the world by living 'other' lives. The play is about three friends, Intuc, a professor, Pansy, an art school dropout and Shrimant, a rich man with gay tendencies. The three share Shrimant’s apartment and have a common lady friend in Garbo, a B-grade film heroine, who is a lover to all the three men.
The sixth chapter on Sonata deals with the three unmarried women and about friendship, their commitments towards each other, their sorrows, theirs victories and defeats. It is the result of a broad survey of the philosophy and its origin, major thoughts, proponents and literary connection that is made for a better understanding of Elkunchwar as an existentialist. It also analyzes the qualities of Elkunchwar that made him an existentialist.

The seventh chapter concludes with the achievement of the plays by Mahesh Elkunchwar in Marathi theatre. It also sums up the evaluation of Elkunchwar’s characters from existential point of view followed by the message that he tries to convey through the depiction of his characters and the treatment of his existential themes. Elkunchwar’s desire is to make women conscious of their existential conditions. His characters like Chandu, Prabha, Parag, Garbo and the three women in Sonata though conscious of the choices that shall make their life meaningful do not use their freedom in the right direction. He shows much concern for the modern women who are entangled in the absurd situations existing in the form of prearranged domesticity wherein they are under obligations to sacrifice their selves, limit their freedom and remain forgetful of the choices.
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