

Contribution of Mahesh Elkunchwar in the Evolution of post-Colonial Marathi Theatre: Tracing the Theatrical History

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ABSTRACT: *The British colonizers invaded India with the vision of capitalizing and politicizing the nation. The process of capitalization branched out of its singular industrial identity and monopolized every aspects of individual existence. India is layered with diverse forms of art and culture uniquely belonging to the respective regions. With the intrusion of colonialism, the artistic and cultural uniqueness were dishonored through generalization. The Eurocentric metanarrative developed into an over-arching institution violating the indigenous micronarrative discourse. The post-independent era experienced further artistic confusion and fragmentation. Debating exclusively on theatre, the 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.*

KEY WORDS : *capitalization, monopolized, metanarrative, micronarrative, performative*

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of Indian theatre is as eclectic as any mainstream genre and like them it has its own flourishing and upheavals. It is generally found that the Indian theatre oscillates between the inheritances of western attributions within the gamut of own traditions or alienating the western conceptions and developing the Indian traditions. Thus, the theatre of India has a multifarious existence. In the post-independent era, Bengal and Maharashtra was the hub of theatrical activities. The sudden withdrawal of the colonial rule created a void in the socio-political, cultural and economic conditions. The heated political conflict of Marxism and Socialism was blowing all over the nation. These political discrepancies penetrated the realm of arts and culture. The first major movement in the history of Indian theatre was organized by Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) and it heard heavy Left-wing ideological influences. The movement erupted in Maharashtra and gradually it streamed to other parts of the nation. While analyzing the evolution and development of Marathi theatre, amongst several significant playwrights Mahesh Elkunchwar holds an honorable position. His plays paint a grim picture of postmodern socio-cultural existence at the backdrop of post-independent urbanity in India. This paper intends to locate Marathi theatrical history in the measureless platform of Indian theatre with a selective analysis of Mahesh Elkunchwar's contributions towards the evolution of contemporary alternative theatre in Maharashtra.

POST-INDEPENDENT INDIAN THEATRE

The end of European colonization in several parts of the globe has created powerful historical instances of the linkage between political chronology and literary periodization. Virtually in every evolving national literary tradition, terms such as "new", "contemporary" or "post-independence" denotes a range of chronological and qualitative shifts whereas terms like "Europhone", "Commonwealth" or most recently "post-colonial" attempts to establish commonalities across the geographical, historical and cultural differences separating the former colonies and dominions. The post-independent Indian theatre which began after 1947 existed largely outside the critical and theatrical constructs continuing to appear in the margins of contemporary world theatre irrespective of the approach. In the early 1950s new experimental forms flooded the various metropolitan and urban locations in several Indian languages. Severe debates cropped up over the aspect of mimicking the European genres and discourses or reviving the classical and pre-colonial traditions. In a nutshell, the Indian theatrical arena has become historically permeable. The two hundred years history of modern urban theatre in India offers a remarkably extensive view of interpenetration of two major systems of theatrical representation: Indian and European, classical-traditional and modern, anti-realistic and realistic, provincial and metropolitan. The influence of western textual models established new dramatic theories in various Indian languages. Several European and Indian canonical plays were adapted and translated. These aspects generated the first national argument about the cultural importance of national theatre in India.

The investments of entrepreneurial capital in the urban proscenium theatres, especially by Bombay's wealthy Parsi community created the first nationally visible popular theatre that reached not only cities and provincial towns but some rural areas well. Indian theatre is initially identified from 1870s to 1940s, basically in the regional expressions of the nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments in Bengali and Marathi theatre. Later it paddled into the national scenario through the hands of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), Indian National Theatre and Bharatiya Natya Sangh. The measureless theatrical arena of India was constructed by three loose events: the formation of IPTA in May 1943, the deliberations of the first drama seminar organized by the newly constituted Sangeet Natak Akademi in April 1956 and the two week Nehru Shatabdi Natya Samaroh also organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi in September 1989. The post-independent dramatic authorship has been defined by monumental figures like Dharamvir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Govind Purushottam Deshpande, Vijay Tendulkar, Satish Alekar, Girish Karnad, Mohit Chattopadhyay and Mahesh Elkunchwar. Their stylistics of playwriting was independent of the theatrical praxis, focusing primary on urban art and self-expression. According to Bharati, "The creative self is an eternal self-renewing river the flow of which cannot be arrested or explained." It is very much reflective in Bharati's play "Andha Yug." The existence of the contemporary play demands the establishment of inter-lingual and inter-regional circulation. For instance, Mahesh Elkunchwar's "Wada Chirebandi" (Old Stone Mansion, 1985) which has invited a lot of controversies for assaulting the psychology, social consciousness, morality and ethics of the Indian middle class. The close linkage of translation to publication and performance has fostered a vital multi-lingual theatrical culture in post-independence India. Tendulkar, Elkunchwar, Deshpande, Alekar or Chandrashekhar Kambar are few authors who have collaborated actively with the translators to make their plays available for both translation and publication.

II. EVOLUTION OF MARATHI THEATRE

Speaking exclusively of Marathi theatre and its playwrights are primarily rooted in the state of Maharashtra and elsewhere in Marathi Diaspora. In Maharashtra, the theatrical activity began in 1843 with Vishnudas Amrut Bhave's "Sanglikar Natak Mandali." He made efforts to provide a new dimension to the Indian theatre with his promising plays like "Raja Gopichandra" and "Sita Swayamvar." His innovations consisted of making his characters act in a regular realistic manner coupled with western staging techniques. The history of Marathi theatre records that Bhave produced plays in Marathi with music composed of Karnatak base. Previous to 1843 in Tanjore king Raja Shahji Bhosle had written plays between 1594 and 1664 but they were not performed on stage. It was after 1843 that the Marathi theatre began to progress. With the beginning of university education in 1868 Vinayak Kirti entered the Marathi Theatre with his historical drama "Madhavrao Peshwa." The plays by Bhave or later playwrights were distinguished through excessive prominence to songs and music but Kirti erased any form of songs or musical recitals. Instead the whole drama was enacted in prose dialogues. It is here that Marathi drama branches into prose and verse plays. The Marathi theatre marched uninterruptedly. During 1880-1900 the playwrights who gave momentum to the Marathi theatre were Balwant Pandurang, Appasaheb Kirloskar and Govind Ballal. The memorable plays during this period were "Shakuntal", "Saubhadra" etc. from 1900-1947 the musical plays and entertaining comedies continued to dominate the Marathi stage. It started making significant contributions to the freedom movement. For instance, the British government banned Khadilkar's revolutionary play "Kichakhvadh" which voiced against slavery. The greatest Marathi playwright Ram Ganesh Gadkari carried the Marathi stage a step forward by transforming drama into a vehicle for social awareness. For instance, his play "Ekach Pyala" deals with the evil of alcoholism. Both Khadilkar and Gadkari were influenced by Shakespeare's plays. On the other hand eminent dramatist Mama Warerkar drew much from Bernard Shaw and Ibsen directing the Marathi theatre towards a new vision. The tri-decadal post-independent Marathi theatre encompasses outstanding creations of playwrights like Acharya Atre, Vidyadhar Gokhale, P. L. Deshpande and the renowned modernist Vijay Tendulkar. P. L. Deshpande holds a unique place in the post-independent Marathi theatre. His plays penetrate deep into the life and grievances of the Marathi middle class as found in "Batatyachi Chawl." Besides these performances the classical-traditional and folk theatre enjoyed its importance in the Marathi theatre. The "Tamasha" and "Powada" are the majorly used folk dance forms in the Marathi plays. Tamasha has more music and popular entertainment. Even today these folk art forms are alive in Maharashtra commanding popularity and people's esteem. Vijay Tendulkar commenced writing in 1955 and some of his remarkable creations are: "Shantata Court Chalu Ahe" (Silence! The Court is in Session), "Sakharam Binder," "Ghasiram Kotwal." Other notable playwrights are G. P. Deshpande ("Chanakya", "Vishnugupt" etc.), Satish Alekar ("Mahanirvan", "Begum Barve" etc.), Jayant Dalvi ("Suryasta" etc.), and Mahesh Elkunchwar ("Vasanakand", "Wada Chirebandi," "Atmakatha" etc.).

III. MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR AND HIS CREATIONS

Mahesh Elkunchwar and eminent playwright with more than fifteen works in his kitty was born on 9th October, 1939. In the contemporary era, he is hailed as one of the most influential and progressive playwrights along with Satish Alekar and Vijay Tendulkar. His fame not only remained restricted within the Marathi theatrical circle and is regarded as a highly dignified playwright in the arena of modern Indian theatre. Born to a Telugu family in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, he has to leave his parents at a very young age. Elkunchwar experimented with several forms of dramatic expressions ranging from creativity to life, sterility to death. He comes into the limelight with the publication of his one-act play "Sultan" in 1967 in the noted literary magazine of "Satyakatha." Some of his notable creations are analyzed below:

ATMAKATHA (AUTOBIOGRAPHY)

The play "Autobiography" has been created by Mahesh Elkunchwar from a psycho-realistic perspective. At the surface, it appears to be a family play consisting of three characters entangled in the complexities and confusions of post-modern human existence. Every individual lives in a simulated world. According to Baudrillard, "Today we only experience prepared realities." The real is not only which can be reproduced but that which is always already reproduced. This is what is referred to hyperreality, which is entirely in simulation. In the era of postmodernity, the truth and reality lies in complete ambiguous state. Nothing 'absolute' exists in this world today. Everything lies in a state of transience or flux. The 'binary opposition' of the structural elements as was claimed by Saussure in his Structuralism theory has ceased to exist in the postmodern world. Derrida defined it in his Deconstruction theory. According to Derrida, 'Deconstruction looks for those already established binary pair of oppositions, where the neat slash is disrupted fitting it on both the sides.' In a similar fashion, the original and the virtual have merged with each other. It is impossible to find the difference as multiple forms of truths and realities exist and postmodernism celebrates this ambiguity.

Elkunchwar, through multiple questionings highlight this very dilemma of postmodern survival. He analyses the relation between art and artist, art and reality, imaginative experience and narrative experience, authenticity of a literary creation and so on and so forth. The characters in the play, Rajdhyaksha, Pradnya, Uttara and Vasanti form a romantic triumvirate developing around Rajadhyaksha or Raja. Raja is an eminent writer who is in the process of completing his autobiography its authenticity is under severe question. His so called autobiography functions as an artificial mask to hide the controversies of his private life, especially his relation with women. Raja was married to Uttara, but later on he indulges into an extra-marital conjugal relation with her sister Vasanti which breaks the Raja-Uttara-Vasanti family triangle apart. Raja is deserted by both the women and Uttara-Vasanti relation crumble into fragments too. Pradnya, a research scholar who as a part of her research interviews Raja comes to know about the harsh, complicated realities about Raja's life. Raja admits that he has hidden several dark aspects of his personal life to save his social image. He also defends his process of lying with a truth which is actually virtual in nature. He believes that to be a successful fiction writer it is not possible to mention every elements of truth. Even the truth and reality of all the characters in this play is questioned on the basis of the various roles they play in different situation and time. Though Uttara continuously says that she is going to publish her letters she has received from Raja so that the people come to know about actual reality, the very important question arises that if at all the actual truth will be revealed. The multilayered features of every character are also revealed through their dialogues. The attitude and the dialogues of the characters mismatches with the actual purpose of their action which are always transient in nature. In the concluding part of the play, even Pradnya moves away from the purpose of her regular visit and falls in love with Raja. This play illustrates the fact that truth has no everlasting permanence. It is an individual construct of a specific moment and situation.

GOD SON

The play 'God Son' is one of the best psychological creations by eminent playwright Mahesh Elkunchwar. The dilapidated condition of postmodern human civilization forms the crux of the play. It very much questions the various social establishments of ethics and moralities. Since independence, Indian has experienced multiple developments and advancements in various fields. Since most of the advancements were a result of colonial influence and blind imitation, the progress has been in a very fragmented and disjointed manner. Through the actions of the 'Man' and 'Woman' in the play, Elkunchwar presents a dull, grim picture of individual existence in the society. In the postmodern socio-cultural framework the most severe problem is defining one's own identity within the massive social setup. This existential angst haunts the psyche of every individual. The realization of the purposelessness and the vanity of survival lead to psychological disorder. The schizophrenic nature of the 'Man' and 'Woman' reveals the same. Postmodern culture and civilization have taken a heavy toll upon them. Their mode of existence has bridged the gap between fantasy and reality, a microcosmic representation of the entire human race. Elkunchwar invites a lot of controversies by questioning

the established social norms and conditions. Social hierarchies are hegemonic in nature. It is a kind of imposition that strips an individual's identity through multiple ways of modifications and manipulations. The play can be studied from various perspectives. From the psychological point of view, the two characters in the play create for themselves an illusionistic world of their own to escape from the frustrations of their married life. The characters are already created without any definite identity except just as 'Man' and 'Woman', representing the post-structural ambiguity. There lies absolutely no permanence in the name of the individuals as everybody exists in a state of transience. The identity of the characters in this play is a reflection of the W.H. Auden's prediction in his poem 'The Unknown Citizen', where he speaks of postmodern man's loss of identity. Irony has been beautifully and variedly used by the playwright from the beginning of the play. The play begins with Woman repeating the word 'Child Psychology' a number of times and it goes on throughout the play. She believes that to bring up a child in the perfect manner it is very important for the parents to know about child psychology properly. She has extreme faith on the books which she has made her world.

She regards her book to be worth worshipping as 'The Bhagwad Gita', 'The Quran' or 'The Bible.' This brings the conflict between subjective and practical knowledge and also throws light on the artificialities of humanity. The manner of her attention, love and care towards her 'imaginary child' proves that she herself is psychologically ill. The stage setting as given in the very introductory part of the play shows the barrenness of their existence. In order to escape from this monotonicity of existence she and her husband create an illusionary world with their child. But in reality she didn't have the fortune to enjoy the privilege of becoming a mother. So in order to overcome this pain she and sometimes her husband act like a child and in this way false mother-son relation are established in this play. She falsely act as a very careful mother when her husband act as her son. Through these falsifications, Elkunchwar questions the ethics and moralities of the parent-child relation. It is a common believe that whatever the parents says are always exact and perfect. They should never be disobeyed by their children; doing such a thing is considered to be very immoral. But in practicality, often the parents' nature, attitude towards their children appears to be a kind of imposition. It leads to the psychological paralysis of the child. It is very much imprinted towards the end of the play where the child is made to undergo a Kafkaesque questioning and then he is totally paralyzed by cutting his tongue, sewing his lips, blinding and then finally killing him by amputating his genitals. The condition of the child, who actually exists in imagination, is a microcosmic representation of every individual who are unable to fit in the norms and conditions of social living. The condition of the child is almost similar to the condition of Stanley in Harold Pinter's 'The Birthday Party.' The 'Man' and 'Woman' are similar that of McCann and Goldberg always forcing their so called child to fit into the rules and regulations of the book of psychology. The rules and regulations are itself a hegemonic discourse, as Foucault said and the books are an institute to command influence and impose them. The amputation of the genitals symbolically conveys the violence unleashed by the feminine against patriarchy.

From a feministic perspective, the frustrations of both Man and Woman come into headlocks with each other. Man is sexually unsatisfied and as always tries to convince his wife Woman to quench his physical thirst but she continuously refuses and tries to divert his attention towards intellectuality. Her soliloquy on the responsibilities and duties of a wife as believed in the Indian orthodox traditions is a summative representation of the general condition of the married women in India. In this way Elkunchwar also criticizes the existing social believes and practices. The child in its silence and suffering can be defined as a revolutionary figure at the end surrendering to the existential angst through death but saves himself from being a part of the dreadful social structure. Every individual is a slave of the society. In order to survive one cannot escape from the terms and conditions of living. Anyone trying to violate it either will be forced to accept or will perish within the cruel entanglements of time. This is what happens with the child who unable to understand the orders and the instructions of the parents faces a painful death. The death, instead of bringing any contempt in them makes them feel happy, satisfied and successful. The play ends with Man and Woman felicitating each other. The entire play happens in the psychological level. All the actions and dialogues take place in an illusionary mode but in a very realistic attitude. As a result often it is confusing to separate reality and fantasy. The false notions and ideas of a confused, scattered Indian socio-cultural establishment had a very poor psychological impact on the individuals and it is very much embedded in this play.

HOLI

Mahesh Elkunchwar's creations experienced a massive change in terms of themes and plots, after he returned to the field of playwriting from an eight year old exile. According to eminent psychologist Jacques Lacan, human beings since birth till death pass through two stages: Semiotic stage and symbolic stage. The semiotic stage is the first stage of humans where the small child is 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 of 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. According to Bible, the complications and sufferings in the life of the humans began once Adam and Eve consumed the "Fruit of Knowledge." Traditionally, the extermination of Adam and Eve from the "Garden of Eden" to earth is believed to be the beginning of the sufferings and pangs of the human civilization and it has attained an ugly stature in the era of postmodern existence. The play 'Holi' can be analyzed from the universal as well as Indian socio-cultural perspective. Universally, it epitomizes the virulent, corruptive state of human existence. Through the hostel and college life experiences of the few students, Elkunchwar illustrates the various social and cultural politics humanity. Postmodernism is a celebration of fragmentation and non-linearity. Violation of the established social and moral codes, inhumanity, creation of chaos, celebrating immorality is accepted as the usual norms of the present universal structure of human existence. Every surviving individual has to fit into these norms in order to survive. One who is unable to survive either will be forced into like Stanley of 'The Birthday Party', Lalu of 'Holi' or will be forced to perish like Anand who commits suicide and in the words of Sartre, 'submits to the violence and the entanglements of the structure. The biggest disease of postmodernity is existential crisis. The fever of purposeless, monotonous existence has gripped every individuals of today's world. The Arnoldian dream of 'The Scholar-Gypsy' has failed to take shape in reality. This is what is represented through the unhealthy and immoral attitude of Shrivastav, Gopal, Madhav, Ranjit and Thakur. They all appear to anti-culturist in nature. But their revolutionary attitude cannot be held in high, positive terms. With the course of time their perverted mind loses the psychological balance and their inhuman treatment forces Anand to commit suicide. The entire play with its characters and dialogues shows the diseased state of human civilization. If the play is judged strictly from the Indian socio-cultural point of view then it shows the various political complications and conflicts that underlies in every Indians life. The characters often debates and fights over their caste, community or religion showing the typical orthodoxies that breaks the nation into fragments. It also shows that post-colonial India has not much advanced in terms of its old rotten traditional cultures and believes. It has only been affected with false elitism of postmodern urbanization which has been very simply and microcosmically represented through the lives of the few hostel students.

SONATA

The play 'Sonata' deserves a very unique place amongst all the creations of the playwright in terms of its themes and dialogues. The play is laid with multiple thoughts and ideas and can be analyzed from various perspectives. The entire play majorly consists of three female characters with a couple of minor male characters in the background. Although, the incidents and actions revolve around the female characters, but it will be a misinterpretation if it is categorized as a feminist play. The play opens up with the interaction between the characters Dolon and Shubhada who not only belong to two different communities but they are complete contrast in their character, attitude and behavior. The non-linear, fragmented, often purposeless, repetitive version of conversation that takes place between these two characters from the beginning of the play defines the reality of human existence. In the frame of real life the interaction between the individuals also takes place in the same manner. The entire play takes place within the four walls of the house in which Dolon and Shubhada lives and they are completely trapped inside it. Their dreams, hopes, aspirations, happiness and sorrows all survive within these four walls. They often dream of escaping from this monotonous, rotten state of existence but never develop into reality. They search for their freedom through the window in the sky but that has also been removed from their sight by the huge sky scrapers that have cropped as a part of the 'development plan' of the post-independent urbanization. This shows how the artificial glamour of urbanization has enmeshed their life totally and it is further understandable through the drinking and smoking habits of Dolon.

In order to survive from a total degeneration they always make efforts to remain connected with each other though mostly in the form of debates and fights. Shubhada world is entangled within her traditional believes and profession. She has kept herself largely alienated from the established norms and practices of an emerging metropolitan culture but that doesn't remain for a long time. In order to remain connected with the individuals around her she has to finally sacrifice her high traditional believes to the 'revolutionary' lifestyles of Dolon and Shubhadra. Dolon and Shubhadra are the two typical postmodern figures who find pleasures in violation of norms and conditions. Shubhadra has accepted her violent relation with Sangram and their love flowers in the process of fighting with each other. Both Dolon and Shubhadra are revolutionary figures who continue to fight against the established definitions of socio-cultural ethics and moralities. Though their struggle hardly yields any concrete, positive result and they continue to suffer within the garb of existential realities. But Shubhadra is an alter-ego of Dolon who is in turn an alter-ego of Shubhada. The naming of the characters also represents a lot of significance and it is very much visible through the names Shubhada and Shubhadra.

The similarity in both the names shows that they both are engaged into a profession which allows them to interact with the society at large but the difference in their names highlights the difference in their experiences. The characters Shubadra-Dolon-Shubhada can also be analyzed on Freudian terms as a representation of id, ego and superego respectively. But amongst all Shubhada holds a better position compared to the two because she has atleast been successful to break the limits and the entanglements of the four walls and reach the outside world, create a voice of her own. Though at the end of the play she returns back to Sangram responding to his call but that was a result of her emotional attachment to him but never as a submission. As the play progresses we find how they continue to survive within the 'bad faith' of existentialism. In the process of tormenting, drinking, smoking, and collecting the empty perfume bottles they search for their happiness and satisfaction. The women whom Dolon continuously observes from their own building are another figure suffering from the same 'bad faith'. Through Shubhada and Shubhadra we find the aspects of structuralism and post-structuralism being juxtaposed together. Shubhada hesitates to do anything outside her own established norms of living whereas Shubhadra breaks away from all forms of social and cultural establishments and creates her own. But Shubhadra's breaking away remains a temporary affair and it never gains permanence because she again returns back to her old violent routine affair with Sangram. But her efforts to overcome the domination and limitations of time she, out of a sudden outburst throws away the clock. But the reality is asserted in the process of the conclusion of the play as it ends in an almost similar way as it begins only that the characters appears to be a bit closer to each other. This reveals the ultimate inescapable existential reality of the human civilization.

PRATIBIMB (REFLECTION)

The play 'Reflection' is a remarkable psychological wonder created by Mahesh Elkunchwar. The playwright through undertaking a deep journey into the characters psyche enables the readers to percolate deep into the characters' mind and soul. This is another wonderful existential play penned down by Elkunchwar. With the main theme as the existential angst from which the character 'He' or 'Blockhead' suffers, it is also laid with several underlying aspects of conflicts: physical-psychological, sexual-spiritual, traditional-modern, proletariat-bourgeois, etc. From the names of the characters to the formulation of incidents and dialogues the play is pregnant with symbolical meanings. The characters in the play exist as 'He', 'She', 'Women' or as 'Blockhead' and 'Broomstick'. All these names show a common way of connoting and identifying a character without any uniqueness or differences. This shows the degenerating state of every individual in the human civilization. The play initiates with the character 'He' wakes up in a total confused state with the telephone, doorbell and the alarm ringing all together. After making certain directionless movements he gets utterly irritated and finally expresses his relief after all the three stops making sounds. This shows his withdrawal from the normal elements of the human structure of survival. By showing his agitation towards alarm clock, doorbell and the phone he defies the mechanical time, the society and social connectivity respectively. 'He' wants to withdraw himself from the 'outside' world which is quite irritating and disturbing for him. His existence, his vision towards life shows that he is in the brink of complete disintegration. As the play progresses we find that that the man loses his own reflection. This loss of reflection shows his alienation from every aspect of human existence. Earlier society has already rejected him for violating its norms and conditions and now his self also rejects him turning him into a completely desolated individual. He is totally disillusioned with his existence and tries to find a suitable solution to it.

The woman who comes to clean the room tries to help him to overcome his loneliness through her coy nature and then she goes on to play the game of getting inside the mind of each other. The characters opening the 'windows' of each other's mind, tries to explore deep, the different layers of the conscious and sub-conscious level of the human mind. First the woman plays the game of love with her paying guest and through this she can look deep into what lies in the mind of the man. But the result is complete pessimism and despair. Now when the man tries to enter the mind of the woman he is unable to function according to his own will and the woman guides him in his own way. This shows the difference between his mind and that of the woman who appears to be much more psychologically firm than the man. The woman has lost her husband in the course of her time and also she has accepted the fate of her as a maid servant and she is happy in her own way. She through her romantic and passionate fantasies often burdened with sexual innuendoes, tries to escape from the harsh reality and in this way she defies the pains and pangs of existentialism. She continuously struggle to avoid being trapped in the existential entanglements. But the man after the loss of her identity remains trapped within the Sartreian 'bad faith' and finally at the end even loses his ultimate power of 'speech.' His power of communication was the only weapon left for his survival with the universal social setup. It is through communication that he remained connected with the different individuals 'outside', but with the passage of time he even loses that power and finally succumbs to the existential angst by committing suicide. The other characters like the Girl, Flags and the Woman all have realized the bad faith and had come out of it.

They have accepted their fragmented, desolated existence and is trying to live in it, with it. But Man is unable to accept his situation and still lives in the modernist nostalgia, dreaming of a definite, well-structured human existence which is not possible anymore. The communication between Flagg and Blockhead reveal the Marxist bending of Elkunchwar, criticizing the elite class people for their exploitative, ignorant nature. Flagg continuously abuses and torments Blockhead and his class. But since history a basic problem with the proletariat has been that in the process of resisting the class difference they themselves get enslaved by the elite culture. This is what happens with Flagg who contradicts his own dictum by having high-class fashioned breakfast. In the later part of the play we find that Man accepts the post-modern fragmentation and he feels relieved by the loss of his reflection but he is unable to give himself to the established ethics and norms and as a result he is totally rejected by the society. The short triangular conflict between woman-man-girl that takes place towards the end of the play, shows the feeling of insecurity from the part of the woman and the girl. This feeling of insecurity and the fear of loneliness are important features of existentialism. The play also concludes in a very significant way. After speaking about the futility of life and relations, Man falls dumb and the sound of the doorbell, alarm clock and the telephone overpowers him and the woman concludes. This shows how the man fall a victim to the existential trap by trying to escape through suicide and the woman continues to live in her celebrated fragmented state which is a blend of fantasy and reality.

PARTY

The post-independent urbanization established a pseudo-intellect class of people lost in their romantic falsities and hypocrisies. This is one of the best creations of Elkunchwar drawing a clear insight into the newly emerging urban scenario in Maharashtra. It is a microcosmic representation of the urban culture and traditions practiced by the elite class in rest of India as well. Keeping the visionless practices of the urban elite class in the background, the play also explores various underlying themes and amongst all, the biggest victims are the women. They suffer the most in the process of rural/urban conflict women are subjugated by the dominant male on both the sides. It is very much revealed in the characters: Damayanti, Sona and Mohini. Damayanti organizes an evening party for the success of Barve, but she expresses her dislike towards these regular parties. It is very evident in the beginning of the play where she expresses her staunch boredom and dislike towards it. She has already realized the vanities that lie behind the smiles, laughter, celebrations and praising that goes in the party. But she is unable to free himself from the clutches of it. She was introduced to this environment by her late husband who once again reveals the impositions and the dominations of the patriarchy. Sona an illegitimate mother faces another form of social oppression. She was deserted by her lover after she got pregnant with their child, but she struggles within the established ethics and morals of the society to find her own freedom. She is forced by her mother and several others to remarry with the rich and prosperous Agashe but she is adamant in her own point of living alone with her child. Consumerism has colonized the mind of the individuals in the modern society. It is also very much evident in the love and marriage alliances amongst several characters in the play. Mohini undergoes the same agony with Barve. She more or less has realized that Barve has lost all his interest in her but she tries to escape the reality by creating a false romantic world around her. She forces out love from Barve and as a result his expressions are emotionless and hard. All the people are lost in their financial successes without any attention towards the socio-cultural reality of the nation. It doesn't find any interest in their life because they remain limited within the nutshell of their commercial theatre.

Elkunchwar also voices for the parallel and alternate theatre through the character Bharat, who is a newcomer struggling to assert his alternate social theatre in the high commercial flood and so he is not given much importance in the party. Critics are often of the view that the character Bharat carries Elkunchwar's voice. The playwright has expressed his unattended aspirations and agonies through Bharat. Malavika has accepted and adjusted well within the established norms of elitism. She readily enjoys the party with the rest. Infact she arrives at the party without any invitation. This shows the lack of basic cults and positive manners amongst the elite folk. Every interaction that takes place in the party is with certain profit making intention. In the postmodern human existence the common features of true love and affection has faded away. Every interaction seems to take place between a consumer and a retailer both cautious about their own profits and losses. The bourgeois-proletariat conflict is revealed in the interaction between Vrinda and Agashe. Vrinda practically dislikes the high class fashion and culture. Though she herself is a part of this party but she remain aloof from their vain practices. She loves to seduce men and hunt them down through her charm. She does it with Bharat and Agashe in the play revealing the masculine weakness and infirmity. The ignorance of the elite class is also revealed at the end of the play. Narendra even after hearing the murder of Amrit remains ignorant and unmoved and declares shamelessly that he is least bothered about it. This play also illustrates the point that the media can play a crucial role in bridging the class differences of the Indian society by bringing the various socio-cultural incidents taking place around the nation into limelight, creating a serious realization and awareness amongst the high class people.

WADA CHIREBANDI (OLD STONE MANSION)

The 'Old-stone Mansion', regarded as the best creation of Mahesh Elkunchwar encompasses a wide range of themes and ideas. The post-independent era saw a rampant development in urban areas, throwing the rural areas into the margin. Postcolonial India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru declared industrialization as a major initiative to allow sufficient inflow of capital for establishing a strong financial economy. But it proved to be a complete fatal approach on his part. Rapid industrialization sowed the poisonous seeds of capitalism that led to a total fragmentation of the Indian economy. The ridge between the bourgeois and the proletariat continued to widen. Though this form of economic approach proved to be quite beneficial and prosperous for the newly developed urban business class, but the rural areas continued to linger in utter darkness. The tortures of feudalism still continued to exist in several rural areas of modern India. But the withdrawal of the colonial rule proved to be a major setback for the feudal lords in India. They were turned into major profit makers after Lord Dalhousie's 'Permanent Settlement Act' allowed the free ownership and extracting of profits by landowners. But caste and social honor plays a definite role in developing and defining an individual's place within the society. In order to maintain their high social status, many families, despite losing their past wealth and glory are forced to continue with their traditional familial cults and practices. The falsified practices of the 'valuable' and 'rich' traditions lead to further socio-cultural degradation. This is what happens with the Deshpande's of Dharangaon. The Deshpande's holds a rich feudal history besides their name, which is now completely buried under the rotten pile of degeneration and destruction. The financial condition of the family is in utter disaster. The family also lies in a complete state of fragmentation. The rats have dug holes in every nook and corner of the Wada household, the roof continuously sheds dust, all symbolic of the fallen state of human existence. All the household members pursue their life in their own separate ways. The string of familial connection is altogether absent from every character in the play whether they are settled in the Dharangaon village or in the glamorized urbanity of Bombay.

The family is initially separated over the rural-urban conflict. The family of Bhaskar complains his younger brother Sudhir for not keeping any connection with them but Sudhir frankly declares that they feel difficult to adjust in the rural area after staying up for so many years in Bombay. This initiates the internal conflict among the Deshpande's which later on branches and spreads into several aspects of individual and collective survival. Despite staying in the same place or belonging to the same blood, family members remain hidden within their individual cocoons of existence and reject any form of unified associations within the family or with the outside society. The vanities of Indian traditions are also very much revealed through the ritualistic practices and the arrangements made by Bhaskar and his family after the death of Venkatesh. Another reason for the inter-familial conflict is the tussle between 'emotion' and 'practicality.' Sudhir and Anjali are very practical in their attitude as they find all these post-demise rituals as illogical and futile. But the Deshpande's continue to flow with their false notion of status and honor and continue to blow out even their minimal financial balance behind baseless customs. The timeless state in which Dadi and later Aai falls into microcosmically represents the universal human condition suffering from severe existential crisis. The holes in the walls, continuous falling of dust from the roof predicts the complete destruction of Wada household. The disease of Capitalism also infects the Wada household when the back portion of the house is rented to Bansilal to start his own business. Wada household is caught between extreme financial loss and desire to maintain its status. The towering ego of the male members of the Wada household and extreme money mindedness pushes the Wada towards thorough degeneration. Every individuals of the family has created a world of their own and were the women hold the typical marginalized position. They have hardly any say in the family affairs. Only once in the whole play the image of 'woman' comes to the forefront when Vahini puts on all the traditional jewelries upon her and escapes into an imaginary world of self-admiration. The family jewelries play a significant role in the honor and destiny of the Wada household. It has both a positive and negative impact on the family. The last elements of tradition or financial security lies in the jewelries which later on snatches all the familial honor of the household when Ranju runs away with it in Bombay. Though Ranju is rescued but the family gold that carried the family honor couldn't be rescued. It is through death that the two families meet each other again and this foretells the grave state of human civilization. The two families are only united when the cold air of grief has enraptured the Wada household. The death of Venkatesh foretells the gradual disintegration and the fading of the Deshpande lineage.

IV. CONCLUSION

Mahesh Elkunchwar's plays are free from the clutches of any definite thematic and technical categorizations. If meticulously analyzed his works consists of multiple thematic layers encircling a wide range of dramatic and theoretical aspects. Most of his contemporaries particularized a social issue through their plays but Elkunchwar's works summates the universal socio-cultural aspects and grievances. The severe craze for commercial theatre is still prevalent in Maharashtra and the alternative versions of social plays remains marginalized. In order to seek recognition, Tendulkar, Alekar, Vaze and others submitted themselves to the huge

pressure of commercialism. But Elkunchwar has been very firm and strict with his purpose. He rejected the established norms of the commercial theatre and developed self-created themes and theatrical techniques. Due to the commercial orthodoxy, Elkunchwar has largely been ignored for a long time, not only in the realms of Marathi theatre but also in the Indian theatrical arena. This process of alienation proved to be a blessing in disguise for him. His themes and techniques of creativity achieved a unique standard which is very well cherished and admired in the contemporary era. To conclude, Marathi theatre has reached its zenith due to the glorious efforts of several highly talented playwrights. The role of Marathi theatre in the development of Indian theatre has not only been unique but a source of valued for theatrical arts in other Indian languages. Therefore, Marathi theatre has etched a golden chapter in the history of Indian theatre.

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