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Creativity in the Context of Existentialism and Metaphysical Concept of Sin in Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Desire in the Rocks*

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Abstract:

The Contemporary Experimental Playwright Mahesh Elkunchwar has adopted various dramaturgies, practiced and strengthened it to give a new direction and direction to the Marathi Experimental Theatre. Mahesh Elkunchwar has followed not only Eastern but also Western conceptions of plays and stand significantly on the global level to prove themselves as prolific writers. Mahesh Elkunchwar is one of the creative Experimental playwrights whose name proudly included in the list of prolific Indian playwrights. He has enriched the Indian drama and particularly the Marathi Experimental Theatre by picturing the social and cultural life in Maharashtra. He takes up typically Indian themes and the plays are deeply rooted in the Indian cultures which imbibe music, theatre, religion and philosophy. He is one of ground-breaking writers with a fine sensibility and at the same time a contemplative and controversial dramatists. Because of his highly individual outlook and vision of life and independent style of writing, he has made powerful impression in the field drama to give a new idiom to the post-independent drama. Elkunchwar has experimented with many forms of dramatic expression, ranging from the Realism to Symbolism and Expressionism to Absurdism. His themes range from creativeness to the life and sterility towards the death.

Key Words: Existentialism, Experimental Theatre, Metaphysical

Mahesh Elkunchwar, a leading figure who has shaped the modern Marathi Experimental Theatre. He has written and produced some of the most influential and progressive plays in the era post independence India and are part of the trinity with Vijay Tendulkar and Satish Alekar who shaped modern Marathi Experimental Theatre. As a leading practitioner of Contemporary Experimental Theatre, Mahesh Elkunchwar has played vital role, bridged the gap between experimental and professional theatre. Deeply inspired by Tendulkar, he exhibits the same boldness when it comes to the choice of themes. He paid a lot of attention to symbolism and also showed how the barriers between professional and experimental dramas are significantly breaking down. He started with some noteworthy one-act plays. He later wrote plays such as *Vasanakand*, *Garbo*, *Wada Chirebandi* and *Atmakatha*. They were made of solid substance and were sure of their experimental technique as well. The subject of *Garbo* and *Vasanakand* is an incestuous relationship and intractable emotional and other problems the situation creates. These plays have been interpreted on a symbolic level also, as a study of the complex relationship between the characters.

Elkunchwar has experimented with many forms of dramatic expression, ranging from the realistic to symbolic, expressionist to absurd theatre with theme ranging from creativity to life, sterility to death and has influenced modern Indian theatre for more than three decades. Elkunchwar emerged onto the national theatre scene with the publication of his one-act play *Sultan* in 1967 in noted literary magazine *Satyakatha*. This play was immediately noticed by Vijaya Mehta; she went on to direct four of his early plays, including *Holi* and *Sultan* in 1969 and 1970 for *Rangayan*. A number of commercial hits followed such as *Holi* (1969), *Raktapushpa* (1971), *Party* (1972), *Virasat* (1982), and *Atamkatha* (1987). Elkunchwar's plays are written in Marathi, the Indian language that is spoken by approximately ninety million people. The plays have been subsequently translated into multiple Indian and Western languages, including English, French and German.

Garbo revolves around four outsiders who bond through their outsidership and try to find purpose, beauty, and meaning in life by living other lives. It presents the story of the tragic lot of four individuals- Garbo, Intuc, Shrimant and Pansy. It deals with the physical and psychological relationship among three male friends, Intuc (the pseudo-intellectual), Pansy (the effete), and Shrimant (the Rich) and Garbo, an ordinary film actress-cum- prostitute who wants to be successful.

Desire in the Rocks is a story of incest at one level, and a deep probe into the meaning of fact and truth, passion and infatuation, creativity and sterility on the other. It depicts the incidents in the lives of two characters, Hemkant and Lalita. Hemkant is Lalita's brother. They come together by chance and by choice enter in to the illicit sexual relationships. It is analyzed with a focus on the two prominent elements in the play; the theme of incest relationships between brother and sister on the one hand, and the other, the primordial elemental relationship between man and woman. *Wada Chirebandi (Old Stone Mansion)* captures the trials and tribulations of a family caught in a period of transition when the old is passing away and the new is yet to come. *Pratibimb (Reflection)* is about losing identity in a faceless crowd in a mega city, and the alienation of individuals from themselves, from the society, and from the cosmos. *Sonata*, a story of three independent career women in a metropolis living life on their own terms and connected by their femininity, is about bonding, betrayal, and forgiveness. *Eka Natacha Mrityu (An Actors Exits)* explores an actor's relationship with his director, his medium, his body, and finally his mortality.

Elkunchwar has experimented with various forms of drama like the realistic, the naturalistic, the absurdist, the symbolist, and the existentialist. His plays are about the anxieties, frustration, hope, conflicts of the middle class society. He focuses on the pangs, angst, agony and sorrows of the men and women in the society in the period of transition. Deeply inspired by Tendulkar, he exhibits the same boldness when it comes to the choice of themes.

I have a gran legacy of one hundred and fifty years of playwriting but it is Tendulkar who is in my emergence as a playwright. Temperamentally also I feel closer to him than

many of the playwrights of his generation. So my tradition begins with Tendulkar. (Elkunchwar, 26)

Mahesh Elkunchwar is also influenced by the western theatre and western dramatists like, Anton Chekhov, Jezzy Grotowski, August Strindberg, Ionesco, Antonio Artud and Samuel Beckett. Through his play writing he has responded to the various Western isms of the nineteenth and twentieth century like, the absurdism, realism, surrealism, symbolism, expressionism, existentialism etc. According to Ravindra Kimbhune;

Elkunchwar's plays are based on the philosophy of the Existentialism and absurdism. (Arwikar, 9)

Elkunchwar's earlier one act plays and the full length plays are written in absurdist style. Many of his plays suggest the existential problems of the individuals living in the period of transition. Mahesh Elkunchwar says;

I am more interested, in an individual's problems, his inner life, and his anguish. The psyche of an unhappy disturbed person interests me more than social problems. Social problems do not interest me really, because they have solutions. The human mind is unfathomable. It is the kind of material that's never exhausted. (Elkunchwar, xv)

Other dramatic devices like games, role playing are used in many of his plays like *Garbo, Reflection* and *One act plays*. These aspects of his plays are illustrated in relation to the features of his plays such as themes, plot construction, characterization, diction, setting and symbols and the dramatic forms.

Existentialism:

Existentialism, as a philosophical approach developed during and after the Second World War. It is a modern school of philosophy, with its roots in the nineteenth century thinkers Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, and developing in the twentieth century in works by Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus. Sartre was the first to call himself an existentialist, and he is more closely associated with existentialism than any other philosopher. The existentialism of Sartre is different from the Christian existentialism derived from Kierkegaard is an atheist philosophy of human freedom conceived in terms of individual responsibility and authenticity. Its fundamental premise, that 'existence precedes essence', implies that we as human beings have no given essence or nature but must forge our own values and meanings in an inherently meaningless or Absurd world of existence. Tallur explains:

According to Sartre, consciousness of our own freedom is the sign of 'authentic experience', as opposed to 'bad faith'.

Existentialism speaks powerfully to the sense of 20th century as a chaotic and even catastrophic era, in which certainties have been lost and man is faced with the abyss of nothingness, or of his own capabilities for evil. It lays stress on extreme situation,

which produces dread, arising from awareness of freedom of choice or awareness of sin. (Tallur.p.54 & 55)

The investigation of this freedom involves investigation of the nature of being and this caused existentialism to form two, main streams: First, aesthetic, which interprets the free individual existence as self-created, and the second, religious, which interprets individual existence as dependent on transcendent being, means God.

Existentialism is a modern school of philosophy, which influenced the literary world. Irish Murdoch has termed modern British empiricists as existentialists. Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Simone de Beauvoir authors belong to France. Sartre's trilogy of novels, *Roads to Freedom*, and his famous play *No Exit* have presented existential philosophy. Albert Camus' world famous novel *The Outsider* is about existential approach. The doctrines of Existentialism have influenced a number of experimental dramatists with continental affinity. For example, Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, Harold Pinter, Tom Stafford have depicted existential dilemmas in their absurd plays.

Various themes of existential philosophy occur again and again in art, literature, movies. And other fields these are: Absurdity, Alienation, Rejection of meaning-giving narratives, Anxiety, Responsibility, Authenticity, Passion/engagement, Individuality, Forlornness and Death.

Creativity in the Context of Existentialism and Metaphysical Concept of Sin in *Desire in the Rocks*:

Desire in the Rocks is a story of incest at one level, and a deep probe into the meaning of fact and truth, passion and infatuation, creativity and sterility on the other. It (*Desire in the Rocks/Vasanakand*) depicts the incidents in the lives of two characters, Hemakant and Lalita. This play is constructed into only six scenes. Hemakant is Lalita's brother. Hemkant and Lalita come together by chance and by choice enter the forbidden, sexual relationships. Their relationship results into the pregnancy of Lalita. Hemakant accuses her of trapping him and depriving him of his artistic freedom and abandons her for a short while. Lalita gives birth to a stillborn while Hemkant returns to her and both face the wrath of the villagers. Lalita takes on the penance by turning herself into a prostitute. The furious villagers demolish Hemkant's dream forest of the sculptures of the pure lust. Both get stoned and at last Lalita sets the mansion on fire, take his head in her lap and the play ends as the whole mansion bursts into flames. The play brings in the notions of the violation of social sections, the resulting sin and the redress of it through penance and punishment. It also brings in the notion of curse and its fulfilment through the death of child and its mother. *Desire in the Rocks* is analyzed with a focus on the two prominent elements in the play; the theme of incest relationships between brother and sister on the other hand the primordial elemental relationships between man and woman.

The theme of incest is not the focal point of the play. At its core lie the vibrant relationships between man and woman. However the fact that the man and woman in question are also

brother and sister provides the play with its outer form and theme. The play opens with the invitation of Hemkant to his sister, Lalita to recruit them in the sexual play ends with a sense of sin, unchastely, impurity and the resultant guilt on the part of Lalita who considers their plights as the punishment for their sin. The incest theme looms largely over the play and so their relationships with each other cannot be fully studied by excluding this dimension. The author has taken much care in not to complicate the brother sister relationship by any material motif of property or revenge like in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. There is no attempt either by Lalita to retain the estate legally offered to her father, or by Hemakant, who is deprived of his due rights, to process Lalita for the sake of property.

Lalita is younger than Hemakant by fifteen years. When the play opens, she is of twenty, and Hemakant, thirty five. They are meeting after the segregation of fifteen years. It is through their dialogues their family history is revealed. They used to live with their father Dadasaheb, a rich Zamindar from an aristocratic family lineage. He was a man of very strict discipline in moral codes and used to control his children through his austere looks and speech. Lalita might have lost her mother in her very early childhood as she mentions only the large portrait of the mother. She has to bow before this portrait every night before going to sleep. Hemkant had developed a passion for sculptures and his father obviously used to get enraged for he had different expectations from his son. Once he comes into Hemkant's room with a hunter and Hemkant getting hold of that announces his freedom. He leaves his father's house and all rights of a legal heir thereby to his property. He wanders throughout Europe for his passion of becoming a sculptor. He leaves his house and his relations at the age of twenty when Lalita was just five. He returns after fifteen years of exile after the death of his father.

Lalita has lived alone all these twenty years without the care and love of mother, with the strict, matter of fact behaviour of her father, and with the treatment of the maidservants who always served her as a princess. Hemkant's rooms were locked forever and nobody was allowed to speak of him. Once a maidservant showed Lalita a photograph of Hemkant and got fired out from the job. Lalita lived like a princess in a golden cage much under the feelings of fear, insecurity, and the need of love. The death of her father relieves her from his austere presence, but she gets subjected to the care of security, and love from somebody who is a blood relative, a brother. She longs for his love, trusts him and submits herself and her will to him. Hemakant on the other hand, lives alienated from his home, his close relations, his blood ties and his society. He has accepted and suffered this estrangement for the single pursuit of his passion for the creation in the rocks. In Lalita, he spots a model for his purpose.

Hemkant's individualistic limitations lie in his relative concept of love and sin. Hemkant is an existentialist protagonist, whose ideas of sin are related to existentialism, he is a person who has established sexual relationship with his own sister and that too with her own consent and yet he says that he has not committed sin. He is without encumbrance in so far as his relationship with his sister is concerned; it is just an embodiment of sexual desire. He is loyal to his sensitivity, impulses and ideas. He only lives in the present and thinks of the same. Now here lies his impulse. He is capable of decision making and ready to bear his responsibility. Hemkant does not agree with the established values of life, conventional,

social, cultural, religious, and ethical precedents. In his effort to explore his own self, he realized that he too is not true to life and his self awakened but he could not reach those incidents and their pros and cons, because of the limitations of his personality. Hemkant's final lot is meaningless kernel of life, because of his repudiation of conventional and realistic life values and his believing this.

Hemkant does not involve himself into everything and has built up a kind of castle around him for his own safety. He always desired to test the beauty of life without having any scratch on it and therefore Lalita says:

Hemkant:(fearful) am I so weak? Was I playing all my life when I thought I was unattached?

Lalita: you had erected a wall around yourself in self defence. You refused to get involved. You were always guarded, aloof to make sure that you didn't suffer a single scratch. You wanted life's warmth without burning your fingers. But life always has its revenge in the end Hem. Its blow has fallen on you all on a sudden. That's why you have collapsed. (Elkunchwar.127)

He has not reached the truth of life which is hidden behind the curtain of realism, in order to realize the life of someone, who has to sacrifice one's whole life, to undergo the pangs of life; and then one can reach the origin of reality and ultimate truth. The outward facts are not life at all. They are just means to reach the origin of that impulse and this journey shows internal pangs like that of Ashwathama's wound. One has to sever the correction of the past, one cannot even think of life's outward kernel.

Lalita is also a traveller on the way of creativity. In spite of her realization of her insist taboo with her brother. She loves her brother intensely. Her love for her brother is above any expectation, whereas Hemkant love for his sister is relative, and therefore he cannot reach the inward mind of Lalita. His idols have become vulgar and obscene because of his inability to realize the impulse of sex. Art cannot reach on par with artistry, until and unless an artist doesn't reach the truth of life and its origin.

Lalita has woven together an unavoidable chain of the events of her life. It is an eternal and painless journey of sorrow, pangs and sufferings. She keeps exploring human values, which are permanent and real.

Lalita: who says so? Where have I found the truth? Perhaps nobody finds it at any time. But that doesn't mean we are permitted deny it. Our ineluctable destiny is to wander in search of it forever. (Elkunchwar.128)

Even her ideas of sin are also beyond expectation. It is vulgar and metaphysical devotion and it is her destiny. Lalita's journey accompanied by black sorrow is nothing but a metaphysical exploration of life.

Hemkant realizes the pangs and sufferings of Lalita, when his own conscious awakens. He feels that there is some unavoidable connection between his pseudo creations and Lalita's deceased child. Creation means sacredness and happiness; therefore the very process of creativity is based on holiness and related to origin and principles of human beings.

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