

Kaleidoscopic Representation of the Human Ties in Mahesh Elkunchwar's Old Stone Mansion

Amol Ghumade

Assistant Professor of English
Department of English
Priyadarshini Mahila Mahavidyalaya
Wardha, (Maharashtra), India

Dr. Pranjali Kane

Assistant Professor of English
Department of English
Shri Binzani City College, Nagpur
(Maharashtra), India

HHH

Abstract

Mahesh Elkunchwar as an experimental postmodern playwright marked his entry in Indian literary circle as regional playwright and his translated plays gained national and International attention His Old Stone Mansion (Wada Chirebandi) is a remarkable psychological wonder. After British rule a gradual degeneration of of feudal order occurred in all over India and landlords were helplessly attempting to retain their dignity. Dharangaonkar Deshpande were not exception to it, being landlords they were also undergoing to suffer with financial crises. After post-independence feudal order were witnessing their degeneration, on the other side other people they worked hard for their prosperity. Old Stone Mansion revolves round a Deshpande family where after a demise of father, Vyankatesh all the family members gets more conscious about their rights and fell down in power politics and try to locate their own space that creates a psychological tension amongst them. This paper deals with the kaleidoscopic nature of their personality in the light of their dialogues, their facial expressions, and through their action in complete atmosphere. This paper will also deal with the human ties and postmodern survival of the characters for concrete human existence.

Keywords: Power politics, Existential estrangement, Post-Independence, Psychological tension, Generation gap, Kaleidoscope

Mahesh Elkunchwar as phenomenal post-independence playwright and Sahitya Academi recipient left his footprints on Indian literary firmament. Along with his theoretical writings he is active in Cinema as actor and screenwriter. He is considered as a successor to Vijay Tendulkar in his writing style. His plays shows the reflection of middle class society that juxtaposes the socio-political issues of Indian rural bourgeois society at large. In all his plays the characters tries their best to cope up with the situation but finds unable to escape from existential trap that spoils their relationships in family. We see the constant changing pattern of human behavior at various level that creates existential turmoil amongst them.

Old Stone Mansion, is a family drama of Deshpande family of Dharangaon in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.

This play considered to be his excellent play ever come across. The Deshpande family consists of Bhaskar, the elder son and his wife everyone calls her "Vahini". His young son Parag and daughter Ranju, Mother "Aai" and father Vyankatesh who has recently died. His younger brother Sudhir and his wife Anjali who lives in Mumbai. Bhaskar's sister Pratibha and youngest brother Chandu all are the family members. The play begins on the fifth day after the sudden demise of Tatyaji (Vyankatesh), the landlord. Aai, the widow of Tatyaji, Dadi, Bhaskar, Vahini, Prabha, and Chandu awaiting the arrival of Sudhir and his wife Anjali from Mumbai, to attend 13th day rites. In the meantime, the eldest son Bhaskar and his wife Vahini, have taken over the charge of two objects on command, the keys and the ancestral jewellery box.

When Sudhir arrives at home, he meets Aai in the back room. On seeing Sudhir, Aai burst into tears and cries that their shelter has now gone. Prabha says that Tatyaji did not speak to her till the end. She complains to Sudhir that when Tatyaji dies, nobody gave her the news when she was in Panchayat library. She says that after Tatyaji's death Vahini has changed alot.

she says-

PRABHA: Let me tell you Sudhir, it's not even five days since Tatyaji died. Five days. And Vahini has changed already. The house keys moved instantly into her keep. And Aai went instantly into the shadows of the back room. When Tatyaji was alive, you couldn't hear Vahini's footfall on the verandah. But within five days her orders are heard way outside the wada. (141)

Power shifts to Vahini from henceforth. Prabha is noticing a transformation of submissive woman to commanding woman which disrupts their mutual understanding. As Prabha and Chandu have no other option. The educated Prabha could not tolerate Vahini's behavior so she expresses her pain to Sudhir. Whereas, Chandu is

helpless. Prabha has completely changed her opinion about Vahini. When, Sudhir says that he has bought shawls for Dadi and Aai which he did not bring either because this was not the occasion to bring these gifts. On this Prabha says with preconceived notions.

PRABHA: For Dadi! Who's ever given her anything new to wear! Her shawl will go straight into Vahini's trunk. Dadi doesn't need more than some tattered old rug thrown over her. Save me from Such old age! (142)

From the above statement we can see how healthy relationship Vahini and Prabha have in their family. The demise of Tatyja brings this change in Deshpande's family as Vahini has become more powerful and self-centered.

We sees that Sudhir is also self-centered, he is already advised on the way by his wife Anjali to not to take initiatives in 13th day ritual expenses. There is one incident that takes place where Bhaskar asks Chandu to take some 700 to 800 rupess from Sudhir, here Sudhir declines that he don't have money and he gives the most convincing answer.

He says-

SUDHIR: Seven or Eight hundred? Where will I suddenly produce that much from? We left in such a hurry when the telegram came, there was no time even to go to the bank. (147)

Here Sudhir wants to escape from his responsibility. Whereas, Bhaskar intends to conduct the rituals in full traditional fanfare even when the family faces financial crises. Bhaskar expects Sudhir to share the expenses, as his image from a big city is that of financially well off. Sudhir wonders to know that the whole village is invited for 13th day ceremony. He does not like the old traditions of expenditure. So they speak of putting their land and gold on mortgage. Sudhir then speaks of getting his share in the ancestor's land. On this, Bhaskar gives detailed explanation. Bhaskar appears to be more practical now.

He says-

BHASKAR: Only in name. You know that as well as I do. He passed on the whole responsibility of your education, your marriage, to me and sat back. Did that cost nothing? And here you are demanding your share! (169)

Bhaskar says that they had spent money on his education and on marriage. Sudhir replies that Bhaskar and his

family have been using the whole income of the farms. Bhaskar defending himself by saying that, that they had spent money on the sickness of Tatyaji and operation of Aai. Similarly, they had to spend money in the government office for the division of the farm. Actually, Deshpande's themselves are a big family with a big loan. The play presents the personal conflict between brothers which ultimately becomes the social conflict. Extreme money mindedness pushes the wada towards degeneration and finally they have to accept them. Interpersonal relationship gets spoiled. But when Ranju elopes with English teacher he comes forward to save the status of wada.

Women in this play, Vahini, Prabha, and Aai remained marginalized throughout the play. Vahini always tries to maintain peace in the family. Her nature is submissive whereas Bhaskar is arrogant. When Bhaskar tells her that he will not divide his ancestral land into equal share, instead he will keep all land with him, on this Vahini alerts him that this is not ethically correct. She says the land should be divide into four equal parts.

She says-

VAHINI: Give each one his share. And let's be free. (186)

Here we see Vahini is very conscious about the future aftermath of land dispute. It is quite clear that Bhaskar will not listen to her but Vahini can see the future of Prabha, Chandu, Aai, and Sudhir if they are deprived of their share from the land. In another instance we can see she is not ready to wear the ornaments. After Bhaskar's request she wears them but she is willing to ready to have all them. She warns Bhaskar not to take anybody's curse on him. She warns Bhaskar not to take anybody's curse on him.

She says-

VAHINI: Put it in the pooja room. (Bhaskar is speechless.) First thing Tomorrow, give each one his share. (188)

Vahini is an important character in this play although she is illiterate but she has a sense of moral values. On the other side Bhaskar seems to be selfish and self-centered. Bhaskar is looking for securing his children's future by absorbing all lands and gold whereas Vahini is looking for welfare of their joint family. Vahini is also protective about her children that's why she deliberately hides Parag's bad habits and in inclination to wrongs company from Sudhir. She is also conscious about Ranju when Prabha makes allegation on Ranju as Prabha finds Ranju is always before the mirror. Prabha alerts Vahini about

Ranju's English teacher. At this time time Vahini comes forward and defend her child from Prabha's allegation. In such a way we can notice Vahini is a noble woman who takes care of her and who doesn't have any interest in property too. She develops a kind relation with all the family members. She maintains an equilibrium all family members. Prabha has some misconceptions about her but Vahini also thinking of her future and tries to convince her to get marry. But graduate Prabha is not willing to marry uneducated husband that creates a communication gap between Prabha and Bhaskar. Vahini acts as a bridge between them. In this way Vahini burns in a mental turmoil but she is helpless as all power is with Bhaskar.

Prabha is misfortunate character from this play. She completes her graduation in arts. She is an extremely intelligent girl. But Brahmin aristocratic family's conception of prestige couldn't allow her to continue her further education. She is denied any opportunity to continue her education and work outside. According to her Bhaskar is the reason and the force behind him is Vahini. She carries hatred of Vahini because of misconception. Prabha also looks for staying at her brother's house, but Anjali avoid her idea by saying what difficult life they lead in Bombay. When she points it out, Anjali seems to be indifferent to her brother Sudhir. Prabha finds no way out. She thinks mansion (wada) is devouring her. She feels like existential estrangement inside. She burns internally. After the death of Tatyaji, she feels somewhat liberated. She thinks that with the share of gold she will again come out as a strong person. She wants to sell off her share of gold. She feels pity for Aai's condition. She wants to escape from the mansion (wada) and go Amrawati for any part time work. In a discussion with Aai she express her dream and hope.

She says-

PRABHA: I will put the money in the bank, Aai. That gold should fetch fifty to Sixty thousand rupees. I will able to manage my studies from the Interest on the amount. (127)

Prabha's this hope is wasted when Ranju runs away with gold. For Prabha everything is bleak and no hope from somewhere. Yet Prabha expresses great faith in her aspiration.

Ranju, an adolescent girl creates a great blunder in the play. She fantasizes with herself with cinema world. She thinks that her English teacher can be a vehicle to reach Bombay. She somehow manages to escape to Bombay for film actress. All over the play she projects her childish behavior and her liking towards films. As a result without

any knowing she runs away with gold. She spoils Prabha's hope and family's status. Here we can see Ranju's adolescence age dilemma. And from here we could see the role of Sudhir as a savior. Sudhir somehow manages to reach police station and escorts Ranju safely and returns in the midnight to the villages. Bhaskar feels helpless over this situation. Sudhir stands firmly for their family status. This is the prominent incident of the play. And from here this family experiences unity in themselves apart from their misunderstandings. The towering ego of all characters gets down. They becomes speechless but they carry inward unity amongst them. Ranju's plight and her safely escorting brings family members closer.

To conclude, The Old Stone mansion is a representative family drama where characters undergo existential experience. They shows their kaleidoscopic nature, nobody is exception. In real life people might also experience the same as their own. This is the social reality highlighted in this play.

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