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Special Issue of Department of English,
Lokmanya Mahavidyalaya, Warora, Dist. Chandrapur (MS)

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RECENT TRENDS IN CREATIVE WRITING



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MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR'S EXPERIMENTS IN AN ACTOR EXITS**Shrikant Niranjana Puri***Head, Department of English, Lokmanya Mahavidyalaya Warora, Dist. Chandrapur (MS)**snipuri.education@gmail.com***Abstract**

Experiments is the essential feature of literature. One can find the history of literature of any country and of any time as a history of constant experiments with or without traditional elements. In case of British drama, its origin itself is an experiment by the churchmen to preach the Latin Bible to the laymen. Further, the blending of tragic and comic elements, violation of three unities and chorus, use of blank verse and melodramatic elements, replacement of young boys with the real women for female characters on stage, closet plays and so many are initial significant experiments. Experiments increased in the modern and postmodern ages. Globalization brought about the first-hand knowledge of the world's literature, and consequently experimenting and blending the literary traditions of one country with another. Although India has a great ancient tradition of poetry and drama, yet in modern age Indian literature began with the imitation of European (especially British) literature. Ravindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chattopadhyay etc started writing dramas in Indian tradition with less experiments. However, the experiments in Indian literature, especially drama, is not a new thing now. Dharmavir Bharati, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sarkar, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Girish Karnad etc made it possible. Their experiments ranges from symbolism to the use of masks on the stage. In An Actor Exits (2005) Mahesh Elkunchwar came up with full of experiments. Therefore, the present paper attempts to explore the experiments employed in the play.

Keywords: *experiment, mask, silence, expressionism, intertextuality, symbolism, monologue, Theatre and illusionary Life, philosophy of life (Soul & Great-soul).*

Introduction: *An Actor Exits (2005), a one act play, is the only unperformed play of Elkunchwar. It is known for its unconventional style of writing. Although it focuses on the last moments in the life of an unnamed actor, yet it focuses on the philosophy of life in general. As the earlier plays of Elkunchwar, the present play also reflects the Hindu philosophy.*

Expressionism: *Expressionism is a mid-twentieth century experiment in the European theatre. It came to India in the last decades of the twentieth century. In it very few characters are presented. However, the psyche of the central characters is explored under a crucial situation in their life. In such stressful situation, the focused characters expresses their soulful feelings and emotions. Sometimes the presence of persons or things in front of them are in reality just the hallucinations. The dialogues, especially monologues, are feelings, which they cannot produce in the actual presence of those hallucinated persons. So that the character conveys the feelings to the illusionary presence of the person. In the present play, the central character is nameless. He is referred to as 'He', the pronoun used for a male person. He is engirded with cobwebs, and cannot get rid of it. This takes him back to his childhood and then to the adulthood profession of acting. He remembers his mother and father, and his diasporic feeling towards them. He expresses his feelings towards the director and the co-actress in their illusionary presence as masks in the*

frames. His hidden feelings about both of them are expressed by using poignant, sometimes abusing, words. He also recalls the secret moments spent with them.

Mask : In the ancient age in Europe, the characters on the stage used to wore different masks to represent different types of characters, for example, tragic hero, comic character etc. However, in middle and modern age this tradition of wearing masks on the stage was lost in regular public performances. Masque, as the name hints, were performed in the sixteenth and seventeenth century wearing masks by the amateur actors from the royal or similar families. Other than this exception, wearing or using masks on the stage was a rarest thing to be seen. However, Elkunchwar in his present play made the use of both the masks in frames and masks on face. The Director, the actress (perhaps his heroin in plays) and other characters in the play wear masks.

Symbols and Allegory: Symbolism is one of the famous characteristics of expressionism. Since nineteenth century, it is becoming more and more popular and is being employed extensively in all the genres of literature. In the present play cobwebs are the symbols of 'mayajal' (the intricacies with the worldly things, possessions, friends and relatives). When these webs become stronger and tighter, the man or woman goes farer from the divinity. He / she escapes from this mayajal, when he/ she gets 'mokshya' (redemption from the cycle of life and death). Mask is the symbol of duplicity, covering the real identity with a fake one. The director is a symbol of that boss / master who orders others to do things that he himself cannot do. The director in the play is the boss in everyday life. He shows fake sympathy for his junior workers. Actually he makes them work hard and without his own labour takes the whole credit of their work. The stage is the allegorical form of the world, and the actors of the human beings. The emancipation from the cobwebs allegorises the death of the human being and going back to 'Mother' and 'Father', that is our Creator. The last Sanskrit quotation elaborates that God is the Infinite entity, and the human being is the molecule / finite form of that Entity. In Hindu philosophy, the separation of molecule (Atma / soul) from that Eentity (Parmatma / God) is termed as 'birth', while the union of this finite molecule with its Origin (Parmatma) is termed as 'death'.

Silences and Pauses: In real life people do not speak all the time that they meet or stay together. They keep mum many a times. One of the postmodern experiments in play is to show the real life pauses or silences on the stage. Therefore, Elkunchwar, in his An Actor Exits, shows the central character doing some common behavioural things and many a times keeping mum (Elkunchwar, 2010: 289, 290, 292, 296, 298, 300, 305-310). This brings the quality of verisimilitude (to life) in the play.

Intertextuality: The term is in vogue and practice, since Julia Kristeva has coined it. It refers to the use of quotations, allusions or translations of other texts to influence the meaning of the present text. An Actor Exits has many such allusions, quotations and translations that refer to many classical texts by renowned authors. The very first page of the play has two references from Aaddya Shankaracharya's Charpatpanjarika and a Sanskrit saying. The first quotation explains the need of few things to live a life. The Actor of the play realises it but at the end of his life. The second quotation, the Sanskrit saying, says that the hope makes man run fast. The

actor runs to fulfil his hopes and spent his whole life for earning money by putting on and off masks. The Marathi translation of a Christian song of Christ's Nativity (297), a Sanskrit quote explaining the illusionary existence of life (302), the Sanskrit shlok explaining the importance of Guru (teacher) / Director (298), another Sanskrit shlok narrating the closeness of kins and friends after death (307), another shlok saying that the death is ultimate and no one including God Ram can avoid it (304), and there is also the shlok from the Ishopanishad telling that the God is Infinite and so is the soul which is also the part of God (310). Moreover, there are quotations from the poetry of Lord Alfred Tennyson's 'Lady of Shallot' (295, 307) and 'The Lotus Eater' (300), from T. S. Eliot's 'Ash Wednesday' (291), and from the Holy Bible (297). In addition, there are allusions of the words of D. H. Lawrence, Arthur Miller, Elizabeth Barret Browning, Osho, and Shakespeare's Macbeth and Othello. All of them suits the situation in the play. There are also the scattered passing but appropriate references to the characters or events or words or pictures from The Ramayan, the Mahabharat, the Geeta, the Bible, the king Oedipus, Hindu and Greek myths, the portrait of The Creation of Man by Michelangelo, Hindi Songs, advertisements, and computer keys.

Hinglish (Code-Switching): The term Code-Switching refers to the speaker's shift from one language to another language/s. A multilingual speaker switches occasionally between two or more languages. In case of literature, the character uses the linguistic elements of more than one language. In the present play, all the major characters switch their language from English to Hindi or Marathi or Sanskrit. The central character quotes many shloks from Sanskrit. He sings many Hindi songs and advertisement. The words like 'baba', 'Angik Abhinay', 'ovis', 'yaar', 'guru', 'arrey wah re wah', 'pind', 'shradhha' and so many are from Marathi and Hindi. The words like 'boardwallas' are the Marathikaran (using words of other languages with Marathi elements, especially affixes) of English words. Another important aspect of Marathi language found in the play is the re-duplication of words. Here words are spoken twice, but with a little change in initial sound of second word. The examples from the play are 'saints-waints', 'art-fart' etc.

Theatre Relating Life / Philosophy of Life : The whole play, An Actor Exits revolves around the philosophical views on human existence. No doubt that Elkunchwar presents the old thing about the illusionary existence of the world and the creatures living in it. It was already told by the Hindu scriptures, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and others. As Shakespeare recites in As You Like It, in An Actor Exits the protagonist on the stage is the symbol of human being in the world performing different roles. His exit from the stage allegorizes the death in the world, and his hopes, relationships, property and struggle for a better life allegorizes the 'mayajal' (bondages that refrain humans from the mokshya). In the play the cobwebs engirded to the actor allegorises the mayajal. His desires at the end of the play to meet with his father is the desire of an atma / soul to meet with the Parmatma / God. Mokshya, in Hindu philosophy, refers to the freedom from the mayajal and the union with the Parmatma. One who achieves mokshya gets redemption from the cycle of birth and death.

Ending: The ending of the play is very significant. The actor in the play gets rid from the cobwebs symbolizing the death / Mokshya and freedom from the Mayajal. His new birth is the awakening from the illusionary life on this world. This is the time to know the reality of our existence and becoming one with the Infinite source of our origin. This Infinite / God occupies everything, the whole cosmos and beyond. So when the actor dies, he exclaims:

My words! How fast we are moving, how vast the space! The blue earth is receding at such tremendous speed. Baba, baba I want this. I'll make a ring of this blue stone. And this Jupiter. I'll make a locket out of this. How fast are these planets receding. And this and ... and this ... so many planetary systems, they are all falling back so fast. And now even this galaxies around my neck. And infinity is not enough to cover me. (Elkunchwar, 310)

He further says to his father / God, "Everywhere it is only you and I / You are me and I am you / And the two of us together is me." (Elkunchwar, 310)

Conclusion

Elkunchwar entered the world of theatre after watching a modern play by Vijay Tendulkar, another Marathi playwright. Elkunchwar constantly experimented in his subsequent plays. In the words of the noted Marathi critic, translator and writer, Shanta Gokhale, Elkunchwar has been a consistent experimenter. She points out one of his latest plays, Eka Natacha Mrityu (Death of an Actor), which departs completely from the conventions of the well-made play and plunges into a form that uses surrealistic imagery and masks.

(<https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/DSvBmnojNpW3dWrBiikf2N/Tribute-Silence-half-pauses.html>) The present play presents Elkunchwar's philosophy of live in an innovative way. The play is a theatrical experiment because of the use of masks, silences and pauses, new symbols, expressionism, allegory of life / theatre (theatre-within-theatre or life-within-life), and the ending of a soul meeting its Origin / Cosmos in it.

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