

THE SOUL FALLS APART: AN ANALYSIS OF MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR'S 'APOCALYPSE' OR 'YUGANT'

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Drama in India is not a new phenomenon. Bharata's *Natyashastra* preserves the tradition of Indian drama. Beginning with the Sanskrit plays, drama in India has come of age now. Initially the themes were drawn from the storehouse of mythology but the contemporary writers are comfortable choosing the subject-matter from around them. Aesthetic beauty and pleasure were the criteria for the playwrights of the past; nowadays writers aim at disturbing the audience. Not just the themes changed, also the language and mode of presentation altered. Now more regional writers are busy making a mark on the map of Indian drama – especially with the active trend of 'translation'. Translation allows them a wider readability and is important to understand the nexus of the local and the global, the domestic and the foreign. The style has become experimental and the vocabulary is bold and unabashed.

The present paper attempts to analyse the changing scene of the Indian society – the feeling of alienation, the outsider sensibility, the despair; it is not confined to the West only but is felt by the modern-day Indians too, primarily the middle-class who have achieved much in life but still are frustrated. Elkunchwar's *Apocalypse* talks about the culture of the past that once held us closely but with the advent of modernization and commercialization, the humane feelings are being commodified. In the mad pursuit of achieving transitory pleasures, man has stepped over the eternal solace and is lost in the darkness of unanswered questions, becoming a nowhere man. The mad dance of death devours all human beings and hopes, soul is dead, things falling apart, and centre cannot hold mere anarchy is loosened. People are divided in hurry with sick aims; the waste land has no 'shanti'.

Mahesh Elkunchwar's Vada Trilogy has been his most discussed work. *Apocalypse* is the third part of this trilogy each part is inter connected, so for the complete understanding of this play it is imperative to know the background of the former two plays. The first part *Vada Chirebandi* (old stone mansion) was written in 1982. It was the First Elkunchwar play to be set in specific location, a village called Dharagaon in the Vidharba district of Maharashtra to which Mahesh Elkunchwar himself belongs. The location is an integral to the theme of the play and determines its social cultural references, its language and customs. In short this was Elkunchwar's first full length play. The family tree is very significant to understand the third part. There was a wealthy family in first part now fallen in a poor state in the third part; the family tree is like this:

DADI (DEAD)
VENKATESH (DEAD) Married to AI (Widow)
PATRIARCH (TATYAJI) have four children

1-BHASKAR/ VAHINI 2-SUDHIR/ ANJALI 3-PRABHA 4-CHANDU
1- PARAG/ NANDINI 2- RANJU 1-ABHAY/CYNTHIA
1-BAL (son)

Part 1 and 2 opened at night 10:30 Pm, Part 3 opens at Day time (sun is blazing)

The play begins with Abhay's visit to his ancestor's place and ends as he leaves. 'Apocalypse' means 'end of an age,' the end of an age is symbolically shown in the play. This village (Dharagaon) is taken as the end of the world. Village has become the microcosm of the whole world. The heat of sun, lack of water, animals, and all people left the village. At this time of destruction of the village Abhay, son of Sudhir and Anjali comes to his village from Sweden. He comes in search of his roots, his lost identity his alienation led him to come in this village which already lost its identity.

The aim of my paper is to show the symbolic aspect of this play. Blazing sun, vultures, corpses, Maina, Chandu all are symbolic figures. 'Draught' in the village itself signifies the circumstances. Abhay, the pessimistic, asks Nandini (Wife of Parag), "how do you manage to live here?"(259) This is what led to the different questions about this play .Why there is a draught in the village, why Parag and Nandini are not leaving the village, even with a small child (Bal) who is running a fever. Chandu (uncle of Parag) questions "if there is no water how you wash your sins away?"(263)

There are many questions raised by the characters themselves. But there is no one to answer them. This is APOCALYPSE everything is breaking, dying, collapsing. Parag tells Abhay how villagers left one by one, leaving their homes.

Abhay who is an 'outsider' becomes shocked after witnessing the 'destruction' in twenty four hours but leaves with a smile. It did not rain since eight years. No rains as if God is angry with the villagers, and not sending the divine rain. People are sinning but because of the lack of the water they cannot wash their sins away. There is no river, birds, trees all gone only desert, vulture and corpses. This barrenness is symbolic of the barrenness in the lives of the people, in the life of Abhay and Chandu. This desert and lack of rain (water) reminds the reader of "The Waste Land" (1922) by T.S. Eliot its section fifth 'What the thunder said', where people were getting thirsty, no water was available to quench their thirst, it was a desert area, they were getting hallucinations of water but that was a kind of mirage. Similarly Chandu gets the hallucinations of rain as he asks "Is it raining?"(273).

The atmosphere of the play is 'morbid' Abhay's visit is very significant. Abhay, a doctor searching his roots, repenting, trying to stop the time, suffering from rootlessness, nothingness, faithlessness, aimlessness, rejects his destiny. All this leads him to Coldness in relationship with everyone even with his beloved wife. Death has robbed his mind and body; he fails to come out from the fear of death. He loses his grip in every relationship even with his wife. He does not find peace even in his parent's village; he is running for life everywhere but found death everywhere, which is the ultimate reality. As he says, "life is a punishment. Yet I don't want to die."(268)

First he runs US from his parents house (Bombay) in search of new identity but runs from there to Sweden to 'live' his life in Sweden, but one day witnesses a dead body in coffin and death creeps into his mind, it surrounds his body and loses his grip with his relationship with his wife, but she does not understand his coldness. As he tells Parag, "The Cold is as deadly as this forest fire. It comes blowing off ice-covered plateaus and steals in through the cracks of tightly

closed doors and windows. Then, without your knowing it creeps silently into your bones your mind, your heart, your soul. Every little recess of your being begins to freeze and die.”(267)
The dance of death occupies the life of Abhay. When he runs from everywhere to his parent’s ancestors village to search for his lost identity and yet he finds a deathly village, scattered corpses on his way, deserted roads even he lost his track, roads have vanished under dust. He finds death everywhere and declares death is the ultimate truth life is vain. He feels himself as an ‘outsider’ everywhere and tells Parag that even in his home he feels as an outsider:

Ever since I came here, a strange feeling has got hold of me: I have no home.. I am an outsider everywhere.... This terrifying drought these collapsing walls, the dust, rubble, carcasses, skeletons, and the stench of rotting flesh! How happy your home is in the midst of all this. I envy you. You and Vahini and Bal-you have an impregnable house of your own. Independent. Belonging to just the three of you. No fourth has an entry here, not even if the fourth is me.... There’s a strong protective wall of stone around this home. And I have been walking around and around it since I came, in the abject hope of gaining an entry into it”. (270-271)

Feeling of alienation has robbed his mind. He is fighting for a peaceful ‘home’. He feels himself ‘unhomed’ in his own ‘home’ in Sweden as he describes to Parag, “I remember the morning vividly. I saw a funeral procession pass mutely by.....The ultimate, inevitable journey. The intimation of death rose in me gradually like a rising fever. It made me see perishability of Cynthia’s and my relationship.”(273- 274)

Nihilism and nothingness is shown in Abhay life. He feels nothing lasts forever. He will die one day and would be no more known by the people, he suffers from a kind of identity crisis. Childlessness makes him more fearful and nihilistic that no one will remember him after his death. He lost interest in life and relationship as death creeps into his mind and he says, “Togetherness became a nightmare then death was spreading through my body cell by cell..... Cynthia and I love each other very much. But the new sense of death stretch between us now like a vast frozen wasteland. Our hands have slipped from each others grasp.”(274)

The fear of death, despair and damnation made him lost control over his life. He destroys his living by fearing death which comes later. He blames destiny for this fate. He questions why Parag and Nandini are living in this dance of death with a small child. He says, “I am willing to accept punishment by extinction, but I must know the reason. This body will parish one day. Turn to ashes but what about the desires, hopes, passions that lived in it- where will they go?”(275)

But after raising these questions he gets peaceful answers from Nandini and Parag and witnesses Chandu’s death and returns the next morning with a hope and smile even witnessing a death some hours ago.

The hypocrite society is being satirized by the playwright. The villagers blame a woman (Maina) for the calamity of draught upon them. Because she sleeps with men and has illicit relationship with Parag as well, that is why God has sent Draught. Again a woman is targeted for the calamity in this hypocrite male dominated society. The irony is that, these hypocrite males themselves went to sleep with her by giving money to her and now when the draught has come and everyone is dying they blame the poor woman. Then they chased her out from the village, ostracized her from their society. The excommunication of Maina is universal phenomenon. Maina reminds the

reader of Chandri the woman in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* by U.R. Anantha Murthy translated from Kannada by AK Ramanujan, in which he has satirized the hypocrite Brahmin society. When plague (an epidemic) spreads in the agrahara Durvasapura, they blame Chandri, the wife of Naranappa (who is dead as the novel begins). The hypocrite society never leaves a woman to blame for their own sins. They themselves were responsible for the calamity sent by the God. As in 'Apocalypse' Parag positively says, "Those who sin in secret are the most eager to punish those who sin openly." (272) there is also the hypocrisy of saints is shown by dramatist, Parag tells to Abhya, "I emptied out the old cupboard the other day to sell it. There was a large bundle of horoscopes. You know what Chandukaka's horoscope says? His hands will always be filled with diamonds and rubies."(267)(He ended his life sitting in the line of beggars) This is destiny. There is no control of anyone upon his/her destiny. The optimism of Parag and Nandini makes them happy even between the 'mad dance of death.' They have accepted death as a natural phenomenon of universe. It will come whenever their destiny will allow it, why to grieve over it in present. The Moral allegory is shown in their dialogues. They accept everything even death with smile. They welcome the death. They are not running from it. No one can run out from death so one should welcome it whenever it comes. Earth will move round the sun, body will perish new born babies will grow and die this is the circle of life and death. One should accept the natural phenomenon. One should be courageous enough to live his/her life without fearing for death, this is what makes Abhay smile at last. He smiles as he leaves and thinks of his wife waiting for him on the other end.

The play has many folds in it, arrival of Abhay, his questions, his nihilism, his fear of death, then his questions answered by Parag and Nandini, Chandus's death before his eyes, Maina's excommunication, the condition of village, morbid atmosphere all over the village. Desert, blazing sun, inferno, vulture, corpses all makes him understand the supernatural power. He becomes aware of the God's existence. He understands that coldness and warmth does not matter if one has faith in God and acceptance of death. The play has an open ending; reader is left to conclude the situation. Mahesh Elkunchwar must have a fourth part in his mind.

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