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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## SOCIO- CULTURAL DISCOURSE IN URBAN SPACE MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR'S *OLD STONE MANSION*

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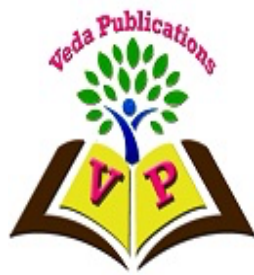
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### ABSTRACT



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This paper analyses the socio-cultural aspects of Mahesh Elkunchwar's Old Stone Mansion (Wada Chirebandi) by investigating the conflicts between traditional familial values and contemporary urbanisation. The research investigates the demolition of the Deshpande family's ancestral wada, symbolising the disintegration of feudal systems, cultural identity, and intergenerational connections in contemporary Indian culture. The examination of the paper's content reveals themes of materialism, alienation, moral irresponsibility, neglect of the aged, and the conflict between country traditions and urban aspirations. The contrasting perspectives of Bhaskar and Sudhir exemplify the ideological conflict between the preservation of cultural heritage and the embrace of modern lifestyles. The research asserts that Elkunchwar depicts urbanisation as a social upheaval that includes both physical movement and the reconfiguration of human relationships, values, and identities. The drama serves as a robust critique of the cultural ramifications of modernity and underscores the necessity of preserving ethical and familial connections amidst rapid social change.

**Keywords :** *Urbanisation, Cultural Identity, Modernity, Family Disintegration.*

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Urbanization is a crucial discourse in literature mainly while it proliferates, enumerating its various significance and eminence in the world. People move from rural to urban place searching for better opportunities; many villagers leave their cultivation to procure jobs and casual work in the multinationals and factories in cosmopolitan cities. Most of the major cities are a hub of education, for attaining good and quality education. The mammoth complexity is that persons come to a city for a particular purpose to earn a sustainable livelihood, but they never intend to return home. They sink into the beauty and pomp which lure them forever. Losing morality and adopting habits for the sake of transient bliss which divests them of their inherent tranquility. One is losing oneself in the urban, walking in the crowd, no recognition and sharing. But the foundation of a family, a society, and a country is essential for everyone because they cannot separate themselves from their own culture although they adopt other culture for fashion and modernisation. Quoting some relevant lines,

"Traditions represent a critical piece of our culture. They help to form the structure and the foundation of our families and our society. They remind us that we are part of history that defines our past, shapes who we are today who we are likely to become. Once we ignore the meaning of traditions, we are in danger of damaging the underpinning of our identity"(Sonnenberg 1).

Further more, the study focuses on the evolving problems and circumstances in high-tech cities. Literature assists formation of different aspects and angles of urbanization.

Mahesh Elkunchwar (1939-) is one of the outstanding playwrights in Marathi theater, making significant contributions to its growth and success. He was born in Parwa village of Maharashtra. He contributed significantly to the progress of Marathi Theatre and played a crucial role in enhancing Marathi's status worldwide. He wrote some of the most thoughtful plays, which remain very successful today. He has written more than 20 plays, in addition to his theoretical writings, and his work in India's Parallel Cinema, both as an actor and screenwriter. Most of his plays have been translated into several languages, including Hindi, English, German, and French. His latest book, *The Necropolis Trilogy*, is a collection of musings on his childhood and youth. He is a contemporary dramatist delineating most of the critical issues of the postmodern era. He is very keen to expound the significance of regional Marathi language. He has expressed various notions and themes. He has received numerous honors, including the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (1989), the highest honor in the performing arts in India, as well as many other prestigious awards. He is one of the most influential and progressive playwrights not only in modern Marathi theatre, but also in modern Indian Theatre.

Mahesh Elkunchwar's play addresses serious aspects of human condition that are often overlooked in a theatre preoccupied with psychology and sociology, particularly in feudal/ patriarchal societies, as seen in his play *Old Stone Mansion*. The play *Old Stone Mansion* (1985) was translated by Shanta Gokhale from Marathi play *Wada Chirebandi*, penned by Mahesh Elkunchwar. The play expresses the old cultural values of the 'Wada' community, a



village in Vibhadra, Maharashtra. It analyzes the decaying feudal structure of a region through a group of houses in Maharashtra. The play focuses on the issues of family crisis and the conflict between commercial culture and traditional culture. Elkunchwar himself says about the play that "Wada is not simple a family drama; it is more than that, a document of social change" (qtd. in Kanna 149). So, when Elkunchwar began to write *Old Stone Mansion*, he captures a close look at one of those families who are struggling with their surroundings, elevated by Bhaskar and his family. On the other hand, Sudhir and his family failed to adopt their cultural values and tradition. The play also captures vividly the decline of "the 'Wada' culture in Maharashtra, unable to stand the test of time and the social change in the world beyond" (Sanap 155).

The play begins on the fifth day after the death of Tatyaji, the family's head. Being a Brahmin family, Bhaskar, the eldest son in the family, wants to conduct the traditional rituals of death, but Deshpande's family has suffered in difficult times. He is a farmer who has been cultivating the family land and caring for the household and the family. Bhaskar expects that his younger brother, Sudhir, will bear the whole expense, because he lives in a big city and maintains their financially well-off status. And he had helped his brother, Sudhir, to finish his education whenever Sudhir needed money. However, Sudhir claims that he also suffers greatly in his life. He has a sense of the Deshpande family very well, but he does not properly care for Aai and Dadi, as he is the responsible person for looking after them. He is representative of traditional values and culture.

Sudhir is the younger brother of Bhaskar. He is an educated person. He lives in Mumbai with his wife, Anjali, and son, Abhay. He works as a professional person and earns a handsome salary. He was late reaching the family house, although he had received the telegram from Bhaskar. He was late because he tried to book a confirmed ticket. It symbolises that his father's demise has no significance in his life. He is postulated in the play as rebellious against traditional values and culture. He is a very materialistic person because he is willing to pay in cash or sell his small share of land to contribute to the rite. Even Sudhir has not come to the village house for mourning or to offer the last rites, but to claim his share of the property. He is a rich person, but he does not contribute any assistance to his brothers and sisters.

Anjali and Vahini are the daughters-in-law of the family. They have exposed a materialistic attitude by tempting their husbands for money and land. Vahini is Bhaskar's wife, trying to accumulate as much money and things as she can. She is trying to be the chief woman in the house to control everything. She never takes care of Aai and Dadi. Even she despises and chides them because they are helpless.

On the other hand, Anjali dislikes village culture and customs, but she is eager to obtain her husband Sudhir's share of the land and the ornaments. She also dislikes taking care of Aai and Dadi. They both need their help, but these women are not looking after them. They are both fascinating in their own share, but they do not mind neglecting their moral duties. Anjali wishes to sell their share of land and settle in Mumbai permanently. Both Anjali and Sudhir are materialistic. This shows the fading



traditionalism and old values rooted in Deshpande's family for years.

Whereas, Bhasker's daughter Ranju has eloped with her lover, and she was found after two days, which has given new trends in the present family and broken the taboo. Their old house was sold and torn down due to family division. It symbolises the loss of old values and culture. In false modernity, they ignore their traditional and cultural duties, which are obligatory for them.

Respecting elders and caring for them is often overlooked by the new generation today. They are always engrossed in their schedule, but they do not bother about their older needs and wishes. Admittedly, their elder and aged members are child-like. As Dadi's overall demeanor is portrayed, Dadi is the oldest person in the Deshpande family. She is a very feeble old lady. She cannot speak loudly; she always asks for time because she is pretty sensitive and often feels overwhelmed by it. When her granddaughter comes to her room, neither of them responds to her, and she is neglected. She usually asks, "Is there nobody around bappa?... Have you abandoned this poor blind woman? (Chandu goes to Dadi. Touches her.) Are you there, son?" (134). She means that she is left alone. She is blind now; she cannot see who arrives and departs, so she frequently asks and calls family members for anything. Chandi often tries to look after her more than other members.

In false modernity, everyone ignores their traditional and cultural duty, which is obligatory for them. Once, it was part of the duty and obligation for family members to care for older people and the aged. Still, this loving care and affection have

gradually vanished because they believe they are all right, given their modern outlook. The realistic depiction of the Deshpande family is appreciated for understanding the decay of old values, traditions, and culture. The several linking devices used by Mahesh Elkunchwar are the disintegration of relationships within the Deshpande family. In the first part of the play, we can see the scattered family comes together for the funeral of their father, Venkatesh. However, they end up fighting over who should get how much of the family's share from the 'Wada' that has been left behind by the deceased. No member is ready to spend on the post-funeral rites. We can see the old Wada crumbling. The collapse of Wada would disrupt an entire network of relationships and a community's culture of living together. Readers can immediately relate to fights that occur in many families, where everyone wants to avoid responsibility and claim their share of the wealth. One must be able to relate to the disparities of a family deeply rooted in a region. Such discrepancies carry meaning for the readers, which is beyond the Wada cultural traditions.

To conclude, the research highlights the loss of faith, identity, complexity, Machiavellian gain, materialism, corruption, broken relationships, loneliness, and the erosion of traditional and cultural values. Ultimately, the constructed characters seek livelihood in suppressed circumstances, which result in them becoming purposeless, hopeless, and alienated from others in the urban jungle. The contradiction between traditionalism and modernism; the decay of cultural and traditional values; and the placement of modernization in Indian



civilization are prominent, as seen in Bhaskar and Sudhir's portrayal in *Old Stone Mansion*.

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