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## REFLECTION OF DEGENERATING FEUDAL ORDER OF RURAL MAHARASHTRA IN MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR'S *THE OLD STONE MANSION*

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he *Old Stone Mansion* is a classic Marathi play written by Mahesh Elkunchwar. The play depicts the degenerating feudal order of rural Maharashtra. It effectively presents the fall of a Maharashtrian family. The economic and social authority of Brahmins was declining after independence. The play effectively presents the things falling apart in Deshpande family due to friction resulted by socio-economic forces of changing time.

**KEY WORDS:** *The Old Stone Mansion*, classic Marathi play, economic and social authority.



### INTRODUCTION

The play opens with the seemingly tragic atmosphere in the Deshpande family. The play begins on the fifth day after the death of Tatyaji, the patriarch of the family. The setting of the play is an old village known as Dharangaon. The widow of Tatyaji, Aai (meaning 'mother' in English), is waiting for the arrival of her second son Sudhir and his wife Anjali from Mumbai. They are coming to attend the 13th day rites of the death of Tatyaji.

Deshpande family is a traditional Brahmin family. Therefore, Bhaskar intends to conduct the rituals in full traditional manner though he knows family faces financial crisis. But he expects Sudhir to bear the expenses as he think of him as a rich man from Mumbai. But Sudhir claims that he is somehow managing to run his family in his two room apartment in Mumbai. This is the first blow to the already crumbling traditional Brahmin family. At the same time Ranju and Parag, the fourth generation of the family thinks of running away from their Wada as they feel stifled in a time stuck place.

The personal conflict between two brothers becomes social conflict as the play progresses. At this moment of time, Elkunchwar, gradually changes the focus of personal conflict to the social. Here, Elkunchwar discusses the larger issues of maintaining financial and social position for Brahmin families in villages in contemporary India. Most of the Brahmin families have left villages and they also have lost their hold in society after independence. At this particular situation Elkunchwar reveals vanities of Indian traditions through the ritualistic practices and the arrangements made by Bhaskar and his family after the death of their father.

Financially, Wada household is completely imbalanced. However, they wish to maintain their status. The egos of the male members of the Wada household and their extreme money mindedness leads to degeneration and finally things fall apart for the Deshpande family and they have to accept them.

The 'Wada' culture of the Brahmin family is unable to stand the test of time and the social change in the world beyond. It holds together only because of its joint family culture and hierarchic patriarchy. Old

Mansion/wada deals with the slow decline in the fortunes of a traditional Brahmin family and how it comes to terms with the demands of modernity. In this way the transformation of the village is historicized in the play.

On the surface the decline of feudalism and joint family culture is the subject of the play, close analysis throws light on the inner darkness of human souls. This can be seen in reference to the characters of the play. All, Bhaskar, Sudhir, Chandu, Prabha, Vahini and Anjali quarrel with one another. They are angry, disheartened but, don't have the courage to break the blood-ties. The characters in the play find their actions totally meaningless and accept their inability and helplessness. For example, the character of Prabha is willing to get out of the Mansion. She says-

**Prabha:** Let me get out of here, Aai. Please. This Mansion will devour me. I feel suffocated in the darkness of this place. Let me go to Amravati, Aai, please. (p. 45)

Whatever they do for their survival is done by the back door. For example, when Sudhir asks Bhaskar about selling utensils Bhaskar replies-

**Bhaskar:** Do you think we were happy to sell the utensils? All of them carried the names of our grand- and great-grand parents but the times were such. Sudhir: But you should have informed me..... Bhaskar: I did not buy an estate out of the sale, I can tell you. Arrey, if we want to sell pots and pans, can we go to the bazaar openly like other people? It had to be done very secretly, without a whisper, by the back door. The pretence of our prestige had to be kept intact. (p. 29)

Thus, Old Stone Mansion /Wada Chirebandi depicts the decline and fall of a Deshpande family which symbolizes a lot many families who denied to change with the time in post-independent India. The play records the invasion of urban values and corrupt business practices into this feudal culture, destroying everything that resists change.

Throughout the play Deshpande family is shown as confronting various events. Social pressure is building around the family. Though labourers have stopped working in the farms of the Brahmin family its members are not willing to work in their own farms. The land reform acts by the government helped the peasants. But it did not help landlords. They declined in their financial position and social status. Similarly, the people in villages, particularly the non-Brahmins have started different kinds of shops in the village, irrespective of the nature of business. The family of Deshpande fails to cope with the demands of changing times which ultimately results in the catastrophic degeneration of the family.

To conclude, the old mansion or wada represents the conventional fabric of the society which is shattered by the present time of current democratic society where the relationships between the owner and the servant and caste hierarchy is challenged along with conventional respect for Brahmins. The political, economic and social freedom offered to masses after independence fundamentally changed their sensibilities and made them aware of their existence which in the end resulted into better farming methods and starting new business like grocery, liquor and other shops disapproving the conventional Brahminical morality. On the contrary, the Brahmins could not fiddle with themselves with this new social order and hence they are thrown in to plight and troubles

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