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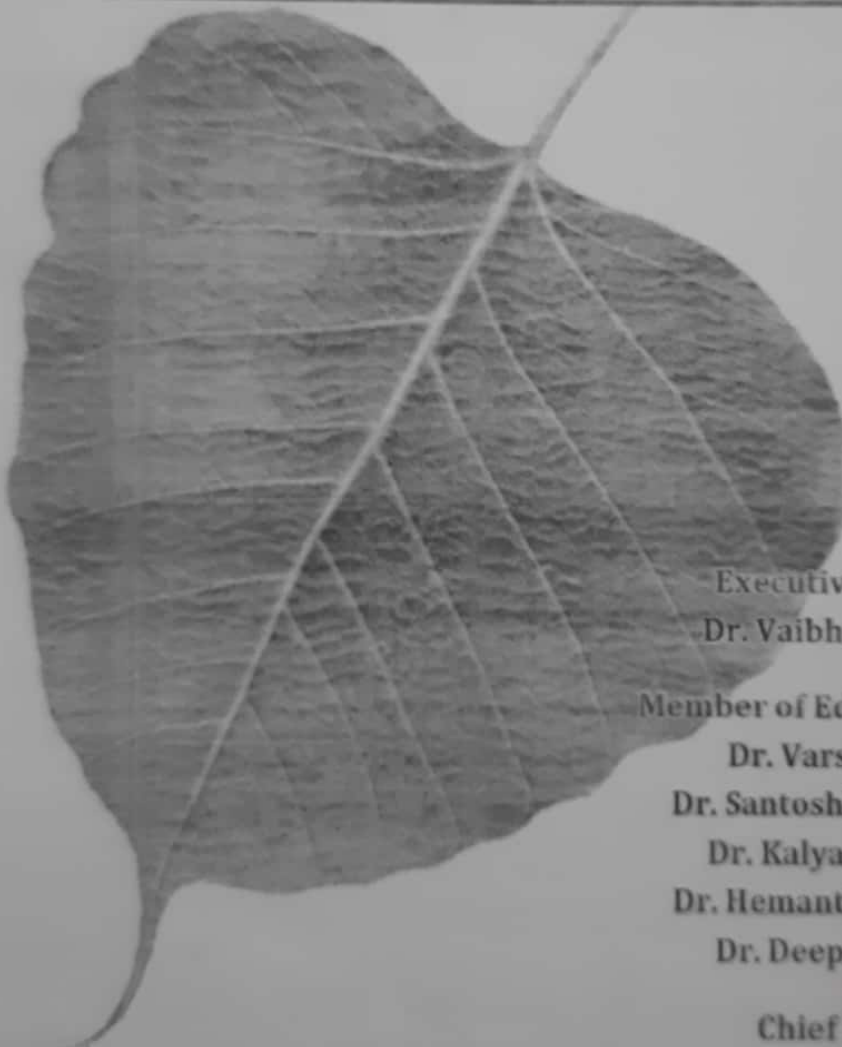
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Special Issue 275

HUMAN VALUES & LITERATURE



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Dr. Vaibhav Sabnis

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- Chief & Executive Editor





Degeneration of Values in Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Old Stone Mansion*

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Abstract:

Values are at the central of all human behaviour. Literature helps to appreciate diverse cultures and certain emotions like affection, rage, jealousy, greediness etc. are general. Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Old Stone Mansion*, raises certain questions and discusses various issues prevalent in the Indian society. It is an encounter between old feudalism and capitalism in post-colonial period. *Old Stone Mansion* focuses the universal issue of the fall of ages long 'Wada' culture. The dramatist with fall of mansion also reflects the inner darkness in the souls of the characters. Decline and fall of mansion in the hands of time is natural, but the fall of human values is the destiny of these characters.

Keywords: values, feudalism, capitalism, post-colonial period,

Values represent our culture. Values are embodied in social activities, relationships and institutions. They are at the central of all human behaviour. Values judge particularly in interrogative of cultural anxiety for the conservation of cultural heritage. Literature is called as the reflection of the society. It helps to appreciate diverse cultures and certain emotions like affection, rage, jealousy, greediness etc. are general. Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Old Stone Mansion*, raises certain questions and discusses various issues prevalent in the Indian society. The play throws light on the end of feudalism in India and changed socio-economic condition of Indian society. Particularly it focuses on rural-urban division, migration and disintegration of Deshpande family. Elkunchwar highlights social and cultural descriptions to comment upon the realities. The play presents *Wada* community to express the culture, traditions of the old crumbling feudal structure of a sector in Maharashtra.

The present paper attempts to investigate the fall of values and sheds light on the changes seen in Indian attitude through the characters of the play. The *Wada* of Deshpande family represents the Indian community. The play is a story of four generations of Deshpande family living in Dharangaon from Vidarbha region which reveals the end of many traditional mansions and generations living throughout the country. Dadi, representative of first generation and Tatyaji and Aai are the representative of second generation. Their children Bhaskar, Sudhir, Chandu and Prabha, their daughters-in-law, Vahini (Bhaskar's wife) and Anjali (Sudhir's wife) belongs to third generation while Parag, Ranju and Abhay are the fourth-generation members in the play. Dadi, Tatyaji and Aai enjoyed the golden days of mansion. Tatyaji witnessed the change in social order in his last days of life.

Colonial rule aware our imagination, independence of thought, political rule etc. The *Old Stone Mansion* is an encounter between old feudalism and capitalism in post-colonial period. The colonial principles 'Liberty' and 'Equality' are suited for the characters. Father and grandfather



of Gaja, the cook, served for the Deshpande family throughout their lives. After doing job for some time, Gaja left the *Wada* and joined a cook's job in the hotel. But he did not return to the *Wada* even after the request. It shows the change in social order in the post-colonial period. Bansilal, the grocer, who came from Marwar with only his water jug. He could settle due to the Deshpande family, but he forgot everything. It reflects the ungrateful behaviour of Bansilal.

After the death of Tatyaji, Bhaskar took charge of the *Wadal* mansion. The mansion not only experienced the loss of glory but the society also lost its age-old values like emotions, feelings, affinity, sympathy, selfless love, sentiments and sacrifice for others. Dr. A. S. Kanna comments,

One of the several linking devices used by Mahesh Elkunchwar is the disintegration of relationships within the Deshpande family, where in the first part of *The Old Stone Mansion*, the scattered family comes together for the funeral of their father Vyanktesh, but ends up fighting over who should get how much share in the family from the 'Wada' that has been left behind by the deceased, while no one is ready to spend money on the post-funeral rites (Kanna 147).

Bhaskar, after the sudden demise of his father, hold the responsibility of the family. He was determined to perform all the rituals with their respective dignity and reputation in the village. In some way, he manages the financial things to retain their family position. But Sudhir thinks it as unnecessary rituals. He also indirectly denies to help him by pretending that he has forgotten to withdraw money from the Bank. A joint family always has the issue of sharing the ancestral property, a cause of family dispute. The greediness of each family member increases after the death of Tatyaji, the head of the family. They blame each other of their irresponsibility. Vahini's remark in the play reveals this fact. She says,

But can't everyone share the cost? Wasn't he everybody's father? Or are we alone responsible for keeping up the Deshpande name? (Elkunchwar 93)

Old Stone Mansion describes the loss of joint families in the age of nuclear families and commercial attitude. Mahesh Elkunchwar expresses indirectly the glitches of this culture. Prabha, daughter of Tatyaji, is the victim of patriarchy. Even first class in 10th std. she couldn't get further education. Instead, her brother Sudhir pursue further study. The traditional *Wada*/mansion represents the symbol of aristocracy in the rural area. The people living in the mansion ruled the people around. But in the modern period due to newly arrived democratic values, people started living as per their will. Prabha never talked with her father, Tatyaji because she considers him as an obstacle on her way of education. She is the tragic sufferer of male dominance society. She thinks Vahini and Bhaskar as her internal enemy at home. No one in the family take their own decision. Once Prabha got the chance to continue with her studies but Ranju, Bhaskar's daughter steals all jewelry of the family and elopes with her English tutor. Prabha's aspirations for the study shattered forever. Chandu, the younger son of Tatyaji, is another tragic figure in the play. He is feeble, sensitive, helpless and loving. But he is not strong enough to say 'no' to any injustice. He is a mute sufferer in the play. It reflects the family member's inability to respect and understand the rights of others.

The fourth and last generation of the family destroyed totally. Parag, son of Bhaskar, fall a prey to bad habits. Son of Sudhir, Abhay, declares, he will not allow Parag to enter their family. The way he responds to his father reveals the degeneration of values in the family. Selfishness is one of the main reasons behind crumbling the *Wada* system in India. The members



of Deshpande family are not exception for it. After the death of Tatyaji, Bhaskar could not control himself for taking charge of everything immediately. He takes charge of family gold and plans to exploit it all. In act II, he plans to hide the box with the help of Vahini. Vahini too becomes the victim of selfishness and could not resist herself for doing this act. Prabha, 35 year old unmarried daughter convinces her Aai for the education on the basis of her share in the same gold. On the other hand, Sudhir and Anjali living in Mumbai, are planning to ask for their share in the family gold. Anjali says that it is very difficult to visit the *Wada* often and their son, Abhay had no fondness for this place and family members. Everyone is busy with planning their self. When all of them were busy discussing the share in the family gold, Ranju eloped with her English tutor by stealing the family gold. All of them repent for their selfish behaviour. Aai's remark is noteworthy at this time.

Aai: Let the gold go. It's nuisance any way. As long as the girl is found, God help us. Let not the Deshpande honour be further torn on.... (Elkunchwar 51)

Here, one can observe, all the characters are caught in the material reality. The effects of modernization and urbanization are experienced by Deshpande family. City is an attraction for the cook who prefers to work in city for better financial opportunities. Sudhir who is living in Mumbai has always financial problems because of sophisticated lifestyle. So, the family members living in village misunderstand Sudhir as he is extravagant in nature. Conflict arises when Prabha wishes to sell her share of ancestral gold for her education. The gold which has been preserved from generation to generation. Somnath Barure remarks,

So, if Elkunchwar says, I had seen Mansions crumbling down, people getting buried under and still not wanting to come out of the shambles'- is true (Barure 73).

Sudhir wishes to sell the part of the mansion in which Bansilal will start his shop but Bhaskar rejects for honour. In a play, one such an instance occurs when Sudhir asks Bhaskar about selling utensils of brass and copper, Bhaskar replies,

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..... It had to be done very secretly, without a whisper, by the back door. The pretence of our prestige had to be kept intact (Elkunchwar 29).

Tradition is the soul of these characters. They bowed down due to the weight of grand past. The characters are struggling and trying to accept things with all good and evil. But when Ranju eloped with her English tutor, all these characters try to resolve the matter. Sudhir plays important role for saving the reputation of the mansion. All the family members forget their misunderstandings and stood for the calamity they encounter. Therefore, the play shows to be the calamity of innocent, holy and destitute souls at the hands of the destiny. The dramatist here reveals the loss of values and the fall of mansion. In the ancient era, the mansion had seen its glory due to the values among the family members. But time has changed everything. No one can stop the fall. Decline and fall of mansion in the hands of time is natural, but the fall of human values is the destiny of these characters.

Thus, *Old Stone Mansion* focuses the universal issue of the fall of ages long *Wada* culture. The dramatist with fall of mansion also reflects the inner darkness in the souls of the characters. Selfish behaviour of the family members contributed in the fall of the mansion. But in some extent, their tragedy seems to be at the hands of their destiny. They are caught among tradition and modernity. Whatever the causes, the loss of emotions, sentiments and feeling like



love, sacrifice are not seen in the characters. The fourth-generation characters are different. Fall of the mansion marks the fall of traditional values. Members in the family make a choice of the nuclear family. They have no ties and liking for their family. Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Old Stone Mansion*, throws light on the moral and social values that are important to sustain present modern society. The degeneration of values leads to loss of moral integrity, traditional customs and heritage.

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