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Sahitya Akademi

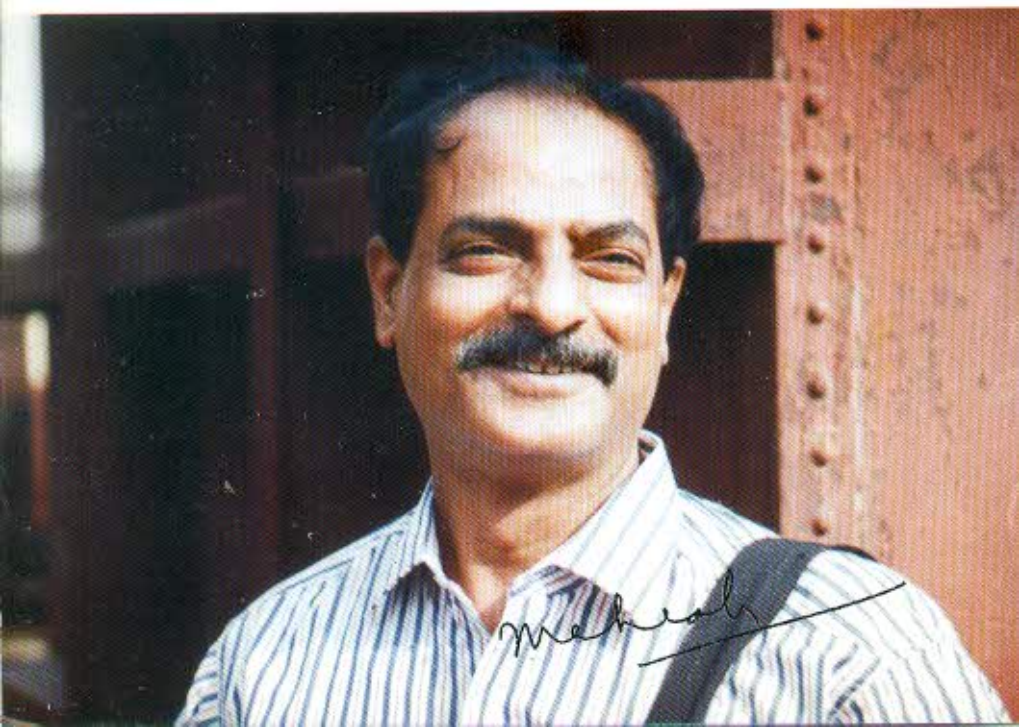


India International Centre

invite you to

meet the author

Mahesh Elkunchwar



I may have felt close to certain ideologies at various stages in my life, but I have always been convinced that there is no ideology bigger or greater than life itself. I'm using theatre as a weapon, if it is a means of self-expression for me, my writing will concern itself with life as I see and experience it and not with doctrine. It is the human condition that directs the social condition and not vice-versa. Art can never forget this nor should it

Mahesh Elkunchwar



1995

Mahesh Elkunchwar, one of the leading playwrights in the country today spent his early childhood in Parwa, a tiny village in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. After his schooling in various towns, he came to Nagpur for his college studies in 1957. He did his M.A. in English Literature and then M.A. in Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology from the University of Nagpur. He started his career as a college teacher and became Head of the Department of English in a degree college and also taught English at the postgraduate level at Nagpur University. Then on invitation, he joined the FTII, Pune as Professor of Screen-play Writing and retired from there in 2000.

Elkunchwar started his literary career in 1970 with the publication of his first one-act play *Sultan* in *Satyakatha*, the most prestigious literary

magazine in Marathi of that time. Smt. Vijaya Mehta, a legendary figure even in the late 60s expressed her desire to produce the play. He steadily published a few one-act plays and Vijaya Mehta produced all of them for her group 'Rangayan'. Reading and witnessing his plays, people realised that there was a much awaited new voice in theatre and in literature — young, passionate and modern, different from his predecessors. Elkunchwar says that he became a playwright more by accident than design. "Had that play been carried by some other magazine it's possible my plays would not have been produced at all. So this happy accident made a playwright out of me."

Holi, his next play, is on the students' unrest. The play was later made into a film in 1984, and is still staged in almost all the towns of the country, in all the regional languages. It has been a perennial favourite of the young for almost 33 years. Later on, his plays like *Garbo* and *Vasanakand* directed by people like Dr. Shreeram Lagoo and Amol Palekar who are Elkunchwar's contemporaries, created controversy because of their daring subject matter and unusual approach. But it was with his play *Wada Chirebandi* that he really arrived at the national scene in 1985. This play which later on grew to become the most famous trilogy in Indian Theatre *Yuganta*, has been staged in all major Indian languages by all major directors and is considered a modern classic of the Indian Theatre.

Yuganta is perhaps the only trilogy ever written for Indian Theatre. When it was produced in 1994, it did have its detractors but none could deny it its sweep and power. Deceptively simple, the text of the play runs on multiple levels. It is an amazingly told story of four generations of Dharangaonkar Deshpandes, a feudal family living in a remote village of Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, once rich and influential, but now crumbled. But it is not a simple story of the individuals in the family and their traumas and joys. These individuals while living their lives unself-consciously, begin to represent the Indian reality of the last fifty years. The changing social and economic conditions, the caste hierarchy, the invasion of the city on the village, the old feudal order being crushed under the new commercial order, the greed for new money, the changing ethical norms, the gradually and subtly changing attitude of women in the social and familial context there is a variety of strands; some noticeable, some not so noticeable, that are dexterously interwoven in the tapestry of this magnificent play. It is a futuristic play in more senses than one. The picture he draws is grim and frightening. He clearly sees us creating wilderness around us. An environmental as well as a moral, spiritual, social, cultural, ethical desert. But the play is not pessimistic and ends on a positive note. The protagonist who owns up his own share into the making of this desert, decides to face it. It is a very Indian play in the sense that it, with objectivity and yet with deep compassion, reveals all the positive and negative aspects of the Indian psyche.

Elkunchwar has never been a prolific playwright but he has

written consistently and steadily and almost every play of his can be termed a landmark play. *Wada Chirebandi* was followed by *Atmakatha* and *Pratibimba*. His latest plays are *Wasanisi Jeernani*, *Dharmaputra* and *Sonata*. Almost all the stalwarts of the Indian Theatre right from Ebrahim Alkazi, Vijaya Mehta, Satyadev Dubey and Amol Palekar to Dr. Shreeram Lagoo have directed his plays.

Elkunchwar has acted in *Aakrosh*, a Hindi film directed by Govind Nihalini and *Vastupursh*, a Marathi film. He has also written screen play for *Party* and *Holi*. While sharing his experiences as an actor, Elkunchwar says that the creative processes of a playwright and an actor are quite similar as far as exploration of the character is concerned and the playwrights are by instinct, good actors.

His plays have been widely translated into several Indian languages and *Yuganta* was translated into German. Twenty-one of his plays have been produced in Marathi, six in Hindi, four in Bengali and three in English.

Elkunchwar has been honoured with several awards and honours for his works which include the Sangeet Natak Akademi award, the Sahitya Akademi award, Saraswati Samman, Homi Bhabha Fellowship and Maharashtra Gaurav.

Known and respected for his innovative spirit, his deep understanding of the human mind, his profound compassion and an undercurrent of spirituality that runs in most of his work, Mahesh Elkunchwar is a unique and towering figure not only in Marathi literature and theatre but in Indian literature and theatre as a whole. □

A Select Bibliography

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In Marathi

- Sultan*. Mumbai: Mauj Prakashan, 1970
- Garbo*. Pune: Neelakantha Prakashan, 1973
- Rudrarvarsha*. Nagpur: Ameya Prakashan, 1974
- Vasanakand*. Mumbai: Mouj Prakashan, 1975
- Yatanaghar*. Bombay: Mouj Parkashan, 1977
- Party*. Mumbai: Mouj Parkashan, 1981
- Wada Chirebandi*. Mumbai: Mouj Parkashan, 1987
- Atmakatha and Pratibimba*. Mumbai: Mouj Parkashan, 1989
- Vasansi Jeernani*. Mumbai: Mouj (Diwali Issue), 1996
- Dharmaputra*. Mumbai: Mouj (Diwali Issue), 1997
- Yuganta*. (Trilogy: Part I: Wada Chirebandi; Part II: Magna Talyakathi; Part III: Sonata) Mumbai, Mouj Prakashan, 1997

In Hindi Translation

- Araktakashan, Holi, Aur Sultan*. New Delhi: Shri Vidya Prakashan, 1985
- Viraasat*. New Delhi: Shri Vidya Parkas 1987
- Atmakatha Aur Pratibimba*. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1994

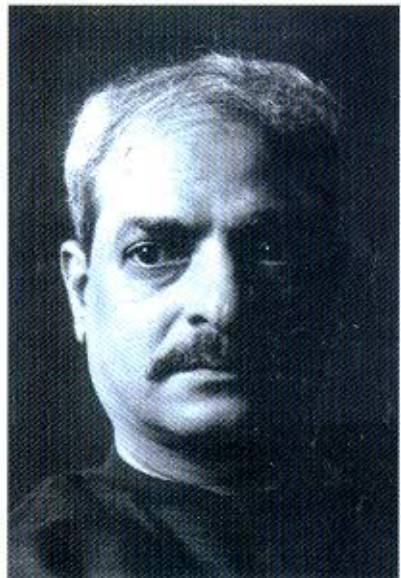
In English Translation

- Garbo*. New Delhi: Enact 1974
- Vasanakanda*. New Delhi: Enact, 1979
- Old Stone Mansion*. Kolkata: Sea Gull, 1989
- Party*. Kolkata: Sea Gull, 1989
- Flower of Blood and Reflection*. Kolkata: Sea Gull, 1989
- Autobiography, Sonata*. Kolkata: Sea Gull, 1989

Plays Produced

In Marathi

- Rudrarvarsha*. Nagpur: Ranjan Kala Mandir, 1968 (Dir. Prabhakar Puranik)
- Sultan*. Mumbai: Rangayan, 1970 (Dir. Vijaya Mehta)



Holi. Mumbai: Rangayan, 1970
(Dir. Vijaya Mehta)

Eka Mhataryacha, Khoon.
Mumbai: Rangayan, 1971
(Dir. Vijaya Mehta)

Yatanaghar. Mumbai:
Rangayan, 1971 (Dir. Vijaya
Mehta)

Kaifiyat. Mumbai: Rangayan,
1971 (Dir. Ashok Sathe)

Garbo. Mumbai: Roopvedh,
1973 (Dir. Shriram Lagoo)

Vasanakand. Mumbai: Aniket,
1974 (Dir. Amol Palekar)

Kshitijaparyanta Samudra.
Mumbai: Unmesh, 1974
(Dir. Kishor Kadam)

Party. Mumbai: Aniket, 1976
(Dir. Amol Palekar)

Raktapushpa. Mumbai: Theatre
Unit, 1981 (Dir. Satyadeo
Dubey)

Wada Chirebandi. Mumbai:
Kalavaibhav, 1985 (Dir.
Vijaya Mehta)

Pratibimba. Mumbai: Theatre
Unit, 1987 (Dir. Satyadeo
Dubey)

Atmakatha. Mumbai: Roopvedh,
1988 (Dir. Pratima
Kulkarni)

Yuganta (Trilogy). Mumbai:
Awishkar, 1994 (Dir.
Chandrakant Kulkarni)

Kshitijaparyanta Samudra.
Pune: Theatre Academy,
1995 (Dir. Mahesh
Elkunchwar)

Vasani Jirvani. Pune:
Samanwaya, 2000 (Dir.
Sandesh Kulkarni)

Yuganta (Trilogy Part III). Pune:
Samanwaya, 2001 (Dir.
Shashank Shende)

In Hindi

Araktakshan. New Delhi:
Ruchika, 1980 (Dir. Feizal
Alkazi)

Holi. New Delhi: National
School of Drama, 1981 (Dir.
Vijaya Mehta)

Viraasat. New Delhi: National
School of Drama, 1985 (Dir.
Satyadeo Dubey)

Pratibimba. Kolkata: Padatik,
1987

Holi. Kolkata: Rangakarmi, 1989
(Dir. Usha Ganguli)

Viraasat I & II (Trilogy: I, II).
New Delhi: Little Theatre
Group, 1992 (Dir. Ebrahim
Alkazi)

In Bengali

Uttaradhikari (Trilogy: Part I).
Kolkata: Ensemble, 1990
(Dir. Sohag Sen)

Party. Kolkata: Ensemble, 1990
(Dir. Sohag Sen)

Uttarpurush (Trilogy: Part II).
Kolkata: Ensemble, 1990
(Dir. Sohag Sen)

Pratibimba. 1990 (Dir. Jayati
Basu)

In English

Reflection. UK.: Department of
Drama, University of
Birmingham

Reflection. Bangalore: Playpen,
1990

Flower of Blood, Sonata.
Bangalore: Playpen, 1990

Chronology

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|------|---|-------------|--|
| 1939 | Born at Parwa, Maharashtra | 1990 | Maharashtra Gaurav |
| 1963 | M.A. in English Literature | 1991 | <i>Wada Chirebandhi</i> , produced in Garhwali
Visited USA as American Govt. guest |
| 1970 | M.A. in Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology
<i>Sultan</i> , his first play, directed by Vijaya Mehta, staged | 1993 & 1994 | Akhil Bharatiya Natya Parishad Awards |
| 1973 | <i>Garbo</i> published | 1994 | <i>Yuganta</i> staged |
| 1976 | <i>Party</i> , directed by Amol Paleker staged | 1995 | Visited Russia at the invitation of Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow |
| 1978 | Visited UK, GDR, FRG, France, Poland as a Homi Bhabha Fellow | 1997 | <i>Yuganta</i> published
Maharashtra Foundation Award for <i>Yuganta</i> |
| 1980 | Acted in <i>Aakrosh</i> | 1998 | Visited Bangladesh for Theatre Festival
Jeevanvrati Award |
| 1981 | <i>Party</i> published | 1999 | German translation of <i>Yuganta</i> published |
| 1984 | First Screen Play for <i>Party</i>
Screen Play for <i>Holi</i> , directed by Ketan Mehta | 2000 | Sahitya Akadami Award for <i>Yuganta</i> |
| 1987 | <i>Wada Chirebandi</i> published | 2002 | Saraswati Samman for <i>Yuganta</i>
Acted in <i>Vastupurush</i> , directed by Sumitra Bhave |
| 1989 | Sangeet Natak Akademi Award
Nandikar Award | | |

