

**(Dis) locating Theoretical Catachresis in Mahesh Elkunchwar: A
Playwrights Re-creative journey from the Western Pages to the
Practical World**

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Abstract: In the hyper-active post-industrialization era, human existence is consistently governed by the multitudinous, galactical abyss of the philosophical and theoretical paraphernalia which has been invading and interfering since the mid of the nineteenth century. The evolution of theory can be esteemed as a literary transgression or an intellectual interruption cascading from one generation to another and making an effort to enrich every possibilities of the global human race. It has not only nourished a rational environment but also nurtured a highly advanced society where the traditional issues of existence cease to exist. In the present socio-cultural, economic and political scenario theory has implemented the inter-disciplinary and intra-disciplinary machineries to slice through the geographical borders, across the domestic walls into the coffee houses, lecture theatres or the round-table conferences. But, unfortunately its practical implications has failed to both globalize and glocalise. Rather, it is suffocatingly embossed within the linguistic creativity of a highly acclaimed individual or is verbally wasted away in the oral discourses. In fact, people seem to have developed an epidemical inclination towards suffixing 'ism' with any regular words and masquerading it as theory. Despite, intellectual advancements the lack of hypotheticality cannot be ignored. The following paper makes an attempt to investigate, explore and question the value of philosophizing and theorizing in the present era.

Keywords: hyper-active, multitudinous, galactical, paraphernalia, glocalise, hypotheticality.

The mid-nineteenth century is demarcated as the most crucial period in the field of English literature as it nurtured, practiced and evolved a new facet called ‘Theory’ adding another feather to the multi-dimensionality of literary studies. With the passage of time the concept of theory blazed past its bracketed image of a simple literary aspect and emerged as a revolutionary weapon inducting creative seeds of thought and embarking upon a multidisciplinary journey. As a result literature explored, questioned, violated and uplifted the inter-lingual and the intra-lingual boundaries across the world. The terms ‘inter-lingual’ and ‘intra-lingual’ invites analysis. Lingual here doesn’t refer to the verbal mode of communication exclusively, but also to the uncountable, multifarious fields of study which can be easily denoted as different languages of expression. From a singular field of study literature developed as a kaleidoscopic platform allowing the free play of different disciplines. But the advent of western colonialism not only tarnished the literary image but arrested its unhindered possibilities by incorporating two most ominous terms--- ‘Eurocentrism’ and ‘Hegemony’ with a promising predictability of unleashing permanent menace in the disputed path of human advancement. The question---If anti-colonialism/de-colonialism/post-colonialism can ever be attained? seems to be an unresolved one. The slashes between the high profile triumvirates don’t indicate similarity rather it formulates a complete cycle of procedure which has consistently failed to flower and flourish. Considering the universal scenario in general, colonial rule originated and prevailed between the early hours of the sixteenth century to the late nineteenth century punctuated across different continents over separate time periods. In the twenty-first century the process of theorization, from a contemplative intellectual taxation has burgeoned into a fashion excuse. People are obsessed with a mania of blind ‘ism’-ization and bluntly nomenclaturing a spineless thought into a serious theoretical objective. As a research scholar, I have always strived to guard my mind against unreasonable pseudo-intellectual taxation by cautiously filtering it and preserving the genuine theoretical values. I am elated to find sufficient space to applicate my thoughts which not only nourish my research field of interest but at the same time look forward to explore the various premises of questions, challenges and doubts that have been tickling my intellect for a long time.

With the advent of post-structuralism and post-modernism the elements of ‘hegemony’ and ‘western politicizing’ has automatically crept, merged and ostracized the indigenous sensibilities

of the 'Third' and the 'Fourth' world. Whenever, theoretical elements occupy the nucleus of any debates and discussions then individuals automatically resort to the philosophers who unchallenged, occupy the very roots of conceptual evolution. Colonialism has untied itself from its political and industrial boundations dissipating into the daily chores of individual existence. Often colonialism is denounced and criticized as a machinated move towards enslavement and bloodshed. But coercion and psychological manipulation has been amalgamated to champion colonialism in different parts of the world. Most probably, this was the reason why people in India specially the Brahmos, landlords and the flourishing businessmen proudly welcomed the westernization of Indian culture and traditions. An almost familiar voice gets echoed through post-colonial thinkers like V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Steve Biko or Ngugi wa Thiong'o who strongly believes that post-colonialism or de-colonialism is a strategy but never a solution. In the present scenario, all these occidental strategies create a serious suspicion on the practical impact of all these theories. As an individual my mind is continuously disturbed by the question--- Isn't the process of de-colonialism a masquerading step towards neo-colonization? Can the human race ever be free from hegemony? The perennial experience upholds a pessimistic image. The recent social upsurges in Ferguson on August 9, 2014, the Boko Haram intrusions in Nigeria, the recent Taliban attacks claiming 132 lives in Peshawar or the mass conversion camps propounded by Vishwa Hindu Parishad across India. Aren't these incidents upholding the different faces of neo-colonialism or multi-faceted hegemony? What is the value of so much intellectualizations and theorizations when its practical implications are drained out? Sometimes I feel a strong affinity towards de-theorization because the original revolutionary motive that was undertaken has been violated long time back. It has become a typical post-modern fashion element ornating the white furnished pages of the prestigious publishing houses or the decorative tables of the coffee houses. Thousands of government and non-government institutions across the world culminates every year charged vision of new enterprises of thoughts and ideas extravagantly dealing, discussing and exploring new protocols of theorization. But in the process of intellectual exchanges the practical purposes of these meetings get obligated. It is time to change our approach towards theoretical learning. It is a crucial time for us to realize and shatter the narrow matrixes of theory miserly confined within the ideologues of Heidegger, Foucault, Marx or Woolf.

Theory largely needs to be blended with the daily realism of human existence and also we have to firmly realize its multifarious implications and improvisations. I would like to illustrate it

with the notion of existentialism. Usually scholars and students initiate their very process of learning through the philosophies of Heidegger, Camus, Lacan or Jaspers. In order to locate the very roots of the concepts, undoubtedly we have to refer to the various western philosophies but the process of individual and indigenous evolution has to be parallel ensured. It is extremely vital for us to understand how Lacan does and Foucault function within the premises of Taliban dictatorship of Pakistan and Afghanistan or how the post-colonial attributes of Homi Bhaba and Aijaz Ahmed fits within the political monopolizations of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham) in the Middle-East. During the 1850s, when Marx, Darwin, Engels, Nietzsche and several other prominent scholars gave birth to their philosophies, it emerged as a concrete challenge prior to the blunt criticism of the preceding eras. Besides everything the basic difference between criticism and theory was latter's practical utilizations and contributions towards generating well balanced socio-cultural-political law and order. Prior to the advent of clustered philosophies the world was epidemically infected with orthodoxies and dictatorship of the religious state. So the subtle outflow of new intellectual expanses promised a re-generated optimism which faced a massive setback with the dawn of the twentieth century. The universal order was wrecked by the two world wars which enforced a complete transformation and degeneration. From geographical across political towards intellectual- the world was not ready to interface the sudden changes. The steady universal progress that was nourished by the newly developed intellectual thoughts came to a stasis. Individuals were, ruptured within severe existential crisis. People started searching their purpose and reason to live. All forms of logic and rationalism were suspended and the questions 'why' and 'how' seemed to be utterly purposeless. Existential and tensions and absurdity pervaded the world. As the world was transgressing from modernism towards post-modernism it very well realized fragmentation is the ultimate order of the day. From a well structured vision of concretism individuals rediscovered a de-cathected, de-constructed and a de-historicized world where all forms of reasoning and genuinity has been hanged to death. The practical, universal scenario nurtured the western intellectual grains resulting into the evolution of multi-faceted philosophies--- existentialism, feminism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, eco-feminism, etc. indented with multiple sub-branches. Initially these theoretical ideologies were developed individually harnessing brand new plethora of thoughts. But gradually with the progress in time all these concepts got intermingled and gave birth new inter-disciplinarian and trans-disciplinarian branches. But the very western roots of theoretical exploitations rightly question the validity and

its totalitarian practicabilities. It is very vital for us to realize and condemn any form of institutional and conceptual totalitarianism as they are always inducted within a definite time and social frame. As a result, the western concepts can form the basis of learning but can never be monopolized.

Intellectuals across the world have been struggling to identify and merge the western possibilities with the indigenous experiences. But theory has always possessed a fluctuating attitude and contradictory character. For instance, let us consider the array of articles published in *Hindustan Times* on December 22, 2014. Thoroughly scrutinizing page 12 let us juxtapose two news articles:

- a.) **Photo of the Day:** People dressed as Santa Clause run during a charitable race in Moscow on Sunday. Five Hundred runners took part in the event within 'Happy Run' held to provide seriously children with financial aid.
- b.) **Gunman kills two New York policemen in 'revenge' attack:** A gunman fatally shot two New York police officers on Saturday...the twenty eight year old gunman Ismaaiyl Brinsley, had posted, 'They take 1 of ours...Lets take 2 of theirs' one of the messages read.

Analyzing the above mentioned news; from the existential prospective of bad faith we find that one part of the world (Moscow) is indulged in communicating the message of peace, the other part (Washington) is cheaply re-promoting racialism. None of these places are aware of the positive or negative incidents taking place around the world and is narrowly gauged within their respective existential confines. Is this not a way of theorizing? Is it always necessary rope in a Foucault or a Lacan to depict the existential issues across the world? Moreover if we contemplate on the western philosophical concepts their contradictoriness gets promoted. Considering all the basic ideologies I don't think we have been able to move beyond colonialism or Eurocentrism and I doubt if we will be able to.

Consciously or unconsciously our consistent reference to the western philosophies itself takes us back to the colonial cocoon which we fail to overcome or ignore. Thus, in spite of creating a 'Third-world' or 'Fourth-world' on pen and paper, in reality we still persist within the narrow walls of the first world. Let us scan across the universal predicaments and we find how vainly the entire world is involved in a hegemonic of different versions of neo-colonialism. It is absolutely

astonishing how United States of America, self-acclaimed care takers of civilization, laws and order invades countries like Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan to settle eternal disputes and condemn jihadism. Isn't this a version of neo-colonialism? United States seems to be eternally bestowed with the parental rights of controlling the universe. They seem to be epitomizing universal existence but their internal socio-economic and political tussles ironically unveil their skeleton. The recent economic reports threaten US of getting bankrupt on a decade or two. Its eternal distress has been further ignited by the pole conflicts and the racial conflicts. Thus, what is the value of 'ism'-izing the simple nouns and adjectives into complicated, psychologically taxing theories when the universal stature is experiencing degradation day by day? Considering the twenty-first century intellectual scenario, theorizing and philosophizing has emerged as a fashioned statement through blind suffixations and objective definitions. Indeed theory has winged out of the pages into every socio-cultural aspects of human existence, but it is also largely misused as intellectual excuses. Let us consider the situation of art and culture in India. Meaningless, plot-less movies or lack of rhythm or pace in literary creations are so easily associated with absurdism and existentialism. The further destabilization and intellectual perverseness can be probably arrested through complete de-institutionalization and de-authorization of theory.

Anti-theorizing was systematically launched into table of intellectual discussions and debates very much during the time when a dominant institution named 'Theory' was relishing its reigns and branched its control through every possible fissures of the society. The entire objective was planned cautiously and emerged as the broad name for a contemporary movement that is suspicious of theory's ethical values. Roberto Adorno in his essay *Anti-Theory* opines:

Our moral lives cannot be reduced to a legalistic application of a set of norms; that the emphasis on theoretical principles to solve concrete practical, moral problems is misguided, that some forms of ethical theorizing have a corruptive effect on how to live our moral lives; that ethical theories are inevitably embodied in a particular historical and socio-cultural context and therefore it is an illusion to think there is some neutral standpoint for practical rationality; that some accounts of morality ignore the plurality of goods and the possibility of conflict between them; and that there are no 'moral experts.'

(2010, Pg-37)

In this paper I won't depend on the critical visions of anti-theoretical and invite charges of self-contradictions against me. Because in the previous sections of my paper I have taken strict stand against theoretical institutionalizations and I strongly feel that my reference to any of the anti-theorists and their ideological believes will question my very own dictum. In the probable final section of this chapter I can be denounced as orthodox or will be easily aligned with the self-fashioned moralists who divinely adhere to the philosophy of 'only preaching and no-practicing.' But my mind consistently admires the ancient religious philosophies which once formulated the Advaitism into the abstract philosophy of Baha'ism we can easily locate a deeply embedded revolutionary theme within. These highly scientific philosophies once again re-ignite the debate, if religion is the other name of orthodoxy. Considering the socio-religious scenario during the Puritan Interregnum, Christianity emerged a Mephistophelean institute crippling individuals from all aspects. But as time chiseled Protestantism carved out a new direction in the Christian ideology which gelled with the reality of human existence. It not only questioned the ancient system of idol worship but also encouraged individuals to serve and sacrifice for the human race. On the other hand what practical solutions we can imply through the Lacanian or Foucauldian concepts except pessimism or nothingness?

Swami Vivekananda not only propounded Advaitism but was the first one to discover and decorate religion with the elements of reason and logic. Advaita philosophy criticizes all forms of materialistic associations, filters them and injects deep aesthetic values within. It creates a sublimated abstract experience which upholds our very reality. According to Shri Atmananda Guru's *Jiva Darshana*, 'Human life is a vast sea where every creatures struggle, fight, perish or survive.' Prominent Indian philosopher Shankaracharya believes that confusion between reality and illusion occurs due to lack of sufficient knowledge of the individual self. Swami Prabhavananda also philosophizes the world as the crumble of 'is' and 'is not.' In order to seek the absolute truth one's soul has to be illuminated. The illumined soul takes an individual to a transcendental consciousness. Under the influence of consciousness, one realizes the Self (Atman) as pure bliss.

The world is beholden as one and there exist no 'mine' and 'theirs.' The world gradually scathes away the illusionary clouds and propel towards attaining 'oneness' or Brahma. If we re-contextualize the thoughts and ideas of this philosophy then it not only portrays a practical

viewpoint but also questions the western theoretical institutions and their functionalities. Isn't the concept of 'oneness' a direct challenge to Lacan's 'Mirror Stage' which segregates the 'I' and the 'Other?' Even the Bahaiistic ideologies are blemished with anti-theoretical intentions. The Bahai faith is a monotheistic religion which aggressively believes in the unity of humanity. It is a compendium of all the naturalistic religious beliefs compiled and composed together to evade the negativities of race, class, caste and gender based hierarchy. These are all regarded as artificial impediments to unity. It seems to be a post-modern extension of Vivekananda's Advaitism. Contemplating on its principals –unity of God, unity of religion, Harmony of religion and science, Universal Compulsory education and most importantly Universal auxiliary language. Doesn't the last point pose a serious threat to the established theories of linguistics and common discourse? Is it possible to compartmentalize and theorize these socio-religious aspects? More than possibility, I think it's rather not necessary. I may sit in my well decorated chamber of my Banaras home and lecture on highly philosophical ideologies and on the other side is Assam is bludgeoned with Bodoland controversies.

It is the apt moment for us to realize that this consistently evolving universe cannot be chained by the discourses of a few institutions. Gayatri Chakraborty Spivack might relish her intellectual abilities with her 'Subaltern Theory' as it encompasses almost every sub-layered social community. But does it influence any change on the subdued conditions of 'Anganwadi' workers of Uttar Pradesh, Anglo-Indians in the Bo Barracks of Kolkata or the 'Keerwant' Brahmins of Maharashtra. Their sole existential purpose seems to serve a potential script to the playwrights and film makers, commercially crediting their accounts. Because the aesthetic character of art has long been reduced to mere objective values. So finally (though this word is strictly condoned in the post-modern dictionary) let us harness a vision embellished with practical issues cautiously theorized to assure a promising symbiosis, otherwise we have to linger within narrow brackets of 'theory' as outlined by scientific hypothesis or what the existential scholars deem as 'bad faith.'

Mahesh Elkunchwar's creative skill undertakes a very similar flight. He honestly admits his influences from Beckett, Pinter, Camus, Albee, Strindberg and others marshalling his intellectual faculty and influencing him towards writing numerous plays questioning the empirical institutions and multiple colours of existence. Since the colonial and even in the post-colonial times, Indian society has been continuously influenced with the occident-orient encounter and the

performing arts couldn't escape from it. In the book *Theatre Business and Management of Men: Indian Theatre in 2000* Konkani playwright and fiction writer Pundalik Naik expresses his concern and dilemma for the conflicts involved in the re-structuring an indigenous form of theatre. He philosophizes that Sanskrit theatre through Kalidasa's works like *Abhigyan Shakuntalam*, *Malavikagnimitram*, *Mritchchakatika* flooded the Indian stage but they were in no match with the Shakespearean plays like *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. As a result the Indians turned blindly towards the western playwrights, tried to adapt them within the grammatical parameters of Bharata's *Natyashastra* which proved to be a complete failure. Naik in his essay *The Nature-Alien Encounter* says:

Playwrights writing in Indian languages were deeply influenced during the 19th century by Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Berry, Galsworthy, Eugene O' Neil, Arthur Miller. But this did not enlarge the vision of any Indian playwright...take for instance the 'Bhaooban daki' of Marathi playwright K.P. Khadilkar. It was an adaptation of *Macbeth*. But the playwright only glorified in displaying the then current human trends rather than undertaking a quest for eternal truth. This was so because the Indian playwrights idolized Bharata's dramaturgy. Almost all such attempts of compressing Shakespeare within the parameters of *Natyashastra* ended in failure.

(41-43)

Elkunchwar's works realizes and tried to overcome the failure by igniting and illustrating the experiences of daily life nurturing a kaleidoscopic image of existence. *Wada Chirebandi (Old-Stone Mansion)*, Elkunchwar's most acclaimed work undertakes a steep journey into the rural chore exploring, investigating and evoking the multi-dimensional binaries of individual/clustered, eternal/external, male/female that has always occupied the nucleus of post-modern existential debate. The Deshpandes of Dharangaon has been crippled by both geographical and economical aridity that has cruised into their life with the advent of post-independent progressive ethics of urbanization, modernization and industrialization. The distraught condition of the Deshpandes outgrows and envelops the entire Dharangaon village intertwined within a calamitous structure of utter financial drought. One's highly flourishing the entire family is submerged under the heavy burdens of market debts and agricultural impotency. So desperate is their condition that Bhaskar is found to sell a part of their house to a businessman Bansilal who epitomizes the gradual privatization of Indian economy under the Premiership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Time has

scribbled ahead and so is India's democratic scenario where the continuous Congress-BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) tussle has yielded results in favor of the later one. But the question arises if the 'Modi'-fied government has been able to modify and rejuvenate the decadent national scenario. Simply considering the socio-economic situation we find even Modi's 'Make in India' campaign cannot neglect the inflow of foreign private investors who dream of refurbishing the Indian economy in collaboration with government aids. But what about the landless agricultural workers who are lingering in depravity in different parts of India?

Irrespective of new governing bodies with brand new suitcases of assurances, privatization continues to make inroads in the rural economy exploiting and uprooting it. In the last decade, India has experienced handful of such instances. During the Marxist regime in West Bengal the entire state shriveled under the catastrophic decision of permitting the Tata Motors to establish their factory within the rural premises of Singur and Nandigram which failed to persist. Amidst the CPI (M)-Trinamool Congress logophilia the poor agricultural workers succumbed. A very similar situation perceived over occupying rural lands at Rourkela, Orissa for constructing steel factories. The recent increment in the suicide rates of rural workers in the Yavatmal, Vidarbha and Nagur districts of Maharashtra or uprooting the residence of Katputli Colony of North-west Delhi aggravates the debate over the relevance of Private encroachment. Besides, complimenting Elkunchwar's creative and intellectual capabilities, his plays flourishes beyond the garb western theorization and illustrate the multi-faceted socio-economic or cultural possibilities of playwriting. *Wada Chirebandi* not only enlightens the moribund situation of the Deshpande household but also reflects the general economic scenario of India gripped in the fever of capitalism. Even the various issues of gender, class, caste, community or urbanity that has been addressed by him is well enriched with a practical vision. The pretentious character *Party-ies*, multi-layered feminine subjugation stuck within the commercial adages of artistry or within the crumbling structures of megalopolis has been vastly elaborated in *Garbo*, *Vasanakand (Desire in the Rocks)*, *Sonata*, *Raktapushpa (Flower of Blood)*.

The violent castration of incest and restriction of emotional outpour in *Vasanakand* transgresses into the psycho-sexual and emotional infiltration of a housewife in *Raktapushpa* establishing a thin parallelism with the psycho-physical of three spinsters suffocating within the narrow urban boundaries in *Sonata*. Womanhood is convulsively portrayed in the form of 'sex-

machine' in *Garbo*. Elkunchwar's intellectual width have garnered and articulated multiple shapes to the feminine situation existent in different corners of the Indian society. Elkunchwar has also questioned India's historical and mythical traditions in the play *Dharmaputra (God Son)*. Though the critics have often knitted Albeean tagline with the play, but as an individual I felt that the play enlivens crucial questions circling around religious vandalism which is consistently practiced across India even in the twenty-first century. The religious issues regarding forced conversions--- *Ghar-Wapsi*, the unending Hindu-Muslim war or the very recent religious upsurges centering around Rajkumar Hirani's movie *P K* can be well aligned with Elkunchwar's vision and its implication through his plays. Thus, Elkunchwar not only challenges the western monopolies of theorization but often takes anti-theoretical stances re-igniting the debates centered on the genuine values of 'theory.

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