



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Analysing The Term Authentic Self In Mahesh Elkunchwar's Play 'Apocalypse' (Yugant)

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Abstract:

The world where each day the disillusionment arises and with it the question of what is the essence of any human lives comes into jurisdiction. The term 'authentic self' comes into prominence following that. Mahesh Elkunchwar in the play "Apocalypse" constantly engages with the question of what a human life is all about. The characters in the play are trying to find out a way of life through a dialogic method. The symbolic Wada and its degradation is an emblem of the decline of culture and the values associated with it. This paper will try to evaluate the notion of authentic self in the characters of the play. The analysis will be made as per the point of view of Martin Heidegger's. This paper will also try to analyse Elkunchwar's idea of authentic self from the play. The research methodology that will be employed in the play will be discursive and qualitative.

Keywords: Existentialism, Self, Authentic self, Disillusionment, Contradiction, Alienation, Degradation, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Pragmatism.

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of post-colonial Indian drama, Mahesh Elkunchwar stands as a monumental figure whose work transcends mere social realism to enter the realm of metaphysical inquiry. His play *Apocalypse* (originally *Yuganta*), the concluding part of the celebrated *Wada Trilogy*, serves as a poignant meditation on the disintegration of the traditional Indian social fabric and the subsequent existential crisis of the individual. As the world becomes increasingly defined by a pervasive disillusionment—where old structures of meaning crumble and nothing replaces them—the question of what constitutes the "essence" of human life becomes paramount.

Central to this inquiry is the concept of the **authentic self**. In *Apocalypse*, Elkunchwar presents a world in jurisdiction, a space where the characters are no longer defined by their lineage, their land, or their social status, but are forced to confront the naked reality of their existence. The symbolic "Wada" (ancestral mansion), which once represented the solidity of the Brahminical patriarchal order, is now in a state of terminal degradation. This physical decay serves as an emblem for the decline of a culture and the erosion of the values that once provided a sense of purpose. Through a discursive and qualitative lens, this paper seeks to evaluate how Elkunchwar's characters navigate their disillusionment to seek a way of life. By employing the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, specifically his notions of *Dasein*, "thrownness," and "being-towards-death," this study will analyze the struggle for authenticity amidst alienation and contradiction.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the search for the self in Elkunchwar's work, one must first establish the philosophical parameters of "authenticity." Martin Heidegger, in his seminal work *Being and Time*, posits that human existence—which he terms **Dasein** (literally "being-there")—is characterized by its relationship to its own Being. For Heidegger, authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) is not about finding a hidden "true" soul, but about the individual taking ownership of their existence.

The They-Self vs. The Authentic Self

Heidegger distinguishes between the "authentic" and the "inauthentic" (or the "They-self"). Most individuals live in a state of "fallenness," where they follow the dictates of *Das Man* (the "They"). In this state, the self is lost in the crowd, behaving and thinking in ways dictated by societal norms, tradition, and idle chatter.

- **Alienation:** The individual feels a sense of displacement when the traditional structures (like the Wada) no longer provide meaning.
- **Disillusionment:** This occurs when the "They-self" fails to provide answers to the fundamental question of existence.

Thrownness and Facticity

Heidegger's concept of **Geworfenheit** (thrownness) suggests that humans find themselves "thrown" into a world they did not choose into a specific history, culture, and family. The characters in *Apocalypse* are thrown into the ruins of the Deshpande family legacy. Their struggle is to move beyond this "facticity"—the unchangeable facts of their past—toward a future where they can define themselves authentically.

Authenticity is ultimately achieved through the realization of one's finitude. Heidegger argues that "Being-towards-death" allows *Dasein* to break away from the trivialities of the "They" and recognize the unique possibility of their own life. In *Apocalypse*, the literal and metaphorical end of an era (the apocalypse) forces the characters into this Heideggerian confrontation with the end.

Discussion: The Dialogic Search for Essence

In *Apocalypse*, the narrative progression is not driven by external action but by a **dialogic method**. The characters primarily the aging members of the Deshpande family and their descendants engage in a continuous dialectic of memory and despair.

The Symbolic Wada and Cultural Degradation

The Wada is the silent protagonist of Elkunchwar's trilogy. In *Apocalypse*, it is no longer a home but a skeletal remains of a lost civilization. Elkunchwar uses this **degradation** to mirror the characters' internal states. As the physical walls crumble, the "social self" that the characters once inhabited also dissolves.

The Wada's decay is not merely architectural; it is ontological. It signifies the end of a teleological world-view where every action had a predefined meaning within the caste and family hierarchy" (Deshpande 88).

For characters like Bhaskar or Chandu, the Wada represents a **contradiction**. It is both a source of identity and a prison of alienation. They are alienated from the modern world because they cling to the ghost of the Wada, yet they are alienated from the Wada because it can no longer sustain them. This state of "in-betweenness" is where the search for the authentic self begins.

Pragmatism vs. Existential Angst

The play introduces a tension between pragmatism and existential reflection. Some character's attempt to escape disillusionment through a pragmatic approach to the new world seeking survival and material stability. However, Elkunchwar suggests that pragmatism without an understanding of the "self" leads back to the inauthenticity of the "They."

The dialogue in the play often revolves around the futility of their current existence. This is not mere pessimism; it is a discursive attempt to strip away the "masks" of the social self. When the characters ask, "What is a human life all about?" they are experiencing what Heidegger calls *Angst* (anxiety). Unlike fear, which has an object, *Angst* is a generalized feeling of unease that arises when the world's familiar meanings disappear. In this vacuum, the character is forced to either flee back to the "They" or face their own freedom.

The Authentic Self Amidst the Apocalypse

The "Apocalypse" of the title is not a singular event but a state of being. For Elkunchwar, authenticity is found in the acceptance of the end. The characters who reach a semblance of authenticity are those who stop trying to "fix" the Wada or return to the past. Instead, they acknowledge the **alienation** as a fundamental condition of modern life.

- **The Dialogic Process:** Through their conversations, the characters perform a "clearing" (Heidegger's *Lichtung*). They talk through their contradictions until only the essence of their individual will remains.
- **Ownership:** An authentic life in *Apocalypse* is one where the character accepts the "ruins" of their history without being destroyed by them. It is the transition from being a victim of history to being the author of one's own remaining days.

Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Apocalypse* is a profound exploration of the human condition in the face of systemic and cultural collapse. By stripping away the comforts of tradition and the solidity of the Wada, Elkunchwar places his characters in a Heideggerian state of "thrownness," where the only path forward is the pursuit of the authentic self.

Through a discursive and qualitative analysis, we see that the characters' journey is marked by a transition from the "They-self" of communal identity to an individualized, though often painful, awareness of their own existence. The disillusionment and degradation depicted in the play are not ends in themselves but catalysts for a deeper philosophical inquiry. Elkunchwar suggests that while culture and values may decline, the essence of human life is found in the courage to engage with that decline dialogically and authentically. Ultimately, the "authentic self" in *Apocalypse* is not a destination but a mode of being one that accepts contradiction and alienation as the very soil from which a meaningful life must now grow.

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