



LANGUAGE, SILENCE, AND SYMBOLISM: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF MAHESH ELKUNCHWAR'S WADA CHIREBANDI

Swaraj Rajendrasinh Lokhande

Research Scholar, PAH Solapur University, Solapur, MS, India

&

Dr. Anupama Prakash Pol

*Head, Department of English, K. N. Bhise Arts, Commerce and Vinayakrao Patil Science College,
Vidyanagar, Bhosare Kurduwadi, Dist. Solapur, MS, India*

Abstract

Mahesh Elkunchwar occupies a distinguished position in post-Independence Indian drama for his sensitive exploration of family relationships, social transition, psychological conflict, and the disintegration of traditional structures. His *Wada Chirebandi* (Old Stone Mansion), the first play of the celebrated *Wada* trilogy, presents the decline of a traditional Brahmin family in rural Maharashtra against the wider background of changing social and economic realities. The dramatic power of the play derives not merely from its themes but also from Elkunchwar's distinctive stylistic techniques. Language, pauses, silence, repetition, colloquial speech, symbolism, spatial imagery, and emotionally charged dialogue convert an apparently ordinary family gathering into an exploration of generational conflict, frustrated desire, memory, gender relations, and cultural transition. The ancestral *wada* functions simultaneously as a physical setting and a symbolic representation of an inherited social order gradually losing its vitality. Similarly, silence operates as a communicative device through which suppressed resentment, grief, alienation, and emotional distance become visible. The present paper offers a stylistic analysis of *Wada Chirebandi*, focusing particularly on language, silence, symbolism, dialogue, characterization, spatial imagery, and dramatic contrast. It argues that Elkunchwar's style derives its effectiveness from an interaction between what characters say and what they remain unable or unwilling to articulate. His dramatic language thus transforms the decline of one family into a broader metaphor for the transition from traditional to modern social life.

Keywords

Mahesh Elkunchwar, *Wada Chirebandi*, Stylistics, Language, Silence, Symbolism, Indian Drama, Marathi Theatre, Dialogue, Family, Tradition, Modernity, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Stylistics investigates the distinctive linguistic and literary choices through which a text creates meaning and aesthetic effect. In drama, stylistic analysis assumes particular importance because dramatic meaning develops through several interacting elements: dialogue, pauses, silence, stage directions, gesture, repetition, spatial arrangement, characterization, rhythm, and performance. The playwright does not possess the same degree of direct narrative explanation available to a novelist. Consequently, characters must reveal themselves primarily through speech, action, silence, and interaction.

Mahesh Elkunchwar is particularly suitable for stylistic study because his plays demonstrate a sophisticated relationship between language and silence. His dramatic world



frequently concentrates upon individuals who find themselves trapped between personal desire and social expectation, tradition and modernity, family responsibility and individual freedom. Rather than explaining these tensions through lengthy authorial commentary, Elkunchwar allows ordinary conversations, incomplete statements, pauses, emotional confrontations, domestic objects, and physical spaces to carry considerable dramatic meaning.

Wada Chirebandi, translated into English as *Old Stone Mansion*, provides an outstanding example of this technique. The play centres on the Deshpande family and unfolds in their deteriorating ancestral mansion after the death of the family patriarch, Tatyaji. The return of family members for the funeral rituals brings unresolved tensions into the open. Economic difficulties, disputes over property and jewellery, generational differences, frustrated ambitions, migration to the city, gender inequalities, and conflicting attitudes toward tradition gradually emerge through domestic conversation.

The wada is therefore more than the location in which the characters meet. It contains their collective history. Its deterioration parallels the weakening of the traditional family structure. Elkunchwar's dramatic achievement lies in making this decline perceptible not merely through plot but through style.

The present paper studies three central stylistic elements such as language, silence, and symbolism—while also considering dialogue, repetition, dramatic contrast, characterization, and spatial imagery. It argues that *Wada Chirebandi* demonstrates how apparently simple domestic language can communicate profound social and psychological tensions.

Language and the Domestic World of *Wada Chirebandi*:

One of the most striking features of *Wada Chirebandi* is the apparent simplicity of its language. Elkunchwar does not depend excessively upon elevated poetic speech. The dramatic world is built primarily through the language of everyday family life.

Characters discuss food, rituals, money, property, jewellery, responsibilities, travel, marriage, household arrangements, and family obligations. Yet beneath these ordinary subjects lie deeper tensions.

A conversation about money may actually express resentment. A discussion about jewellery may reveal insecurity and unequal power. A disagreement concerning ritual may expose a conflict between generations. An apparently casual remark may carry years of accumulated bitterness.

This layering of meaning gives Elkunchwar's dialogue its stylistic richness. The distinction between surface meaning and implied meaning may be represented as: Thus, language in *Wada Chirebandi* works simultaneously at domestic and symbolic levels. The Deshpande family speaks about immediate problems, but the audience gradually understands that these problems represent a larger historical transition. The old economic structure supporting the family has weakened. Traditional authority has lost much of its unquestioned legitimacy. Younger characters imagine lives outside the wada. Urban existence offers alternatives that earlier generations did not possess. Everyday speech therefore becomes a linguistic record of social change.

Dialogue as an Instrument of Characterization:

Elkunchwar rarely needs extended descriptions of his characters because dialogue itself performs the work of characterization.

Bhaskar's speech reflects his relationship with family responsibility, authority, and economic pressure. Sudhir, who has moved to Mumbai, speaks from a different social and cultural position. His experience of urban life creates a distance between him and those who remain connected to the ancestral household. The linguistic contrast between characters corresponds to a contrast in worldview.



The older generation frequently interprets behaviour through inherited notions of duty, family prestige, ritual, and tradition. Younger characters are more exposed to individual aspirations, urban culture, changing gender expectations, and alternative lifestyles.

The dramatic conflict is therefore partly linguistic.

Characters do not merely disagree about particular issues; they frequently speak from different conceptual worlds.

Elkunchwar's use of family dialogue also demonstrates that intimacy does not necessarily produce understanding. Family members know one another deeply, yet this familiarity often makes their language more painful. They know precisely which subjects can wound. A short sentence from a close relative may consequently possess greater emotional force than an elaborate speech.

Silence as Dramatic Language:

Perhaps the most important stylistic feature of *Wada Chirebandi* is silence. Silence in Elkunchwar is not the absence of communication. It is communication by other means. Characters frequently cannot express directly what they feel. Social conventions, family hierarchy, gender expectations, emotional fear, resentment, and personal shame restrict speech. Consequently, pauses and silences become meaningful.

Following Tatyaji's death, for example, the household exists within an atmosphere of mourning, but grief is complicated by practical disputes and old resentments. Death creates silence while simultaneously creating circumstances in which previously suppressed conflicts emerge.

This relationship between speech and silence is one of the play's stylistic strengths. The characters speak because silence has become unbearable, yet they also become silent because certain truths are too difficult to articulate. In stylistic terms, the unsaid becomes as significant as the spoken.

Silence and Gender:

Silence acquires particular importance in the representation of women. The traditional household distributes authority unevenly. Women possess considerable knowledge of family relationships and domestic realities but do not always possess equal freedom to define the conditions of their lives. Elkunchwar does not portray female silence simply as passivity. At times, silence represents restriction: a woman cannot openly articulate dissatisfaction because social expectations demand endurance. At other moments, silence becomes judgement. Refusal to speak can communicate disapproval more effectively than argument. This ambiguity makes silence dramatically powerful. The women in *Wada Chirebandi* reveal how patriarchal family structures can convert emotional endurance into an expected feminine virtue. Yet their conversations also expose the hidden cost of such endurance. The audience therefore becomes responsible for interpreting what social convention prevents the characters from saying openly.

The Wada as the Central Symbol:

The most important symbol in the play is undoubtedly the wada itself. On the literal level, it is an old stone mansion belonging to the Deshpande family. On the symbolic level, it represents ancestry, tradition, collective memory, social prestige, family unity, patriarchy, and a declining way of life. The brilliance of Elkunchwar's symbolism lies in its organic connection with the plot. The wada is not artificially introduced as a literary symbol. It is the environment within which the characters naturally live. Its physical decline gradually becomes inseparable from the decline of the family. The title *Wada Chirebandi* consequently acquires ironic force. A stone structure suggests permanence and strength. Yet the social relationships contained within that apparently



solid architecture are deteriorating. Stone may survive longer than human relationships. The mansion remains while the family it once united begins to fragment.

The Wada as Memory:

The wada also functions as a repository of memory. Every room and object carries associations with previous generations. The characters cannot inhabit the house without simultaneously inhabiting the past. This relationship produces both belonging and confinement. For older family members, the ancestral house provides identity and continuity. For younger characters, the same structure may represent restriction. Elkunchwar thus avoids assigning the wada a single fixed meaning. The wada matters precisely because different characters interpret it differently. Their attitudes toward the building reveal their attitudes toward tradition itself.

Objects and Material Symbolism:

Domestic objects in the play also acquire symbolic importance. Jewellery, property, household possessions, and inherited material objects are not merely economic assets. They contain emotional and cultural meanings. Jewellery is particularly significant because it intersects with family inheritance, female security, ownership, and economic necessity. In a traditional family structure, jewellery may represent prestige and continuity. For women, however, it may also represent one of the limited forms of material security available within a patriarchal economy.

Tradition and Modernity as Stylistic Opposition:

A major thematic conflict in *Wada Chirebandi* is the tension between tradition and modernity. Elkunchwar does not present this opposition through theoretical speeches. Instead, it emerges through contrasts among characters, lifestyles, vocabulary, expectations, and attitudes. Sudhir's connection with Mumbai represents movement toward urban modernity. His return to the ancestral wada brings two worlds into direct contact. However, Elkunchwar refuses to romanticize either side. Tradition provides belonging but can become restrictive. Modernity provides freedom but can produce alienation. The play's stylistic balance arises from this refusal to provide simple answers.

Repetition and Accumulated Conflict:

Repetition is another significant linguistic feature of the play. Family conflicts rarely appear only once. Issues involving money, responsibility, marriage, property, or past grievances repeatedly return to conversation. This repetition reflects the psychological reality of family conflict. Unresolved problems return because they have never actually been resolved. Stylistically, repetition creates cumulative dramatic pressure. An issue that appears minor during its first occurrence becomes increasingly meaningful when repeated. The audience begins to understand that the characters are trapped within emotional patterns just as they are physically gathered within the old mansion. Repetition therefore links language with spatial symbolism. The family moves repeatedly through familiar arguments while living within familiar walls.

Interruption and Fragmented Communication:

Elkunchwar also makes effective use of interruption. Characters interrupt one another because they are emotionally involved, impatient, defensive, or unwilling to hear uncomfortable truths. Fragmented conversation reflects fragmented relationships. In conventional communication, dialogue ideally involves listening and response. In *Wada Chirebandi*, however, characters frequently speak without genuinely communicating.



Spatial Imagery and Psychological Confinement:

The physical architecture of the wada contributes to characterization. Drama is inherently spatial because characters exist before an audience within a defined performance area. Elkunchwar exploits this quality by making the ancestral house psychologically meaningful. Enclosed domestic space can suggest security, but it can also suggest confinement. Characters remain physically close while emotionally distant. Members of the family occupy the same house, share meals, participate in rituals, and discuss common responsibilities. Yet they increasingly inhabit separate emotional worlds. The wada therefore becomes a physical representation of the family psyche. Its walls hold the family together while simultaneously emphasizing their inability to escape inherited conflicts.

Death as a Structural and Symbolic Device:

Tatyaji's death initiates the dramatic action, but its significance extends beyond the death of one individual. The patriarch represents an older structure of authority. His absence creates uncertainty. The family gathers because tradition demands collective mourning, but the gathering exposes the weakening of the very collective structure that ritual is intended to affirm. Death therefore becomes symbolic of social transition. Elkunchwar uses death not merely to create sadness but to reorganize relationships. Once the traditional centre disappears, characters must confront the question of what remains.

Irony and the Decline of the Family:

Irony operates subtly throughout the play. The ancestral mansion should symbolize permanence, yet it is deteriorating. The family should symbolize unity, yet its members are divided. Ritual should reinforce collective identity, yet ritual occasions reveal conflict. Inheritance should preserve continuity, yet property becomes a source of disagreement. These contradictions produce structural irony. Elkunchwar does not need constant verbal irony because the dramatic situation itself is ironic. The apparent symbols of stability reveal instability.

Psychological Realism:

One reason *Wada Chirebandi* remains dramatically compelling is Elkunchwar's psychological realism. Characters are not reduced to representatives of ideological positions. The traditional characters are not merely conservative, and the modern characters are not automatically enlightened. Each possesses contradictions. Individuals may love family members while resenting them. They may value tradition while feeling trapped by it. They may desire freedom while fearing separation. They may criticize the ancestral household while remaining emotionally attached to it. This psychological ambiguity produces realistic dialogue. People rarely express one consistent emotional position in family relationships. Elkunchwar's language reflects this complexity through changes of tone, incomplete expressions, repetitions, quarrels, pauses, and sudden moments of tenderness.

Language and Social Identity:

Speech also functions as a marker of social identity. The play originated in Marathi, and its cultural environment is deeply connected with Maharashtra. Family relationships, kinship structures, rituals, modes of address, and domestic expressions carry regional significance. Translation inevitably modifies some linguistic features, yet the social function of language remains visible. Characters define relationships through forms of address. The linguistic recognition of age, kinship, gender, and authority reveals the hierarchical organization of the family. Language therefore does not simply describe social structure.



Language performs social structure:

How one addresses another person reflects how one is expected to relate to that person. When such expectations weaken, linguistic tension accompanies social tension. The linguistic form through which the story is presented becomes part of its meaning.

Findings:

The stylistic analysis produces several significant findings. First, Elkunchwar employs apparently ordinary domestic language to communicate complex psychological and social meanings. His dramatic dialogue operates simultaneously at literal and implied levels. Second, dialogue functions as a major instrument of characterization. Differences in vocabulary, tone, conversational behaviour, and attitude reveal generational and ideological differences. Third, silence constitutes one of the most important stylistic devices in the play. Pauses and unspoken responses express grief, resentment, suppression, helplessness, emotional distance, and resistance. Fourth, the wada is the play's dominant symbol. Its physical deterioration parallels the weakening of the traditional joint family and inherited social order. Fifth, material objects such as jewellery and ancestral property connect economic problems with questions of gender, authority, inheritance, and family identity. Sixth, repetition and interruption reveal unresolved emotional conflicts. Characters repeatedly return to familiar arguments because the underlying problems remain unsettled. Seventh, spatial imagery reinforces psychological meaning. The enclosed mansion places emotionally distant individuals within physical proximity. Finally, Elkunchwar's style avoids simplistic opposition between tradition and modernity. Both systems contain possibilities and limitations, creating the ambiguity characteristic of serious modern drama.

Conclusion:

Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Wada Chirebandi* demonstrates the extraordinary dramatic possibilities of ordinary language. Its stylistic distinction lies not in elaborate verbal ornamentation but in the playwright's ability to make domestic conversation, pauses, silences, repetitions, interruptions, objects, and physical space carry multiple layers of meaning.

Language reveals the tensions among members of the Deshpande family, but silence often reveals even more. Characters are separated not by an absence of speech but by the limitations of speech. They possess words without necessarily possessing mutual understanding. Elkunchwar consequently turns silence into an active dramatic language through which grief, suppressed desire, resentment, gendered restriction, and emotional alienation become perceptible.

The symbolism of the ancestral wada provides structural unity to these linguistic and psychological elements. The old stone mansion embodies continuity and decay simultaneously. Its apparent solidity contrasts with the fragmentation of the family occupying it. The wada preserves memory but also confines its inhabitants within inherited expectations. It represents home and burden, security and imprisonment, history and decline.

Through these stylistic strategies, Elkunchwar transforms the crisis of one Maharashtrian family into a larger meditation on cultural change. The decline of the Deshpande household reflects the weakening of traditional social structures under the pressures of urbanization, economic transformation, generational change, and individual aspiration.

Wada Chirebandi therefore demonstrates that dramatic style is not an ornamental addition to theme. Language, silence, symbolism, characterization, and space constitute the very means through which the play thinks about society. Elkunchwar's achievement lies in allowing the smallest domestic exchange to suggest a larger cultural transition and in making what remains unspoken as meaningful as what is said. The play consequently occupies an important place in modern Indian drama and offers particularly rich material for stylistic analysis.



References

- Elkunchwar, Mahesh. *Collected Plays of Mahesh Elkunchwar*. Vol. 1, Oxford UP, 2009.
- ---. *Old Stone Mansion*. Translated by Shanta Gokhale, Seagull Books, 1989.
- Leech, Geoffrey N., and Mick Short. *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. 2nd ed., Pearson Longman, 2007.
- Nørgaard, Nina, Beatrix Busse, and Rocío Montoro. *Key Terms in Stylistics*. Continuum, 2010.
- Simpson, Paul. *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. Routledge, 2004.
- Verdonk, Peter. *Stylistics*. Oxford UP, 2002.
- Wales, Katie. *A Dictionary of Stylistics*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2011.

Article Received:15/12/2025

Article Accepted:23/12/2025

Published Online:26/12/2025

To Cite the Article: *Lokhande, Swaraj and Pol, Anupama.*“ Language, Silence, and Symbolism: A Stylistic Analysis of Mahesh Elkunchwar’s *Wada Chirebandi*.”*Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed/Peer Reviewed e-Journal of English Language, Literature and Criticism*, Vol.-VI, Issue-3, December, 2025, 280-286. www.literarycognizance.com

This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

