

ISSN 2348 - 7674

Research Innovator

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol II Issue V : October - 2015

Editor-In-Chief
Prof. K.N. Shelke

www.research-chronicler.com

A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside sits on a wooden surface, alongside a red wax seal and a small wooden object. The overall scene evokes a sense of traditional scholarship and research.

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ISSN 2395 – 4744 (Print); 2348 – 7674 (Online)

**A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed
Multidisciplinary International Research Journal**

Volume II Issue V: October – 2015

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Adhe Adhure: Savitri's Quest for a Complete Man

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Abstract

Drama is a growing art, and, as such, Indian dramatists have been making constant experimentation with themes and techniques. There is an imperative need for perceptive and mature evaluations on this growing discipline. Rakesh's plays dramatize the sufferings of men and woman who fall victims to socio-economic hierarchy and cultural hegemony. He uses historical characters to project the breakdown of communication in contemporary life. Rakesh's rise to fame as a dramatist of vital significance was, therefore, owing to the situation as it obtained in the world of theatre in the country in general and in Hindi in particular rather than to a critical recognition on the part of the Hindi scholars, critics and readers. Rakesh embedded all his rebelliousness in his short stories, novels and plays, as he tried to travel the path 'hardly travelled' by the earlier writers and his writings brought slings and arrows as well as praise, admiration and applause from many critics for breaking the barriers. His play *Adhe Adhure (Halfway House)* created shock waves and startled even the die-hard critics.

Key Words: Mohan Rakesh, Adhe Adhure, Savitri

None, but Rakesh could have so meticulously and skillfully dramatize man-woman relationship with great latitude and courage. The play dramatizes but does not explore, does not delve deep into human consciousness. Like a paper boat floating on the surface of the water, the entire play encompasses and depicts the physical exteriors, the reality that lies outside. There is hardly any attempt to unfold the layers of the 'psyche' of any one of the characters except through stray comments by others. Many biographers and critics close to Rakesh feel that he was almost obsessed with the idea of man woman relationship. *Halfway House* does not tell a story in the conventional manner. It breaks new grounds, and there is more of

a discussion or talking more on the pattern of a 'discussion' or 'talking' more on the pattern of Brecht or Beckett whose influence can be seen throughout the play.

The dramatist made his plays representatives of the real life and the complexities of the modern-day-living. In a broader sense, we can say that Mohan Rakesh basically deals with only one subject in all his plays and it is man-woman relationship. This inclination starts right from the short stories and culminates in *Halfway House*.

The play starts with a prologue by the man in a black suit. It conveys that all men behave alike in a given situation, a middle-class family here. The prologue describes Rakesh's chief concerns in the

play depiction of thoroughly undefined individuals and the devastating circumstances into which they are plunged. According to the prologue, the circumstances are beyond control; the characters have no identity, and the play itself is undefined. It is about the half and incomplete life of a middle class family. The play opens in the living room of a middle-class urban family. The room is untidy, a school bag lying on a tea-poi; some clippings of Hollywood actresses along with a pair of scissors are lying on the sofa. A pair of pajamas swings from the back of a chair. No one is seen in the room, nor is any sound heard, indicative someone's presence. As the play opens we find Savitri entering the living room. The plays centre around just one character and that is Savitri, other characters are like 'planets' orbiting around and influencing her the play begins with her and ends with her.

As act one begins, Savitri is seen tidying the living room. After a few minutes Mahendranath, Savitri's husband enters the room. They have been married twenty two years. They have been blessed with three children, Ashok, Binni and Kinni. Mahendranath is about fifty and he is out of work.

He is just a nominal head of the family. Savitri doesn't hold any respect for her husband; she is just a piece of stinking flesh. There is an occasion where she says that she wants a husband not a hanger on which clothes hangs. He is very convivial and his friends like his company. He enters into a business with his friend, Juneja. Savitri urges him to get good furniture and other

things for their house. Mahendranath has suffered serious set-backs in business and has not been able to re-establish himself. He withdraws his capital part by part, and buys all the items one after another and furnishes the house according to the taste of his wife. Rakesh has presented a picture of what a middle class family is going through in a changing world, where industrialization and new economic values have shaken the very base of its existence. The middle-class suffers more because this class has gone through extremely tense situations, which is the outcome of its high aspirations and its failure to be able to achieve it. The family of Mahendranath and Savitri in the play Halfway House is economically uprooted, and has gone down from a high middle-class family to a lower income group.

In modern times, human life has become an ocean of uncertain circumstances and individuals are victims of a general purposelessness and these are, precisely, the factors responsible for disintegration of family. Mahendranath's family struggles hard to cope with the contradictions within it. Savitri, his wife, is hardworking and committed to the economic progress of the family, but she lacks integrity of character which is the essence of marital life. The children are quarrelsome and Mahendranath himself is an idler, incapable of doing anything, for him or for others. Savitri takes her husband to task for not helping her in house work. She then refers to his being lazy. He admits that he has lost business as he spent his capital. Savitri goes on nagging Mahendranath for losing business. This adds to his frustration

and he takes it on his wife. Savitri finds her husband to be an idler, not even half a man, a mere stinking flesh and that she establishes connections with other men in order to discover a complete man. Savitri absorbs patriarchal culture and observes it. It makes her think that man is a bread earner and that woman is a house keeper. Savitri is more assertive than her husband. Savitri has more powerful controlling authority than her husband. Mahendranath meekly yields to the demands of his wife and purchases furniture by withdrawing his share of the capital from the business. Savitri takes up a job and feeds the family while her husband idles away without helping her in her house work. This upsets the cultural norms of patriarchy. She feels that her husband should succeed in business and earn every luxury that she dreams of having. She does not tolerate the dependence of her husband on his friend Juneja and his service to others.

Savitri's contempt for her husband is seen when she says, "That he's never had any confidence in him. The test for everything in life has been you. Whatever you think, want, do, he too must think, want and do. Why.....? Because you are a man. And he? He is not even half a man! If there is an unsavory task, Mahendranath will do it..... a complicated problem, Mahendranath will solve it..... When the press opened it was the same; in the case of the factory, it was the same. To do your dusty work Mahendranath was good enough, but what happened, when it was done.....? Mahendranath has already taken his share and spent it. And what was his share? (Points to furniture in the room) This and this..... second, third, fourth-rate things

with which he thought he was making a home!" (p.15) She then accepts the patriarchal concept of a manly man and very much wants her husband to be manly. When Juneja, her husband's business-partner tries to explain to her how she has caused his downfall, she refuses to see the reason. As her husband fails to fit her image of a masculine man, Savitri runs after several men but fails to realize her dream. She does not realize her part in the failures of her husband. As he does not conform to her concept of a masculine man, she considers him important. She blames first his parents and later his friends for this. She runs after several men but fails to establish a lasting relationship with any one of them. She feels greatly frustrated and takes it out on her children. All this makes their house a veritable hell. She is not satisfied with Mahendranath, and so tries to find the complete man in Singhanian, Juneja, Manoj and Jagmohan.

Savitri is an independent woman who has the exposure and the economic independence of the modern society, she gets ample opportunities also. Mahendranath is more of a parasite and has no identity and self respect of his own. Savitri wants her son Ashok to settle down and invites Singhanian home to introduce him to her son. Singhanian and Jagmohan are the members of the urban rich class who flaunt their riches and high social status, take undue advantage of the weaker sections and exploit women employees for gratifying their sexual lust and for pleasure. Singhanian happens to be Savitri's boss and has all the traits of a comic figure. He is disliked not only by Mahendra

who feels bitter about his frequent visits, he is equally looked down upon by Ashok who has watched his behavior and conduct during his early visits. Ashok goes to the extent of making a drawing of Singhanian with ass-like ears. *Halfway House* brings to surface the tensions of many couples, especially in educated middle-class families. The changing values and breaking of the traditional homes have brought about the inner turmoil of modern discontented mind. Binni, the elder daughter of Mahendranath and Savitri, is married to Manoj but is unable to adjust. There seems to be some sort of estrangement between Binni and her husband. Mahendranath is a failure as a husband not only because he is not the bread-winner now but also because of his psychological dependence on others. He is incapable of taking independent decisions about life and seeks help and guidance from others. Savitri complains, "Ever since I have known, I have always found him living on someone or other, particularly on you. He's ever been able to do anything without asking you. If we want to buy something, he must ask you. If we want to go somewhere, he must ask you. When he wanted to marry me, he had to ask you. I cannot even breathe without asking you..... and what has been the result? That he's never had any confidence in him." (pp. 68-69)

The play gains intensity and poignancy from the conflict in the relationship between Mahendranath and Savitri on one hand, and from Savitri's relationships with the other men, namely, Manoj, Singhanian, Jagmohan and Juneja, on the other. Manoj, as we are told, used to

visit the house as Savitri's paramour. Singhanian is her boss whom she seems to oblige to secure a job for her son Ashok. She is enamored of Jagmohan for he is a person who, she knows, possesses all that her husband lacks. Juneja, whom she derides in her husband's presence, was once considered her savior in distress. Juneja unveils the reality by discovering the root of all the trouble in Savitri's concept of life. He agrees that Mahendranath at times, becomes bad tempered, but there was a time when he was happy by nature he laughed from within. It is Savitri who always makes him feel low. She aspires for life which Mahendranath cannot give her, which no man can possibly give her. Juneja's words are relevant, "The point is that if any of these men had been part of your life instead of Mahendra, you would still have felt that you had married the wrong man. You would still have encountered a Mahendra, a Juneja a Shivajeet, or a Jagmohan and thought and reacted in the same way. Because the meaning of life to you is how many different things you can have and enjoy at the same time. One man alone could never give them to you, so no matter whom you married; you would always have felt as empty and as restless as you do today." (p.74)

The play reveals the pretentious nature of upper middle-class Indian society and women's urge to become economically independent. Post-independent Indian period more so the years after the sixties saw the emergence of career women who aspired to take up high profile jobs

through competitions are through political influence; some of them started their own business like garment-designing, beauty-saloons, slimming centers and so on.

Savitri the principal character in the play, could be considered one of the pioneers, and most of the pioneer women often suffered, one way or the other at the hands of their male bosses who often exploited them. The urge to become economically independent or to take up a job under economic compulsions often led some young women into traps of Junejas', Jagmohans' lust. Breakdown of marriages has become a common affair on the upper middle-class urban-society, particularly in the metro cities. In most cases there is a clash of egos which results in breakdown of marriage. Rakesh has tried to depict the despicable condition of a fragmented family from all possible angles. Besides the breakdown of marriage, Rakesh has also tried to depict the theme of alienation and fragmentation.

Savitri judges Mahindra by what he does not have and what others have strength, vigor, status, fat bank balance. Binni evaluates her marital home not by what it has but by what it does not have----- freedom, license, loafing about the legacy she had taken from her parental home. Savitri shifts from one man to another and then to another in her search for a complete man. Ambition for a grand and glorious life coupled with biological urge has led Savitri to a point of no return; at the end she is catapulted into the same predicament from which she had endeavored all her life to get out. Mahendra too decides to return to the same house once again. Binni has been frequently returning to

her parents to get relief readers are of the opinion that Binni's predicament is no different from that of her mother and she would end up as such. The conclusion of the play is controversial. A hegemonic male centered discourse is created to shift the entire blame for unhappiness in marriage on Savitri.

In many ways Savitri is in sharp contrast to the traditional home-loving and home-tide woman having all ingredients and traits of stoicism. Savitri too suffers, but her sufferings are the result of her own choice, her inner compulsions, and her psychic needs. Her frustration is caused by her failure to fill the psychological chasm within her that detracts her from establishing any rapport with her husband and the other members of her family.

In this play, the man and the woman are not only married they also have a family, consisting of two daughters and a son. This family seems to be a gas chamber in which the members are getting choked, they are unable to breathe normally as it were, and feel suffocated because of the oppressive, rancorous atmosphere that lies like a pall on the family. Each one of them seems doomed to suffer, whether it is the head of the family, Mahendranath or his wife Savitri or the boy Ashok or the youngest adolescent, Kinni. *Halfway House* expresses tragedy, helplessness, vacuum, egoism rise of individualism, feeling of futility, and search for meaning in one's existence, distance of authority, and laws of traditional values, a feeling of loneliness and alienation in contemporary life. The plot of the play is made of an average middle-class family life. Ostentations, taboos, worthless

traditional customs, cowardice to break them for fear of social stigma, financial stringency, to live beyond one's means all these characteristics of the class appear vividly in the play. The members of Mahendranath's family suffer from these ills. All action takes place in Mahendranath's house, in his drawing room to be exact.

In a desire to have what she wanted she even lost what she possessed. Though one feels sympathy for her still the means she adopted can't be ignored. She defined a complete man as one who has a sound character in his sound personality. He must be of a good status with sufficient bank balance. She adds manhood to the list and keeping in mind the criterion of a complete man she considers her husband a stamp rather a servant who looks after the house while she is away. She neither makes any adjustments nor did she have a soft corner for him. She wanted to

paint him in the image she felt comfortable with. Junega aptly explains Savitri that one man could have never satisfied her irrespective of whom she married. The emptiness and restlessness she has experienced with Mahendranath she would have experienced the same with anyone else. Her erroneous concept of life and erroneous definition of man brought doom to her house. She took him as a dummy husband and her words that, 'he's not half a man' portrays her physical needs even. As far as her name is concerned its contrast to the rich history selfless of love and dedication of a wife attached; she wanted removal of her husband from the surface of the earth.

Half Way House is the dramatization of a career woman. The author has taken great pains in sketching this character. He does not condemn her nor does he approve of her but remains silent. One has to accept or reject according to their perspective.

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