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Mohan Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure (Halfway House)*: Representation of Savitri

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Abstract: Indian English Writings hold very unique place in literary arena because now it is no more mimicry or written keeping in mind the colonial themes and situations but the creative writers and translators are doing a great service to the humanity and nation structuring every theme that concerns our society and people. Poetry, novel, drama among other genres of literary expression in Indian English Writings are critical also of several issues like feminism, postcolonialism, existentialism, partition of India and Pakistan, marital relationships, among others. Such a name is Mohan Rakesh, one of the dramatists of Indian writing in Hindi, who not only highlights the day to day life but also present situations through the settings and characters of his dramas like *Halfway House* that readers and audience are spell bound to consider and reconsider the character's actions and reactions according to their understanding and social milieu. In the drama *Mahendranath* and Savitri are husband and wife who live life like middle class married life i.e. confronting economical, psychological, and social conditions. It seems that what a husband is expected to perform is not done by Mahendra along with responsibilities of the family as it is labeled as family drama; what a wife is expected to do is not done by Savitri. Different critics have different opinions regarding the representation of Savitri. Some are in favour of the dramatist and some charge him of misrepresentation of woman. The present chapter aims at analyzing the representation of Savitri in general and assessment of woman in the role Savitri as 'New Woman' in the modern age that is era of conflict between economical growth and moral values. Who is responsible for such a mess in the drama will also be central and underlining theme of the chapter.

Keywords: New Woman, moral values, economical growth, modern age, human

A versatile writer, Mohan Rakesh experimented with genres of short stories, novels and plays for expressing his concerns and responses to many contemporary issues related human existence and relations in society. Collections of essays, biographies and travelogues are also his contribution to literature with critical insights. His dramas *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* (1958), *Lehron Ke Rajhans*, *Adhe Adhure* (1969) and the unfinished *made* him popular among dramatists and readers establishing him an unrivalled and a playwright of his own kind in theme and technique. After Jay Shankar Prasad it is Mohan Rakesh who has the credit of bringing freshness and new things in Hindi Plays that could make different recognition of the plays. His plays are convincing and full of credibility because they have been weaved with the experience and craftsmanship of the writers corresponding to realism. No doubt, he contributed to literary world with stories, novels and plays of his genuine experience but his magical effect could be seen through his plays and these made him famous.

Started his career as postman at Dehradun from 1947 to 1949, then as a teacher in Jalandhar, Punjab and other places, resigned his teaching job to become a full time devoted writer. From 1962 to 1963 he edited Hindi Literary Journal 'Sariika'. His career began as a story writer—



between 1944 and 1972 Sixty Six stories were written by him but during his lifetime only 12 could be published to make him a story writer. New Story by him was different from other earlier and conventional stories. He shows his dramatic excellence in the use of language in his diary too right from the beginning of his writing career. Theatre was his interest that resulted in his famous dramas. It is interesting to note that to his credit Mohan Rakesh has not many plays like other dramatists but parallelism can be found between Mohan Rakesh and Jane Austen the novelist in case of quantity of works and popularity. Rakesh could not produce many plays and each play came out after a long gap. This is attributed to the deep turmoil in his family and syntax of the play, stage-ability, dialogue and other factors in personal and professional life. He intended to bring theatre to the people and that he did successfully. Colloquial tongue is structured in his dramas that indicate his intention of bridging the gap. Without breaking away from the tradition of Jayashanker Prasad Mohan Rakesh could improve the tradition enriching the tradition of drama. It won't exaggeration to say that tradition and individual talent got blended in him creating historical achievement in drama. For audience it becomes very difficult to remain unimpressed by the reality presented in the drama in such a way that one cannot escape the living effect of presentation. Modern urban life with its multi colour gets presented in his plays with touch of acute reality. His plays are critique of married life, a vision of tragic flaws in life. Kalidas's marriage with princess failed in Ashad ka Ek Din, consequently his relation with Mallika could materialize into marriage although they have love for each other as it was tragic that played significant role in their life bringing pangs of love. He tried to lead a life that was completely against his temperament. In Adhe Adhure, the husband and wife have sown no seeds of love to their children. How can they expect the tree of love. A house devoid of housewife is destined to be a halfway house as there is no housewife in the family because Savitri is a working lady.

The drama in question is the story of a single-family highlighting aspects and dynamics that disrupts relationship that remains undeveloped though living together. Different from other plays, this has experiment that of one man playing five roles of a man in black suit, Mahendranath, Singhaniaya, Jagmohan and Juneja who represent attributes are type not individuals. Husband-Mahendranath and wife-Savitri always quarrel, their elder son is unemployed, elder daughter has disturbed married life. The wife is accused of lisoning with men though the drama doesn't clear state it but only hints, that is dramatist's art and technique. It is acrimony that pervades their relationship in the house. Fed up with his life and quarrel, Mahendranath even leaves his not to come back but returns depressed. Agony and helplessness constitute the major portion of the play and life of the key characters. Still, both are not ready to goodbye to one another for their better life.

Halfway House deals with middle aged couple, Savitri and Mahendranath, the dissonance in whose lives is reflected in the fragmented lives of the children. Set in the contemporary life, the dramatist probes the life of husband and wife (man and woman relationship), with special reference to the woman who goes out to be independent economically as well as assist the family members survive. Most of the scenes and dialogues of the play are from the viewpoint of the woman-wife-Savitri. Marriage holds different ideas for both Mahendranath and his wife Savitri. They have juxtaposed views and hopes from each other; it could be said that their ideas are, may be, not their own but formulated by society and tradition and emergence of 'New Woman'. When we go through the drama and relationship of the characters, find that older patriarchal ideal of marriage and subservient positions of woman have been thematically structured with critical and analytical world of words. Beating and torture of the wife (woman) has been very pointedly penned here in such a way that makes readers realize the pain,



suffering, psychological trauma, physical wounds leading to mental agony and many more that she has to undergo only because of the social set up formatting the mindset of the husband to wife, deciding, defining, bracketing her code of conduct and limitations in life denying freedom for life- 'individuality' and 'self'. Binni, the daughter says: "I can't even recount the scenes I've witnessed in the home." (64) The play very successfully manifests the situation of the female like Savitri whose effort to better the family deserves appreciation, motivation, cooperation but the same does not happen in general, rather it is questioned and criticized on different levels by the male members of the family because they are not ready to accept change as their motive is to remain dominating, subordinating and marginalizing even though their contribution in the family as well as society can be compared to women's. Ashok, the son and Mahendranath, the husband are no exception to this observation. It is usually observed that a woman has to be follower of the family for her contacts either in the professional life or personal life. Her freedom, her choice, her relationship, her invitation and many more codes are decided by family or husband. If she does not conform to these said and unsaid rules she invites trouble for herself though she intends to act for the welfare of the any member of the family. Can't she think for better life? Can't she be allowed to talk or invite a male in house? Can't she have friendship? All her actions concerning a man outside the family circle deserves suspicion asking her explanation and forbidding for any such behavior as it is not permissible in the society for a woman. Marriage and its result is the recurring theme in the drama that underlines the roles of husband and wife. Their importance and utility in life. In this connection Walker states: " The advantages resulting from the state of marriage are that the two sexes may reciprocally satisfy the natural desires which are felt equally by each... that they equally submit the exercise of the reproductive organs to a healthful regularity; that they may equally perpetuate their common species; that they may equally be respective duties, provide for the children proceeding from their mutual union, that they may equally assist each other throughout life by reciprocal affection and cares; they may in old age receive the cares of their common progeny; and they may , in health and wellbeing, reach that age which all these circumstances generally enable married pairs to attain. (Walker 78)

In the play the dramatist has skilfully painted and presented the questions that a woman has to answer when she is accused of having contacts with men regardless of the motives. Characters as Ashok and Savitri are there, she is pressurized to go for one and leave the other. Here we might see that the son who represents his father's authority in particular and patriarchal social set up in general. Now it is discernible that she chooses self-rejecting other like that of New Woman and why not she should do that. Why self-sacrifice is for woman only? only sacrifice will decide her existence and bonding in relation. Sometimes husband, sometimes son asks her to choose to act either for herself or for family and reputation of the family. For the behavior of Singhanian that is crude, Savitri can't be hold responsible but it is male as Singhanian. It was the hope of Savitri that coming of him will be of great help to his son in securing a job as he lives a life of unemployment. No proof is found in the play that there exists any such doubtful relation between the two-Singhanian and Savitri which can be questioned or suspected. Here what is important is the direction for relations to be followed by woman given by man— Mahendranath and son Ashok. It is economic factor that created problems in the family. Savitri asserts herself as she is educated, employed and a modern woman saying no to tradition and male domination or taboos. It is very ironical here that mother wants job for his son and the son being angry with the boss of her mother says: "I don't want a job. Not through that fellow anyway." (28) Here a contradiction appears between the son and mother who opt for opposite ways. The mother-Savitri can be seen as the well wisher of the family and the son as she



prioritizes economic strength while the son feels insulted in getting job through medium of his mother.

In an interview Rakesh expresses about the play and Savitri in the following way that constitutes his idea of the central character :

This woman is the central character and I want the four men to be played by the same actor. What I want to indicate by that is that it's not the individual who's responsible for his situation, for he would have made the same choice no matter what, regardless of the situation. Any choice any one makes has a certain irony in it, for things turn out the same regardless of the choice. (38)

Walker comments regarding marriage and role of each other, "History proves that marriage is essential to well being of human society." (Walker 80) It is the conviction of Mahendranath that husband is all in all for wife, he can order, he can decide her conduct, course of action. He does not care for what she wants from life, from him and from family. Rather she is given the articles to please thinking that she needs them, she is for them, she does not wish what man wishes because she is woman. On the other hand, Savitri says regarding her expectations from marriage and man : "What is it that makes a man really a man?" ... Doesn't being a man involve something more? Personality? Strength of character? (68) Her speech suggests that it is personality of man that is required in relationship that is to accept marriage not as subordinating a woman but as partner of life, completing each other, as what one need other supplies. It is marriage that demonstrates social acceptance of each other for continuing life. It is not sacrifice of self, freedom, individuality among others. Being a critic of her husband's biased and patriarchal attitude towards her, she comments: "That same Mahendra who smiles meekly among his friends, becomes a fiend when he comes home. One never knows when he comes home. One never knows when he may snatch one's eyes out or drink one's life-blood!" (71) Here the words 'fiend' and 'friend' are very remarkable in relation to defining the treatment of Mahendranath. We can say that Savitri indirectly seems to suggest that Mahendranath should be friendly to her in their relationship. But he is fiend like for her because of patriarchal set up in the society. She symbolizes a new woman who is not ready to submit to tradition that enslaves woman in the name of marriage. The dramatist seems to put forth his idea of marriage and relationship of different genders conveying 'neither be dominated, nor be dominating', 'snatching of freedom is not relationship.' The relations are to support, motivate, betterment, not creating dislike for each other while living under the same roof together. 'Half a man' is the phrase used by Savitri signifies that her expectations from marriage, from husband like any other woman have been shattered as Mahendranath disqualifies as life partner to complete as it remains incomplete for her. However, at the same time it is also a question that a man is man not God who is complete and relationship is to accept it. Critical exploration of Mahendranath's attitude highlights that his is dominating mind set that calls for analytical study and supports Savitri. In marriage as patriarchal set up mentions in practical that 'authority' is husband not wife though the wife earns bread for family accepting the world 'outside' home. Twenty years have passed since their marriage and now Savitri is earner but she is denied 'authority'. The question is 'why'? it is her loyalty to family, desire to fulfill her needs of life that made him to go for work but in return to this in her family what she gets is really compelling and probing to a lover of humanism.

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