

Fragmentation of Domestic Space in Mohan Rakesh's Halfway-House (Adhe-Adhure)

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Abstract:

Halfway House is a play written by Mohan Rakesh, a well-known playwright of Hindi Literature. The play explores the life of an urban middle-class family, led by Mahendranath and Savitri and their three children. Savitri's decision to earn money as the sole breadwinner causes discomfort in the domestic space. Due to modernization, the values and traditions in post-independence India have drastically changed. This has influenced the private and domestic life of the Indians. Especially, the man-woman relationships have completely changed. Once, the man was the center of the family; he was predominantly involved in every decision-making. Due to the changing scenario and the acceptance of modernization, women were allowed to have education and began to reject the traditional pressure of society. Day by day, education percolated from the upper classes to the middle classes of society. Cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai have largely made the industrial and technological development that created numerous opportunities in the field of education and service sectors. The present paper explores the theme of fragmentation of domestic space in Mohan Rakesh's Halfway House. Being a theatre writer, Mohan Rakesh seriously portrays the issue of fragmentation of domestic space in middle-class families. He projects Savitri and Mahendranath as members of a middle-class family who face the disadvantages of modern development in post-independence India.

Keywords: Mohan Rakesh, Adhe-Adhure, Halfway-House, Savitri, Domestic space and fragmentation.

Introduction:

Halfway-House is the English translation of Adhe-Adhure, a play written by Mohan Rakesh in the Hindi language in 1969. Mohan Rakesh is well known for his versatile writing. He has made ample experiments with literary genres. He exposes contemporary issues in short stories, plays, novels and collections of essays. He has breathed new life into the Hindi Theatre. His other plays include "Aashadh Ka Ek Din", "Lehro ke Rajhans", and one-act plays such as "Ande Ke Chilke" and "Raat Bitane Tak", which have created history in the Indian Theatre. The present paper examines the theme of fragmentation in domestic space in Mohan Rakesh's Halfway House. He presents Savitri and Mahendranath as the prominent characters of the play. Compared to Mahendranath, the playwright gives more weightage to Savitri, a well-educated woman character, and an experiment with a new woman character in Hindi Theatre, which produced more repercussions in the 1970s of Indian society. Savitri is allowed freedom of education, liberty of going out freely, and the choice to live life in her own way. Savitri challenges the traditional policies of patriarchy by having extramarital relations with her boss and friends. It creates a communication gap among the family members of Savitri.

Mohan Rakesh used to believe strongly in individualistic self-identity and self-respect. In most of his literary works, the changing relationships of man and woman are frequently projected by Mohan Rakesh. He would feel that in post-independence India, especially in the 1960s and 70s, due to industrialization and technological development, middle-class families were getting opportunities for education and jobs in government as well as private services. It made them gain self-awareness and self-respect. They also became aware of their own happiness and desires.

In the post-independence era, mostly the relationship of husband and wife is crucially impacted. The conventional idea of the marriage institution is being questioned. In this play, the married life of Savitri and Mahendranath is not based on the emotions, love, and mutual understanding required between husband and wife for domestic stability. They lack physical intimacy and also lack respect for each other. This not only affects the husband and wife's relationship but also their children's relationship with them. The domestic life of Savitri and Mahendranath has entirely collapsed. Each of the family members has lost their emotional bonding and connection with each other. Things like pyjamas of "Bara Sahib" Mahendranath, Ashok's "magazine clippings", and the "torn books" of Kinni in the First Act of the play describe the torn and disordered state of family members. The damaged family life does not unite the family members. Mohan Rakesh throws light on two different views; one follows the traditional patriarchal view of controlling the family, though he is not doing anything, and the other one believes in a modern approach that allows freedom of education and decision. The playwright shares his own experience of married life, which was not very good for him. For him, marriage restricts individuals' freedom and independence. Marriage is like a gas chamber where life is stuck. Each one in married life feels suppressed, losing liberty and happiness, and eventually gets suffocated, which leads to giving up all the domestic responsibilities to feel free.

The entire play revolves around Savitri's personality. She is the protagonist of the play. She is married to Mahendranath, who has lost his job; now he is not doing anything. They have two daughters, Binni and Kinni and a son, Ashok. When the play opens, Mohan Rakesh makes clear that he is talking about the matriarchal family where Savitri is the head of the family; therefore, she goes for a job, earns bread and money for her family members. Hence, she expects help from her husband and children to maintain the house in proper order. Initially, she tries to keep her family members happy and fulfil their needs. Savitri has ideal views about her husband, expecting equal treatment from him, who takes care of the family and takes the entire responsibility on his shoulders. His views and dreams of life partner get crushed when Mahendranath beats and harasses her regularly. Instead of loving her, he humiliates and disrespects Savitri daily. The subordinate treatment she receives from her husband makes her stand and accomplish all her dreams independently. While carrying family responsibilities and earning money for the domestic needs, instead of appreciating and supporting Savitri, Mahendranath humiliates her. She tries her best to provide financial support to the family by working at Singhaniya's office, though that help is not enough to fulfill the daily needs and educational requirements of Kinni. Her every effort to reset the family wealth is always disturbed either by her husband Mahendranath or her son Ashok. From no one she gets respect and emotional support while doing work. They like to have arguments with her and deny every decision she makes in favour of her family members. Savitri realizes her inability to please the family members. She is aware of her husband's bankruptcy and debt; so Mahendranath neither takes family responsibilities nor supports her emotionally. The regular humiliation from her husband and inability to fulfil her desires, as well as Mahendranath's nature of casting doubt on Savitri's character, destroys her inner peace and emotional bonding with the family members. She comes with the conclusion, that she is isolated in the

family; neither husband nor children cares her. Her husband is a failed man; he has not succeeded either in caring his family or in running his business successfully. So being an unsuccessful man, according to Savitri, Mahendranath is not able to complete her dreams. Hence, she decides to get detached from all the family members including Mahendranath and live life on her own terms and conditions. To confirm her decision, she breaks the necklace, which was a symbol of family ties. Initially she has the illusion she would find a man who will fulfil her desire. Therefore, she completely changes the track of life, and keeps extramarital affairs with her boss Shivjeet Singhaniya, Jagmohan and Juneja at different times. Particularly, with Jagmohan, she feels he will prove to be a perfect life partner. In every relationship, she gets nervous, and eventually Mr Juneja makes her realize that no one is perfect and complete on earth. In marriage, every individual has to compromise and flexible to achieve their dreams. Savitri's dream of spending her remaining life with a perfect man gets destroyed automatically. All the hopes, dreams and expectations from a life partner are completely scattered and crushed. Savitri and Mahendranath's unhealthy family life largely impacts to fragment the domestic space eventually.

Conclusion:

Mohan Rakesh's play Halfway House is written against the background of pre- and post-independence Indian social life. It was the transition period for Indian society; so people get confused to cope with this transition from traditional to modern culture. Therefore, everything was in the mood of change. The current play revolves around the family of Savitri and Mahendranath. Every member of their family is in a state of fragmentation as it affects to increase communication gap between husband Mahendranath and wife Savitri. Their lack of love and affection for each other leads to detach the children from them. Mahendranath is a symbol of patriarchy and the chief of the family. On the other hand, Savitri, a representative of a modern educated woman, can accept all the challenges and wants to be independent, which ultimately results in fragmenting the domestic space in Halfway House.

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