

RESEARCH ARTICLE



CHANGING DYNAMICS OF MEN AND WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN SOCIETY WITH REFERENCE TO *HALFWAY HOUSE* BY MOHAN RAKESH

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[doi: 10.33329/joell.7.2.13](https://doi.org/10.33329/joell.7.2.13)



ABSTRACT

Indian society has been marking a transitional phase where stereo type roles assigned for both men and women have been drastically changing in urban cluster. Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* (Aadhe-adhure), a modern iconic play projects the pain of urban middle class man and woman who are caught between the traditional and modern transitional path of their roles in the family. It is an epoch making work on the changing human relations and changing dynamics of the man and woman relationship. Its central character, Savitri, a working woman and mother of three, is portrayed as a lady filled with frustration of her unemployed hopeless husband and son who are unable to take out their duties of the family that creates a disappointing scene in the family. At the same it also brings to our notice that man is also somewhere uncomfortable with the changing scenario of roles of male and females in a family. This paper highlights the changing roles of women in the modern urban setup and the changing dynamics of family as projected in the play. It highlights the materialistic compulsions of the modern man; resulting in the disintegration of human relations, the loneliness of man, the sense of suffocation and disgust, boredom and the search for quick and easy escape routes. The desire to look for completeness may look like everyman's essential and irresolvable problem. We find all characters in this play incomplete (in one or the other way) who are caught in their own predicaments but the worst part is that women are more incomplete than men. They stand as hollow object with no sense of pleasure and satisfaction. This paper also looks to read the status of men and women in the family and society in the present context. Traditional beliefs and practices have been changing, heralding a new age, opening new horizons of social spaces where typical rigid social look outs are undergone to the drastic changes. *Halfway house* locates modern Indian women into the modern social space of family where she appears challenging her traditional role assigned by the society and takes a new flight of a changed life for herself.

Keywords: *Traditional beliefs, New- horizons, Heralding, Drastic, Concerns.*



Mohan Rakesh's Aadhe- adhure is basically a modern play which deals with the theme of relation in a family in the urban set-up. It propagates for the social transition in present age from traditional to modern age where Savitri, the mother of three develops a strong quest in herself to liberate from restricted limitations imposed by the society. She is one who one side proves her as best mother and wife, sacrifices her dreams for the family but at the other side she rejects rigid beliefs of masculine domination but this fills in her a sense of hollowness and incompleteness in her relations within the family members. It projects microscopic picture of middle urban class family in metropolis and reflects the changing roles and values of the family. The play deals with the multiple questions on broader socio cultural context at the realistic ground where a woman hangs between modern and traditional dilemma of stereotype role.

Judith Butler, an American philosopher, states that "your gender is constructed through your own repetitive performance of gender." She believes that it is a common practice that people follow in any particular society. In context of Indian society this gender division and classification of role and responsibilities is determined by the mind set and the belief system that Indians do believe. She is very clear while asserting that this kind of gender stereotype in Indian society is created by people themselves for both men and women in the society. A girl is always reminded of her gender and imposed limitations every day in her each action. Parents themselves create this kind of gender stereotype in the family in a very distinct way to clear the idea of expected roles and responsibilities to be carried out by both males and females in the family and the same is continued by the society lifelong. Freud, a great psychologist and philosopher also opines in her theory of 'how a person's identity is modelled' that if a man or a woman behaves according to the standard roles set by the society then he/she is considered normal person. But breaking the trend is always restricted and opposed at the pretext of set social rules and is hardly accepted the notion of change in the society.

The concept of family evolves as key concept in Indian society around which life peeps and seeps into Indian culture ultimately accommodating, formulating and enriching Indian literature in vernacular languages and in English language as well. Family is a space in which relations are nurtured and grown; where life is coloured in multiple diverse manner with exuberance of pleasure and delight. It is a space where life blooms and recreations go on in a rhythmic manner where everyone in the family plays his/her part in a very responsible manner. It is a space where love and respect flows in the veins of the family. This is a collective existence where everyone exhibits his/her calibre to empower it. It is a place where everyone is granted liberty and treated with respect and dignity.

Woman in the family is a very significant person whose role in the family is very much important. It cannot be ignored that she is the pillar of family and at the same she is the essence for her fellow partner. Her presence enthral the emotions and accompanies her partner to shoulder the responsibilities of the family. Therefore her contribution in the family must be given due consideration and she should be encouraged and promoted to participate in almost decisions taken in the family. It is very important which cannot be negotiated by anything except the reward and recognition to her accomplishments.

But when we evaluate and examine the fact to come up with the ground reality of women's status, we find that woman's status in society has been changing since ages but in a very disappointing slow manner. Gradual developments acquired by Indian society influenced the social structure of the country in a very diverse manner which sometimes promoted the concerns and lookouts of women but sometimes it kept them aloof of their well beings. Gender treatment had' has been an issue which imposed a great challenge to the female community regardless of their positions in the family like mother, wife, daughter, house wife, working woman etc. The development of media, corporate and entertainment Industry have played very significant role in representing the today's women and her role in family and society. They collectively reflect the spirit



of modern women who was restricted to greater extent by typical rigid dominant muscular male community. This development explored the rich varied dimensions of women's strength, placing her in the prime important positions not only in the family but also in the family and society too. This becomes a direct reflection of the Indian women's role in contemporary Indian society and its expectations from women. She has been breaking the binary to redefine and re-explore her position in existing system.

Woman is a role model who transfers the values, manners and ethics from generations to generation in the young generations of the family. She also implants other values she holds in herself like sacrificing, selflessness, love, respect, devotion, care, attachment with husband and kids etc. By this she reflects her interior traits and beliefs. But at the same her traits keep her into the gender stereotypical roles assigned by the society. This further indicates that women are considered somewhere secondary and subalterns. They need the support of male community for their approval and concerns to keep continue with. It is the demerit of our belief system that poses a great challenge before the women to come out of the trauma she has been imposed by this masculine community. Women find themselves helpless before this masculine dominating community to create any individual identity and recognition.

Savitri is such a female character, who opposes the role of traditional stereotype Indian woman and prepares herself to be fit in the new changing role. No doubt she finds the things very difficult to manage and balance, yet she strives hard to prove her strength. She finds herself divided into the role of typical Indian women and modern Indian women. Sometimes she feels obsessed with the burden of office responsibilities and home responsibilities but at the same she sets new example to the society. There is a strong desire in her to liberate herself from the traditional role and restrictions assigned by the society. She avoids to create controversies in the family and tries to be happy with what she has. Like typical Indian women she does not ignore her personal concerns in the way

of winning the affection of her husband. She is one who performs the daily chores of the house not to please her husband but to take up the challenges and to prove her strength.

Savitri like middle class Indian females actually, have been breaking the ice towards traditional role of women in the family and society assigned by the masculine dominating community. She consistently works hard in the family and office to carry out the responsibilities, sacrifices her own choices, dreams and concerns for the collective growth of the family members. She never takes into consideration of her own care rather devotes her everything for the family. But still her husband doubts on her sincere efforts to care the children and bear the domestic chores. Her contribution towards the family is greater than expectation yet her husband does not recognise. He blames her for everything that falls short in the family and that happens wrong in the family. She is one who stands at the centre of transition.

This, in turn, creates a vicious circle of the never-changing role of women and the expectations that the society expects from them. Like these typical women she also finds herself caught in the grip of ever changing role of the women. Like other protagonists of representative Indian authors she is also submissive, soft-spoken and sacrificing. Despite the fact that the man in life (who is her husband) ill-treats her, ignores her contributions towards the family and even doesn't hesitate to humiliate her. Her sacrifices made for the family fall short before the ego of her husband. Her self-respect is ignored and she is compelled to compromise with her concerns. Then only the ego of her 'man' is satisfied and in return she somehow saves her marriage and lives 'happily' in so called way with him. This patriarchal portrayal, that even if the man ill-treats you, you ought to be nice and loving to him and let him have his way, gives a wrong message to the society. It feels surprising that how a man can be stout in treating his own wife whom he is supposed to love truly.

By observing the character of Savitri, it is very clear that society still hesitates to grant the



recognition to the contribution of females in the family. Still masculinity is in the background that restricts the males to accept the changes with open mind and heart to promote the females to set the highest success in term of changing roles of a woman. Savitri like woman proves herself as best mother, wife and care taker in the family but still she has to rely on the mercy of males let it be her husband or her boss or her son. Still she finds herself helpless after sacrificing everything for the family. No doubt she puts every effort of her best to improve the situations and fulfil the needs of the family but she has never been given any credit for her contributions and sacrifices. I feel this as the worst part of negligence of the Indian husbands who still hang themselves in stereotype gender role and expect an imbalanced contribution from the female partners. It is the time when new changes are arrived at the doorstep which we need to welcome. We as society need to accept the change and adopt it in new perspective to secure the happiness and satisfaction of the children and the family. The contribution of mother, wife and daughter must be given due respect and recognition. Without it we as a society cannot go ahead and be success as a society and nation.

In search of an ideal husband who would be a complete man in all respect she seeks assistance and help from one person to another. She is in search of a person who would be rich like Juneja, learned like Shivjeet, high-positioned like Singhania, sweet-tongued and suave like Jagmohan and handsome and liberal like Manoj. This quest of her remains unfulfilled till the end as she moves in and out in many relationships without any satisfaction. Although Savitri's relations with men seem problematic in itself, the play tries to conclude the point that this is nothing but an existentialist quest for meaning in life. She is a modern woman who reflects her urge to have things in better way but is never supported by her own husband.

The absurdity of life is very well depicted at the end of the play. The search for identity and meaning in life is a major issue of every urban inmate and this is best articulated in the play right from the beginning. Her husband, too, is filled with

the sense of the absurdity of identity who feels that he is like amorphous and undefined. Her like women are compelled to live in the shadows of the man (father/brother/lover/husband/son, etc). These men control the decisions of their life, without entertaining their concerns, consensus, individual needs, desires, expectations, etc. Savitri, a working wife and mother, poses multiple questions to the Indian society regarding the voice and representation of Indian women in contemporary time. She is such a woman who takes the challenge to interrogate the present job hierarchy overtaken by male. Even she also interrogates the typical role of an Indian woman assigned by Indian patriarchal system. But at the same she reflects her urge for recognition and identity which is ignored by her husband, a typical head of the family who is unemployed yet assumes himself to be head of the family.

The quest of completeness is visible not only in Savitri but in in all the characters. The economic crisis and his losing the identity of being the bread-earner of the family had altered her husband's position too in the house into a non-entity. It has adversely affected his mind and heart. He is immensely unhappy to be regarded only as a stamp of respectability to be used only when the need arises. In this newly created condition of changed power equations, Mahendranath searches for meaning in new relations build on a sense of understanding and mutual respect, as is the case with Juneja. He explores his own predicament to define his position in terms of his non-utility and unsuccessfulness. Then after he seeks solace in temporary acts of rebellion involving leaving the house and seeking meaning and mental peace in his companionship with Juneja. He lacks the conviction and inability to take independent decisions. Yet, Mahendranath intends to keep continue with patriarchal control and restriction on Savitri's autonomy.

Mahesh Dattani in his play *Dance like a Man*, says that a woman in a man's world may be considered being progressive. But a man in a woman's world is pathetic (166). This statement made by Mahesh Dattani clearly complements the status and consequence of Mahendranath like husbands who



too find themselves in new dilemma of changing roles for both men and women. No Matter how modern we are; it is more important that how much we are opened and liberal to adopt the changes of modern age where our gender locates us in a newly created space that makes a new identity. But if we challenge this change by stereotype beliefs, it will develop controversies in present scenario. . It is clearly portrayed that a woman like Savitri cannot limit herself as expected by old traditional rigid patriarchal beliefs. It is the time to wake up, to voice, to represent and to empower one self. If the role of husband is important, similarly and equally the role of wife too is important. Her significance in the family cannot be side-lined and ignored in today's scenario. She must be given due respect and recognition for her contribution towards the family responsibilities such as rearing the children, caring them and carrying the house hold responsibilities. She is one who is in the centre of family whose existence lies in the central pool of the family. Therefore she must be given power to decide and act. Her consensus for any decision, taken in the family, must be considered and entertained.

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