

# The Role of Women in Mohan Rakesh's *Half –Way House*

## Abstract

The motive of this paper is to describe the process of making dominance either by force or consent. The situation or status of women and the 'struggle to importance' is shown in the play 'Half Way House'. The aim is to make the readers aware of the fact that even after a long time of Independence of India in 1947, the gender problems both at national and regional level still exist in any of the form both at regional or national level. This is an attempt to evaluate the status of women and how they are struggling for their rights and power and transforming them in the male dominated world. There is still the importance of Gender that is considered in technological and modern age.

**Keywords:** Dominance, Gender, Struggle, Transforming, Rights, Force, Consent, Regional, Male Dominated, Technological, Modern and Power.

## Introduction

There are number of writers who have written a lot on this burning gender issue prevailing in the society. Mohan Rakesh is one of the famous and renowned playwrights in Indian writing, and plays written by him shows that he has deeply raised his voice and felt the need of individuals identity. He was very much concerned and involved in what is happening in society and within the family. Mohan Rakesh is regarded as one of the important figures in Indian theatre. Mohan Rakesh as a playwright through the women characters in his plays has shown the hegemony of traditional power structures in society and the influence of male characters in the back of the minds of women. Mohan Rakesh presents the theme on a domestic level. Silence and violence are enough to portray the women characters in 'Half-way House'. The play focuses on the actual condition of women who are living in a society under burden which is dominated by males. The truth is that the actual position of the women makes them tragic figures. Some of the critics have called this play as anti-woman. In the play, it has been shown that materialism becomes supreme and there is a class where all human bonds of love and concern for one another have been replaced by materialistic compulsions and things or stage become critical or life seems to be hell. In the play, every member of family is out of his joints, and each one of them drags over each other making a home not a home but a hell. In *Half-way House*, the women characters play major role. Both types of characters i.e. men and women with differences in nature have been portrayed in the play by Mohan Rakesh. Men have been shown as passive or flat characters wherever the women characters play prominent role and are bold, modern and round characters who for their identity need freedom and raise their voice against violence as they are modern women of the technological age. Here begins the breaking of relationships, and this shows the problems of domestic-household. In the play, Savitri plays the significant role and is the sole-provider of the family, and this fact makes her arrogant and aggressive towards her husband Mahendranath. Both Mahendranath and Savitri try to dominate the family but on this issue subsequently start fighting which affected the mind of their three children that is Binni, Ashok and Kinni. It is just because of the domestic-violence at home, Binni, the elder daughter, had run away from the house and got married to Manoj, who was of no match to Binni and later this bonding proved to be an unsuccessful marriage. The conflict and fight on petty issues between Mahendranath and Savitri also affected Ashok as he became a loiterer and indulge himself in passing time here and there, and not helping the family economically. As for Kinni, she became a spoilt child due to lack of parental control and supervision. Though the women and especially the major character, Savitri becomes the victim but then she realizes that all men are equal in nature. They treat the women low in this



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male dominated society. There comes a change in her nature after meeting Juneja. The whole family is divided and starts living as per their own wish, style and in a modern way.

Savitri is such a character living in today's society and facing lots of problems and struggling for their identity. In this play, Savitri has been shown as a modern woman who is not dependent on their husbands for their living. Savitri asserts that a woman is not merely a wife, mother and daughter, but also a free human being who has her own dreams, ambitions, aspirations, goals in life. Savitri experiences after meeting Juneja that all men are alike with different masks. Mohan Rakesh wrote a long speech for Savitri, to be spoken towards the end of the play, in her encounter with Juneja. The high ambition of the women characters become the cause of the ruining of the family of Savitri. The readers can see Savitri in two roles in the play. One the traditional wife, home-bound, family bound woman and the new woman, who is conscious of what she has been doing for the family, who has seen the glitter of the materialistic World i.e. out of home and believes that her self-fulfilment lies in walking out of the family and fulfilling her desires. This is the psychological mind set up of her and the new Savitri with change exist. Savitri after struggling for her freedom and identity faces many problems as she finds that the world for which she was aspiring is completely different and beyond her imagination. She is not able to leave the family because she loves her family from the heart. The traditional Self is still within Savitri though she has changed her outer appearance.

Savitri as the representative of women reaches to such a stage where she finds herself to sail in two boats –they remain in notions of morality and traditional values on one hand, and, on the other hand, aspire to join the ranks of the rich and the wealthy in the process lose out on their peace of mind and happiness because what they want is impossible. The study of women characters in 'Half-Way House' show the complexities in man woman relationship which arises out of emergence of a new economically independent woman and the changed equation of power between the sexes within marriage. What Mohan Rakesh has shown is a kind of role-reversal and subverted the traditional power structures in his play. Savitri and her husband, Mahendranath, are under the influence of patriarchal culture and wish to lead the life in that notion. It makes them think that man is a bread-earner and that woman is a house keeper. Though patriarchal culture is common to all, individual differ in their perception and absorption of it. In this play, Savitri is more determined for identity than her husband. This is very much contrary to the patriarchal cultural norms and thoughts. Savitri has more will power in the entire family and for proving this, she takes up a job and feeds the family but her husband Mahendranath do not even help her in her house work. This upsets the cultural norms of patriarchy and the mind of Savitri. Mahendranath is a man and wants to be manly so refuses to take up house work and even does not try to find employment for him.

Savitri plays both the role of a man and a woman, a masculine role of earning the bread for the family and the feminine role of keeping the house. In return she does not even get any appreciation from any of the family members. Her husband even does not support her in any of the household work. She seems to enjoy more freedom by working outside than a traditional wife but as a woman she cannot break the patriarchal fetters completely to realize her dreams. Mahendranath can neither play his masculine role successfully. Both of them lack the quality of spontaneity to come into a direct conflict which has created a crisis in their family. The crisis only begins when the conflict between husband and wife starts and instead of understanding each other they indulge in fighting.

Through this play and the characters of women, the issue of gender injustice is quite predominant in a country like India where woman are not completely free from the bonds of society, and are still confined to the four wall of place called 'home'. This shows that females are still suffering in a patriarchal society. Women are denied their individual identity and existence in a male dominated society. Savitri manages to convey the impression that her life is a curse, and that her husband, Mahendranath is the cause for the curse of her life. Savitri represents the needs of women – to marry a man who is economically sound and do progress in life. Mohan Rakesh has depicted marriage as a social prison where the life sometimes becomes a hell. Mohan Rakesh depicts the differences in the personalities of man and woman caused by gender distinction of patriarchal culture in Half-way House. The domestic violence and the silencing of women help the readers to analyse the fragmented personality of the modern human being and the status of women. We are living in the fragments of life. We are actually born whole human beings, but the division of labour based on gender breaks us into male and female fragments. The two deformed fragments are called men and women. The woman characters in Half-way House act as the voice of freedom and argument in oppression to the social and legal inequalities commonly imposed upon women by a patriarchal culture. It is the questioning of male authority and the shift of power from male to female. The assertion of women and their quest to attain freedom is shown inside the four walls of Half-way House. Mohan Rakesh's 'Half-Way House' is one of the significant dramas that powerfully portrays this modern malady, transcends time and space and shows the eternal human predicament. Each of the characters experiences a sense of isolation, loneliness, alienation, absence of communication, loss of identity and loss of values. Mohan Rakesh depicts the domestic-violence of women who are confined to the four wall of a place called house or home. Women have to suffer a lot during her life in Indian society. In the play, 'Half-Way House' women characters are shown as assertive and active. Women suffer a double exploitation as women and as members of working class. The central root of the problem is the system of patriarchy which leads to all kinds of discrimination against and

devaluation of women. The concept of gender is like the villain and has to be understood and evaluated by an individual if it has to be tackled in the coming years. Modern man has shrunk in spirit; languish in confusion, frustration, disillusionment and alienation. Through the women characters in 'Half-way House' one comes to know that women are trapped in the contemporary social or domestic pattern which makes them slaves and gives them a sense of incompleteness.

#### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of study on this topic is to make the society aware that though we are living in the modern age i.e. 21<sup>st</sup> century, but our thoughts and feelings for women are still old. Women of today also need identity of self so that they can be called as a human being and not a thing.

#### **Conclusion**

I conclude this paper with the remark that Women should be treated equally as the men is treated. Only then our society will progress and reach

the Zenith of success. The women should not be exploited on any issue. They must be treated as one of the important part of the family, society and nation. Then the differences in the opinion of gender issue would be vanished forever.

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