IJRAR.ORG E-ISSN: 2348-1269, P-ISSN: 2349-5138

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND ANALYTICAL REVIEWS (IJRAR) | IJRAR.ORG

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

DISRUPTION OF FAMILY LIFE AND IT'S ASPECTS AS PRESENTED IN MOHAN RAKESH'SPLAY *HALFWAY HOUSE*

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ABSTRACT:

Indian society has been undergoing a transitional phase where stereo type roles assigned forboth 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.

The traditional family structure was at the verge of collapse and the system of joint familywas getting replaced by small and nuclear families with the changed gender roles. In India, Pre and Post independence, the concept of woman, was drawn from the scriptures andmythologies and modelled on women like Savitri and Sita, thus, working outside theirtraditional domains had no place in the typical patriarchal society hitherto but post independence women, encouraged by Indian constitution, education and reformists,strengthened their voice for equal rights and unbiased working opportunities. It is an epoch making work on the changing human relations and changing dynamics of the man and woman relationship and family life. 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 havebeen changing, heralding a new age, opening new horizons of social spaces where typical rigid social look-outs are undergone to the drastic changes.

Key words: Challenges, Family, Absurdity, Modernity, Patriarchy.

INTRODUCTION

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 microscopicpicture 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 ofstereotype role.

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 whichrelations 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 enthrals 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 inalmost all decisions taken in the family. It is very important which cannot be negotiated by anything except the reward and recognition to her accomplishments.

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 inIndian 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 wayto 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 societythen 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.

Under the British imperial power India got exposed to western philosophies, Indian reformersand the reformist movements associated with them like that of Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Sarasvati, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Mahatama Gandhi, Jyotiba Phule etc. In the twentieth century India, the effect of economic expansion, industrial towns triggered the population migration from rural territoriesto urban. This economic change resulted in the social change leading towards shift from joint families to nuclear families, which were more mobile. The new nuclear families consist of two adult parents including a male and a female and their dependent children, living a comparatively mobile and independent life. Independent India and the Indian constitution liberated Indian women legally, by providing them equal rights as citizens. The constitution rejects the concept of women being weaker to their male counterparts, in principle. In post independence India, education and economic independence provided strong footing to modern educated women. This was purely a new trend following independence of the countryand was seen as a major transformation in the gender roles of the members of the society.

Similarly, there was a drastic change, by default, in the field of art and literature with newsubject matter and issues of social reality as the new literary prism. Although the country gained freedom from its political slavery it still struggled to improve the socio-economic condition of its citizens. This was the time when Indian literature, especially the plays andnovels, contributed a lot in highlighting the social-economic problems among the masses.The tradition of writing historical and anti-British plays was soon replaced by the social plays.

Commenting upon this aspect of Indian literature written in Hindi, renowned critic and writerDiana Dimitrova remarks that this tendency of writing social in plays among Indian writers after the independence was developed on western tradition. She writes:

> The influence of western drama grew and the social problem plays in Hindi thrived. This predominantly social messages of modern Hindi drama was in perfect conformity with theideology of progressivism, the ideas of Gandhi and Indian National Congress, and the political orientation of the J.L. Nehru government toward the soviet Union and Marxism. (Diana, 2004, p. 365)

Various writer who wrote during this period of post independence dexterously utilised the power of dramatic craft in illustrating the social and psychological issues faced by the people."The preoccupation with social issues led in turn to a new 'rebellion' in the 1960's and a newshift in the subject matter" (Diana, 2004, p. 12). **Mohan Rakesh** played an important role in highlighting such social issues with his dramatic insights and skilful characterization presented through his plays.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review of a few research articles based on the play and the playwright is asfollows:
Dharwadekar,Aparna. in the article, " Mohan Rakesh , Modernism , and the PostColonial Present" (2008) has
mentioned that Rakesh saw ordinary city life , confronting the fragmentation as an important characteristic of modernity. According to her Rakesh has used the private space of home as the testing ground of familial, social and political relations.

Saraswat,Surbhi. in the article, " The Quest of Completeness : Mohan Rakesh „s Aadhe-adhure" (2014) has highlighted that the play Halfway House projects the changinghuman relations and in particular changing dynamics in the man-woman relationship. explore the Indian English plays under the influence of existentialism by citing the examples of several famous plays of prominent Indian playwrights including Mohan Rakesh.

Srivastava,Reetika.in the article , " Aadhe-adhure : A Critique of Contemporary Domestic Life" (2018) opines that the play deals with the theme of breakdown in relationsand distortion of the values that manage to keep family and society integrated.
From the literature review it is apparent that a few researchers have analyzed the play fromdifferent angles.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the importance of „Acceptance" in carrying forward a stable marital life.
- To examine the female psyche presented in the text.
- To examine the impact of disrupture and broken relationship in family bonding.

- To study the impact of parents' incompatibility on their children.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Does "Acceptance"booster mutual understanding leading to a harmonious conjugallife?
- Does conflict between parents affect the lives of their children?
- What are the things that a wife, especially a working woman expects from herhusband?
- What attributes should have to be a good family?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of research , the play **Halfway House** was thoroughly studied . Secondary data analysis of research papers , critical essays and websites was done to make the assessment more effective and logical.

ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

Halfway House the play undertaken for study is a translated version of Mohan Rakesh's Hindi drama *Adhe-Adhure* written in 1968 after two decades of India's independence and first performed in March 1969. The translation of the original text is done by Bindu Batra and it is taken as the primary source for the current exegesis. In this seminal work Mohan Rakesh highlights the problems that emerged in the urban society of post-independence India. It was a challenge for the middle class society to stay united and earn livelihood as socio-economic circumstances were constantly challenging that led to rupture in the traditional family setup. Dharwadker and Bhargava (2008) in their article "Mohan Rakesh, Modernism and the Postcolonial Present" remark:

Adhe-Adhure as a drama of urban dysfunction which combines realism with several structuralinnovations to accommodate the psychodrama of home and family, the privileged narrative ofrealism in modern western theatre, to the Indian metropolis (p. 139).

Further, they quoted Om Shivpuri in the same article who described it as "… the first meaningful Hindi play about contemporary life… its characters, situations and psychologicalstates are realistic and believable… it has the capability of grasping the tension of contemporary life" (Dharwadker and Bhargava, 2008, as cited in Shivpuri, 2003, p. 154). At the very beginning of the play the dramatist questions man-woman relationship and gender roles in a contemporary middle class Indian society. Structurally, the play is not divided in acts and only two long episodes appear with an interval between them. The play opens in a house of the unnamed "man number one" and "woman" with the entry of a man in black suit who also serves as the narrator of the play. In the prologue itself, the theme of exploration of identity is introduced when "men in black" exclaims "who am I" (Mohan, 2013, p. 2)? He calls himself 'amorphous' and 'undefined' to explain his position and the challenges he was facing to exhibit his identity in contemporary society. Furthermore, pessimism and absurdity again can be traced in the comments of the narrator in Prologue when he asserts that no matter what the circumstances and consequences were, the search for identity would always be continued as an absurd, undefined and irrational act. he maintains that there is nothing likeseparate individual identity and "… the fact is that there is something of me in each one of you and that is why, whether on or off stage, I have no separate identity" (Mohan, 2013, p. 5).Further, this notion of identity and meaninglessness can be best understood through the character of the Savitri who looks to fulfil the void and motive in her married life. She asks "why does one get married? In order to fulfil a need… an inner…void, if you like; to be self- sufficient… complete" (Mohan, 2013, p. 69). Since her husband was unable to satisfy her inner desires, frustrated Savitri seeks marital happiness out of the marital bond which has been considered as an impious act in the society. Dilip Kumar Basu (2013) editor of the *Halfway House* sees it as "The desire to look for 'completeness' in the 'other' may look like Everyman's essential and unresolvable problem, and may vaguely place her in the center of an Absurdist drama where the search may be considered tragic/ridiculous." (p. iv).

Mahendranath, the husband of Savitri, is also in the search of re-establishing his lost identity by making an attempt to establish his business in partnership with his friend Juneja. He had been confined in the four walls of his house and his position of not earning a penny has degraded his respect in the family. This loss of identity in the family affected his mind and heart badly. He was trying to regain the lost ground but his financial position did not support him. He admits "… silent acceptance, perpetual snubs, constant insults, is all that I deserve after so many years" (Mohan, 2013, p. 26). The loss of control in the family hurts his ego andhe does not want to be like "only as a stamp of respectability to be used only when the need arises" (Mohan, 2013, p. 27). The constant accusation of being indolent in the home by wife developed an inferiority complex in his character. In the midst of this emotional and mental crisis Juneja's friendship proved a repository of love, respect, identity and comfort. The character of Mahendranath is the real representation of the problems faced by the middle class in Post-Colonial India, where individual is meaningful only if he is meaningfully monetarily. He being unemployed, without economic base, fails to understand Savitri, his wife. He gives more significance to his friends than his wife. He is dependent on his friends' advice on every matter as he can not share himself with his wife, on whom he is financially dependent. Being jobless he feels suffocated and blames his wife for his downfall. He accepts his professional defeat and surrenders to feel powerless after having given power to his wife, the modern woman, the breadwinner.

In the Post-Colonial, industrialized, urbanized and capitalized period the family institution gota huge setback when the classical joint family structure was compressed into nuclear families.Mahendranath and Savitri had a nuclear family and this family structure was also different in the sense that the established

gender roles in the society were reversed there. Mother took the onus to earn the bread for the home and father had to spent the whole day sitting idle at home,without any employment. Thus in a typical patriarchal society this act broke the stereotype and the trend was unexpected, socially shameful and indigestive to the male members of the society. Rakesh Mohan through his art of characterization meticulously exhibits that these reversed gender roles became the cause of scuffle in the family as the plot reveals that Savitri does not like Mahendranath sitting idle at home and this was the reason they were always at odds with each other and the entire family was disturbed. Moreover, Mohan Rakesh designated the exasperated and absurd condition of this family where nothing concrete comesout from the planning. Husband only plans to start a business so that the burden of the family can be lightened but nothing changes. Kinni, the little girl's feelings and emotions are also not taken into consideration, and she becomes unruly with passage of time. She is portrayed as unmannered with no sense of talking to elders. The parents of others' in the society accuse her for indulging their children to talk nonsense. These accusations and unhealthy climate at home has made her life disturbed and full of frustration. She finds no meaning in her life. Theonly son of this nuclear family is Ashok, who is irresponsible and non-serious and never pays any heed to the advice of his mother. He would rather flee away from home than to find a jobthat can lessen the burden of his mother, the only bread earner in the family. The elder daughter, Binni, has married early against the wishes of her family. Her marriage is unsuccessful and thus she has not been happy with her husband and has left him for her parental home. Commenting upon the reversal of gender roles in *Adhe-Adhure*, Dharwadkar and Bhargava (2008) in their research paper "Mohan Rakesh, Modernism, and the Postcolonial Present" maintain that *Adhe-Adhure* reverses conventional gender roles in a manner that was radical for the India of 1969 and is scarcely less radical in the early twenty- first century. As the cornerstone of the family's economic edifice, Savitri dismantles not only male authority but masculinity itself, becoming the first married woman in major post- independence drama to brush aside the conventional sexual mores. She has both the ability and maturity to talk of choices derived by desire. Indeed, all three women in the play challenge the status quo, the mother by looking for a way out, the older daughter through her strange marriage, and the younger daughter through her adolescent sexuality. The multiplication of male roles does not detract from the focus on women, because in all four roles the man is either emasculated or compromised by his duplicity." (p. 159)

The playwright through the character of the Savitri has depicted the women of post- independence India. These women are depicted as bold, ambitious and a responsible personsin such an unstable time. Despite having an insignificant position in the office Savitri manages to invite her boss at home so that her only son can have some employment. Her husband also turns out to be a failure, both as a husband as well as a businessman. This 'newwoman' of modern age is rebellious one
who wants to live life on her own terms and conditions and create a distinguished identity ofher own rather than be known by the name of her husband. This is evident in the text where on being called Mahendranath's wife by her husband's friend, this is how Savitri registers herconcern:

"Don't call me that [a wife] - Mahendra is also a man, with a family ... a fact that those whowere close to him never liked from the start... That same Mahendra who smiles meekly among his friends when he comes home. One never knows when he may scratch one's eqes out or drink one's life-blood! One day he makes a bonfire of his clothes in anger. Another dayhe sits on my chest and bangs my head against the floor. 'Tell me whether you'll come with me or not? Whether you'll do all I say or not?' But I still don't do what he wants. I still don't conform. 1 hate all this - I hate it. I want . . . a man, not just a miserable . . . hanger-on!
Sometimes I t1-j to wench my tortured being away from him. There was even a time when 1tried to turn to him into a man. But if my efforts ever began to bear fruit, his friends started pitying him. 'Savitri is leading Mahendra by the nose!' 'Savitri has broken him ... he is no longer a man.' Just a puppet ... Poor Mahendra! (Mohan, 2013, p. 2)

Finally, as she realises that her goals and aspirations are at risk, she once again plans to enter into a new relationship with her old friend, Jagmohan. But this also fails. He too can not fulfill her expectations and she decides to return to her previous life. Moreover, this play was coincidently written and performed at the time of the third wave of Feminism in India which was concerned with the fair treatment of women at home after marriage, equal job opportunities and a voice against sexual, physical and domestic abuse. Savitri, despite being courageous, ambitious, hardworking and responsible, can not think of herself getting a reasonable job. She is so much hegemonised by the orthodox patriarchal society that she believes

that all high standard and respectable jobs are meant for males only. She seeks exceptional qualities in male members around her, be it her son, her husband, her boss, her lover or her son-in-law. She is constantly in search of imaginary complete man, and slowly she goes away from her husband, Mahendranath to Juneja, Manoj, Singhania, Jagmohan etc., but does not get that complete man anywhere. Instead, she finds halfness all around in all men, and senses her halfness too. She can not convert her halfness with any of these men, even outside her marriage. Mohan Rakesh, through this drama has very skilfully highlighted the fact that for humans, completeness is myth, a mirage, which can be chased but can never be achieved. In order to enjoy one's life one has to accept this halfness or emptiness and in order to be peaceful one has to learn to share, care, sympathise and perform with honesty andhope. But, Savitri in order to fill her halfness keeps going to different men, one after another, and when she fails, she grunts, "Every one of you … all alike! Exactly the same. Different
masks, but the face … the same wretched face" (Mohan, 2013, p. 225).
Through Savitri's character the dramatist has brought forth the life of modern Indian women who still face umpteen challenges due to their gender. Although the problems of women are central to the play, their ambition and transition to modern culture inspired by the western school of culture poses a threat to overall structure of family and further to the society. DianaDimitrova (2004) writes in this regard.
Though the woman is at the centre of the play and we sympathize with her throughout, thereis a shift towards the man's point of view at the end of the drama. The playwright makes us believe that it is the woman's aspirations for the new, the different and the inaccessible that accounts for the problems. (p. 387)
It is quite evident from the analysis of the primary text that post independence India had multi-faceted social issues to face at individual and family level. The play pointedly showcases the effect of independence, constitution, education, employment, nuclear family on the traditional gender roles, and, in a realistic depiction proves that complete completenessis a myth and it is wise to accept one's halfness and learn to face the emerging social challenges as family on the traditional principles of mutual respect, sharing, caring, controlling and sympathizing. In us, as a reader or audience of this classic drama, each Mahendranath can counter his completeness with the help of his Savitri and each Savitri can counter her emptiness with the help of Mahendranath.

The conceptual frame work: critical analysis of the concept of female psyche and thedisrupted family.

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 inherself 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 thismasculine 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 butto 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 ofthe 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 recognize. He blames her for everything that falls shortin 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 thefact that the man in life (who is her husband) ill-treats her, ignores her contributions towardsthe 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 backgroundthat 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 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 alteredher 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 f or 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.

The play is absurd in nature not in its theme but in its technique, in the manner of treatment.There is very little direct physical action in the play. References are given constantly to the past which is the cause of their present frustration. Past is conveyed not by action but by the reports through the conversation. The same technique is noticeable in the portrayal of the characters. Their nature is revealed not through the actions. Instead, they are interpreted by others through their dialogues. Everyone explains the other from his/her own point of view only. Naturally, they come out with half-truths that appear rather absurd, for their being at once meaningful and meaningless.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it may be drawn that *Halfway House* does justice to represent actual circumstances of the Post-Independent Indian society, particularly the traditional middle class families, which had newly been compressed into nuclear families, being more mobile and congenial to emerging socioeconomic conditions. The dramatist through varied thematic concerns provides deep insight into these newly emerging challenges and problems in contemporary society. The skillful portrayal of the characters themselves speaks about unbalanced political structure and collapsed economic conditions and its effect on society at individual and family level. The reversal of gender roles and the issues associated with it have been beautifully presented by the playwright. The change in the institution of family from joint to nuclear can be seen through the family of Savitri. Failed business attempts of Mahendranath portrays the cold and helpless attitude of the government of the time towards small businessmen. Unlike today's businessmen they had no encouragement in the form of government incentives like easy interest free loans and other financial packages for the people living below poverty line. Thus, we can conclude that Mohan Rakesh through this iconoclastic work of art established a new trend in Hindi drama through which he mirrored the real socioeconomic issues which were not represented appropriately earlier. The play remains as classic document that dared to address the social issues when every dramatist wasaddressing the colonial. The play is immortal as a classic document offering the way forward to deal with such universal social challenges and individual halfness encountered universally.

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