

Reetika Srivastava  
Research Scholar,  
Department of English & M.E.L.  
University of Lucknow, Lucknow  
E-mail: [rsrivastava1986@gmail.com](mailto:rsrivastava1986@gmail.com)  
Cont. 9795987939.

### Aadhe-Adhure: A Critique of Contemporary Domestic Life

#### Abstract

Mohan Rakesh occupies a coveted place as one of those who made a significant contribution in building up the early post- independence Hindi Literature. He is emphatically remembered today as a playwright par excellence who revolutionized dialogue-writing in Hindi drama. Rakesh's Aadhe-adhure is an epoch-making work that projects the transition of values in urban middle class family. He probes deeply into the problems and psyche of this particular class through the ruthless and dispassionate portrayal of Savitri-Mahendranath family. This landmark play deals with the theme of breakdown in relations but very differently. Rakesh has brilliantly captured and brought on the fore- hopelessness and utter rottenness of value system of middle class family that emerged after independence in a poignant manner. This paper highlights the problems and plight of modern man who is entangled in the web of selfish pursuits, how materialistic compulsions lead to moral degradation, loneliness, resulting in constant anguish and deserted life of the individual due to distortion and decay of those values which help to keep family and society in order leading to complete disintegration.

**Keywords:** Transition, breakdown, hopelessness, Materialistic compulsions, disintegration.

Disintegration means to become weaker or to be destroyed by breaking into small parts, when something falls apart on its own. Disintegration in family occurs when the bonds holding it together are being weakened until eventually they can hold it no longer. Family is a building block of society. Society is strengthened when ties in family grow stronger.

Dissatisfaction with the metropolis and modernity is a recurrent feature of the writings of post-independence period. Invisible barriers are built in the mind of people which alienate them from one another mentally and emotionally though they live together as units of the same family. There are many factors leading to collapse of family values leading to a hell like situation from where there is no exit but only suffocation, resentment, regret, loneliness and confusion. They are communication gap, neglect of children, industrialization, emergence of nuclear families, absence of a unifying purpose, impact of western culture, lack of compassion and benevolence, growing individualism, failure of dreams and aspirations, and absence of perennial values of love and care which have the power to make relationships work and which keep family in order.

Contemporary families are collapsing from inside even if they appear to be cohesive, for, in reality each individual among them lives his own life and in his own world. Everyone has his own concerns and problems, which no one else shares with him, and nobody senses any commitment towards the others or is obliged to do anything for anyone. The people within the same household do not even talk to each other unless it is necessary and this leads to communication gap among them. With the changing social scenario after independence and growing industrialization people moved from villages to cities in search of better job opportunities and facilities. Industrialization brought far-reaching changes in Indian social and economic life and led to the establishment of urbanised nuclear families. Nuclear family is usually a feature of disintegrating society.

Although written decades ago Mohan Rakesh's *Aadhe-Adhure* translated in English as *Halfway House* by Bindu Batra, retains immediacy and relevance even today as a timeless classic. Mohan Rakesh is credited for ushering in modern era in Hindi literature, he was the pioneer of *Nai Kahani* movement along with Kamleshwar and Rajendra Yadav. Rakesh was blessed with the craft of synthesizing internal struggles of man and society of his time with realism. The play depicts the destitution of a single unit family in an urban setting. It is about a middle-aged father Mahendranath who is a failed entrepreneur; the mother Savitri single breadwinner of a family of five; and their three children son Ashok who is unemployed; two daughters Binni who elopes with Manoj to marry, in reality she uses marriage as an escape route to flee from the loathsome environment of her so called home but she has returned perhaps forever; and Kinni the rebellious teenager, victim of neglect by both her parents who frequently raises hell just to get the attention she constantly craves for. She is turning sour towards her family because of the cat-fights, constant bickering and taunts by neighbours

due to failure of her father on professional front, her mother's male friends and elopement of elder sister.

There are three other characters Jagmohan, Juneja, and Singhanian who are intricately linked to the family and its dwindling/ failing fortunes. The ongoing conflict between individuals and society form the major crux of Rakesh's plays. His plays are commentaries of his times. Rakesh used contemporary real life colloquial language that people spoke, understood and could easily relate and this accounts for the undiminishing popularity of his works. Rakesh in his path-breaking work *Aadhe-Adhure* depicts a dysfunctional family ahead of its times.

*Aadhe-Adhure* is a family story, it is about a house at war against itself. The wife always taunts her husband because he is out of work, a failure-

THE WOMAN: You're such a busy man! There's no saying when you may have to rush off to some Board Meeting or other! (HH, 11)

It is a kind of *pandemonium* from where there is no exit. Rakesh evolved a new theatrical language, his dialogues are skilfully chiselled, economic and embedded with deep meaning. In this play author's concern is with individual beings-all units of one family who are rendered helpless and restless when faced with responsibilities. Social scene after independence rapidly changed. Contemporary middle class man is totally absorbed in a multitude of problems where he has to face many questions. The play aptly depicts the plight of modern man who has to constantly keep pace with the mad race of materialistic progress and social elevation. All this leads to isolation, loneliness, dissatisfaction, anguish and moral degradation. Wherever bonds of love and care in family are replaced by materialistic compulsions; and mundane selfish aims breakdown in relations is bound to occur sooner or later.

The play begins and ends in tension and whole of the play is filled with a terrible discord. Rakesh's powerful and pointed language plays a prominent role in creating and keeping up the tension. Very rarely we find such a forceful use of everyday language as in this play. Apart from the various facets of man-woman relationship, the play is the story of a disintegrating family whose members- husband, wife, elder daughter, son and younger daughter- have become extremely bitter and acrimonious constantly snapping each other. The events in the play unfold in thirty hours but contain innumerable episodes covering a wide range of time. Rakesh has dealt with various forms and levels of man-woman relationship in his short stories too but gave ultimate form to this long exploration in *Aadhe- Adhure*. In Rakesh's own words-

Most of my stories are about people living through the torture of relationships in their loneliness, where I have tried to depict through the individual his environment. The attempt is not to see the individual and society as mutually opposed and mutually exclusive, distinct from and separated from each other but rather to see them as related in such a fashion that the individual reflects the dilemmas of society and society reflects the torture of the individual.

(From the flap of *Sampoorna Kahaniyan*)

The play is a document of ambivalence between man and woman. Mahendranath loves Savitri a lot and she too must have loved him in the beginning of their relationship but after few years of their marriage she starts to resent and despise him. For Savitri her husband is not even a human being he is the curse of her life, he is a callous spineless parasite with no identity of his own at best she considers him a stinking lump of flesh. Savitri had aspirations towards a life which her husband could not give her, but which no man could possibly have given her. Savitri has been in search of the mirage of a complete man outside matrimony and this results in dissatisfaction because she begins to rate her man not by what he is, but by what he is not and by what others are.

THE FIRST MAN: What is my status in this house? Silent acceptance, perpetual snubs, constant insults, is that all I deserve after so many years?

THE WOMAN: For whose benefit are you saying all this?

THE FIRST MAN: For whose benefit can I say it? Does anyone listen? Those who should listen, regard me only as a stamp of respectability, to be used when the need arises. (HH, 26)

The change in the life-pattern of parents has made the condition of children miserable. Rising individual freedom and deterioration of values leads to moral degradation. Love proves itself to be the decisive factor of vital, mental, moral and social well-being and growth of an individual. For happy course of human life and sound growth of young impressionable minds love, nurturing of noble values is indispensable.

In this accursed house devoid of love and care each member of the family is emotionally disconnected/ detached from the rest. The minds of family members are divided by clefts of discontentment and discord. They don't open their mind and heart with any confidence in front of their other family members. Constant bickering and quarrel occurs because of lack of mutual understanding. Each member of that family cares just about himself.

Love is the binding force or cementing factor for maintaining relations. When members of a family treat each other with perfect understanding, mutual love and respect only then there will be peace and harmony in the family . Love is the key to happiness in a family and this is what is lacking in Savitri- Mahendranath family. The atmosphere in such a home is full of fire and fury, din and sound, distrust and disharmony, jealousy and ill will. The members of the house are torn by dissent. The happiness and joy of the house has been washed away by the fury of their dissension. In the absence of love the essence of family life is missing. In this terrible atmosphere they are turning poisonous towards interests of one another. Elder daughter of the house, Binni who elopes with Manoj and marries him just in order to escape from that place. She says in Act I-

THE OLDER GIRL: A strange sort of feeling mounts up within me and spreads like poison through my whole being. Everything I touch or see or hear becomes distorted and I stand helpless and fearful under the spell of a destructive fate. It happens unasked, unforeseen. It... it...tortures me till I think I'm going mad. And in the end? In the end he too turns against me and says...

THE WOMAN:What does he say?

THE OLDER GIRL:That...it's from this house I have taken something with me that prevents me from being natural.

THE WOMAN:This is your own home.

THE OLDER GIRL: My home...yes. And I come here to look for the cause of my trouble! Can you tell me, Mama, what it is and where it is? Is it in the doors and windows of this house? In the walls, the ceiling, the floors? Why can't I see it? Can you see it, Mama? Can Daddy? Can Kinni? Can Ashok?  
(HH, 19)

The disintegration looks disturbingly complete as the play progresses when facts regarding matrimonial lives of two women Savitri and her daughter Binni comes to the fore. Ashok the only son spends time on collecting pictures of heroines and is waiting for any opportunity to flee from this wasteland and the younger daughter Kinni rebellious and defiant takes interest in physical relationships of adults that is spoiling her young innocent mind devoid of any maternal guidance. The victim of any perverse situation within the family are innocent children same is the case with this family.

The slovenliness on the dining table and in the drawing room reflects disharmony in the family everything lies scattered here and there leading to total confusion and disorder. Home is where lives of its members converge. Family breakdown results from lack of

compassion and benevolence in the house on parents' part. No service is greater than which promotes and preserves family life. In modern families growing individualism has superseded family solidarity. Children are neglected and this results in communication gap the people within the same house do not talk to one other. Here they diverge with unmistakable signs of disintegration in the family as the play progresses. Love is the heart of a family. It is the wealth of heart that assures happiness in family, the lack of it ruins it.

Mohan Rakesh occupies a coveted place as one of those who made a significant contribution in building up the early post- independence Hindi Literature. He is emphatically remembered today as a playwright par excellence who revolutionized dialogue-writing in Hindi drama. Rakesh's *Aadhe-adhure* is an epoch-making work that projects the transition of values in urban middle class family. He probes deeply into the problems and psyche of this particular class through the ruthless and dispassionate portrayal of Savitri-Mahendranath family. This landmark play deals with the theme of breakdown in relations but very differently. Rakesh has brilliantly captured and brought to the fore the hopelessness and the utter rottenness of the value system of middle class that emerged after independence in a poignant manner. This paper highlights the problems and plight of modern man who is entangled in the web of selfish pursuits, how materialistic compulsions lead to moral degradation, loneliness, resulting in constant anguish, deserted life of the individual due to distortion and decay of those values which help to keep family and society in order leading to complete disintegration.

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