
UNIT 15 *HALFWAY HOUSE: A READING*

Structure

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15.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit offers a working summary of Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* and aims to introduce you to certain nuances of the text. The focus of this unit will be on:

- comprehending the relationship between actors and characters;
- analyzing situations and characters specifically;
- gaining awareness of the nature of social institutions;
- looking closely at the way the plot evolves; and
- locating the playwright's view on events and characters in the text.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Halfway House follows a peculiar pattern. The audience gains entry into the play through a character called The Man. A little later, The Man becomes Savitri's husband and watches the goings on in the family helplessly. We shall understand the significance of this man's movements, responses and interventions in this unit.

15.2 PROLOGUE

The play *Halfway House* is divided into three parts: 1) Prologue; 2) Act I; and 3) Act II. The Prologue is an important part of the play which begins with it and also receives a specific direction from it. Let us see the role it plays in the structuring of *Halfway House*. We note that Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* is a play about a family going through difficult times and raises a number of issues relevant to the socio-cultural ethos of the time. The Prologue introduces the subject of the play: "a particular family and its particular circumstances". In the Prologue we meet "the man in a black suit" talking directly to the reader/spectator in the first person and making general observations on life. At this point, the man wearing a black suit is both an actor and a character who talks about the various roles he is going to play in the unfolding drama. In fact, he comes across first as an actor and then as a character of the play. He creates a link between the performers, the performance and the audience and for this reason is a figure similar to that of a sutradhar, the introducer of a play in traditional Indian drama. Apart from this role that this actor assumes in the prologue, he also enacts the characters of Mahendranath, Singhanian, Jagmohan and Juneja in the text. Indeed it is an innovative method in drama where

one man plays four different roles; nevertheless it is not a mere technical point. In fact, Rakesh seems to make a comment here on human nature in that all men essentially are the same behind the different masks they wear.

The man in a black suit informs the reader/spectator that he does not have a well-defined role in this play. According to him the same is the case with other characters in the play. Clearly, he makes a statement here shunning the expectations of the audience who would hope to see a play that is well-formed with a predetermined structure. The man further suggests that the play itself is “undefined”. He goes on to ask the existential question: “who am I?” To this, his answer is: “I am the man you bump into by chance in the street.” Commenting on the nature of the play he clearly tells us that “it is because of me that it (the play) does or does not evolve” and that he is responsible for all the happenings in the play. He explores alternative situations where the woman in the play could have had a different set of values, but later concludes that in any case the play would have remained as “undefined” than as it exists in the present state. Finally, he encourages the reader/spectator to give her/his suggestions on the problems raised in the play. Don't you think that had the playwright offered a solution to the problems projected in the play, the plot and characters would have been appropriately defined? In answer, one may say that Rakesh consciously leaves characters, complex situations and issues midway / ‘halfway’ as it were, without probing them further. This offers us some clue about the title of the play—*Halfway House*. This aspect is going to haunt us throughout this unit. Let us see how we confront it in the following discussion. First, we take up ‘Act One’ of the play and comprehend it from the point of view of marriage, family etc.

15.3 ACT ONE

Marriage in the Post-Independence Context

The act opens with Savitri entering the living room, the place where the entire action takes place. The first impression one forms of her character is that she has a sense of self-assurance who knows her position in the house. In comparison, her husband is a beleaguered man. The moment Savitri enters the house, she either orders her husband around or complains of the reckless attitude of the household towards her. The setting of the room and the objects lying around tell us something about the characters who belong to the family. The pyjamas of “Bara Sahib” Mahendranath, Ashok’s magazine-clippings, and the torn books of Kinni give us a clear view of these characters. Angry with all of them, Savitri begins clearing the mess the members of the family made for she has invited her boss Singhanian over for tea to fix a job for her son Ashok. You should think why she has felt compelled to plan this visit of the boss. Her Husband, Mahendranath decides to leave the house on knowing about the invitation. We are told at this point that Mahendranath in the past borrowed money from his friend Juneja and that this money has to be paid now. Can Mahendranath pay the money to Juneja and be on equal terms with him? On his side, Mahendranath hopes that some help can come by associating with Juneja. Savitri, however, does not find Juneja trustworthy nor does she think he would ever be genuinely friendly towards her husband. One can see a clear lack of trust between the husband and wife. One can truly call it a kind of disconnect between Savitri and Mahendranath. In one of their many quarrels Mahendranath puts across a relevant question to Savitri: “Have you ever considered why I stay away?”. The question remains unanswered as the reader/spectator struggles to find the answer with the hints available in the text.

Meanwhile, we are introduced to Binni the older girl in the family who eloped with and married Manoj. Binni regularly visits her parent’s home in a state of tension and unease. Unhappy in marriage, Binni helplessly tells her mother that “before I got

married I thought I knew Manoj very well. But now..." she feels that "the longer two people live together, breathe the same air,...the...the more estranged they become from one another" (16-17). Isn't this because of the state of stagnation in the family?

We have two concrete instances of marriage—one that of Mahendranath and Savitri, and the other of Binni and Manoj—both of which point towards the failure of the institution itself, in which individuals find themselves becoming more and more alienated from their spouse but find it difficult to move out of the arrangement. It is for the reason that marriage comes along with a whole baggage of customs and laws ordained by society.

The Dimension of Family within Marriage

At the same time, there is a kind of mystery created around the house in which these characters live. Binni tells her parents that her husband feels uneasy in her parent's home and that the "air" in the house has made them abnormal people. Binni can perhaps play a role in this situation: "I can find out only from within myself or from this house" the solution to the problem. That is why Binni keeps coming back to the house to find out the problem. Note that Manoj gets a mention in this conversation but never once appears in person. Here, Mohan Rakesh presents a perspective on the family of Mahendranath through an outsider, Manoj, but the playwright has carefully sifted the unimportant from the important in that he keeps the man offstage but presents his view of the family. This has made the situation complex.

We are next introduced to the younger girl in the family Kinni who after having returned from the school and finding no one in the house runs out in the street. Later, she finds that all the members in the family including her married sister Binni have come back. Where did they go and why didn't they wait for her? She complains of having eaten nothing in school for want of money. Kinni's state in the house is that of a neglected adolescent who craves for care and affection but gets none from the family. She turns into a rebellious girl with none in the family to confide in. She is bullied by her brother Ashok, too. It is a reflection on the home Kinni belongs to. One sympathizes with her in the play for more often than not she becomes a victim of other people's bad temper. Kinni told her mother that she "feels so ashamed wearing torn socks to school" but Savitri evaded the problem. She keeps recounting the ways in which she's humiliated in class by the teacher for not having brought the skeins of thread to school. In response, she gets scolding and threats. Indeed, Savitri is acutely aware of the problem but lacks sufficient means to meet the needs of the young girl. Savitri feels helpless and once says to her elder daughter: "I can't manage any longer, Binni. I just can't ..." (21-23). The audiences are left to wonder whether Savitri's family is an isolated case or represents broader social trends in post-Independence India.

However, Ashok, the eldest among the three children of Mahendranath and Savitri, has no desire to take up a job particularly through help from social contacts of his mother. We are told that Ashok hasn't shaved for days, is wearing old trousers, a worn-out but flashy shirt and that he has been sleeping in the house all day long. The image provided to us of Ashok here is that of an idler who scarcely feels responsible about matters relating the family. It is also given that Ashok had quit his college halfway and left in six weeks the job his mother arranged for him. He is disrespectful to his parents, particularly his father in this scene which irks him no end. Consequently, Mahendranath has a bout of self-pity as he comments: "For how many years have I been bearing the burden of life? And for how many years have I been looking after this family? And despite that, what have I come to...that everyone answers me back, is rude, disrespectful, impertinent...I'm responsible for ruining my life, your (Savitri's) life, all your lives! And I still stick to this house, because I'm a parasite, because I like living off my wife" (26-27). The issue he has

raised in this speech can scarcely be ignored. Irritated, he leaves the house at this moment deciding never to come back. Initially, he goes to his friend Juneja's place but returns home the next day.

Such interactions in the course of the play create tensions and build an unhealthy atmosphere; already the notion of family with principles that govern it has received a big jolt. It is not the ideal family that stands united in times of crisis nor are its members sympathetic towards one another. The image of a self-sacrificing mother is constantly denied to Savitri even when she iterates her claim to it. The values of love, compassion and respect that form the basis of the familial world are constantly done away with in the text from one situation to another. Does it suggest that family as an institution in the modern times is no more a secured zone that sustains the individual? Also, does the playwright focus upon a particular section of society, the upper-middle class where notions of family and fellow-feeling are increasingly receding to the background? Let us remind ourselves that Mahendranath's family is by no stretch of imagination an upper-middle class one; still it runs on the aspirations of economic success and the life of plenty. Indeed, it seems Mohan Rakesh has in mind the upper echelons of society when he projects the disintegration of a 'home' in *Halfway House*.

Next comes the announcement from Savitri that her boss Singhanian is about to reach their place. To this, Ashok reacts in the following manner: "If he hadn't been your boss, I would have booted him out that day. Lolling on the sofa and scratching himself in the groin. His thoughts stray in one direction, his eyes in another, and I'm supposed to guess that he's addressing me" (28-29). Ashok's description is indeed graphic; we actually witness Singhanian with his boastful look and pompous style. This bears reference to his comment: "What a wonderful publication... the Reader's Digest! In our country there's just trash; one never sees a good magazine. An American came here recently" (31). Singhanian's elitist pro-American approach has its basis in the class he belongs to. When Savitri entreats Singhanian to have tea, he responds thus: "No, not at all. The company has an international clientele, people from all countries visit our office. Recently, a Japanese delegation... whatever you may say, Japan is really keeping them all on their toes. Just the other day I glanced through the industrial statistics..." (31-32). Singhanian in the play is evidently upset about the way "labour unrest (is) sweeping through the country today" and more particularly the labour problem in his own firm. Although Singhanian appears only once in the play, the impact that his personality leaves on the reader/spectator is offensive. Mohan Rakesh makes a scathing attack on this particular section of Singhanians, suggesting that it is almost impossible to sympathise with such a lot. The audience is left to identify with Ashok's disgust of the man and the turmoil caused by his presence in the house. The act of squashing the insect played out by Ashok is in some sense a reference to what he'd like to do with Singhanian who is viewed by Ashok as an insect and a monster alternatively. We have also noted a sexual innuendo in Singhanian's comment for Savitri: "Come to the house some day. You haven't been over for a long time" (35). It is evident that Singhanian would not help Savitri without extracting a price from her. As Singhanian leaves the house, Savitri chides Ashok for sketching a portrait of Singhanian as a monster:

THE WOMAN : Don't, if you can't but I won't stand for it. When I go out of my way to invite people, then you make fun of them. Did you hear? I'll never, never stand for it.

THE BOY : If you can't stand for it, why do you have to invite people who make...

THE WOMAN : Go on, tell me!

THE BOY : Let's change the subject. This is why I wanted to leave at the start.

THE WOMAN : Complete your sentence.

THE BOY : ...who make us feel even smaller than we actually are (40).

The argument ends with Savitri's decision that "from now on I'll only bother about myself...I have done my utmost. It's the end now as far as I'm concerned...it really is the end" (43). However, as things turn out to be later in the second act, there seems to be no end to quarrels and fault-finding among the family members, with Mahendranath and Savitri disagreeing on almost every point that is raised.

15.4 ACT TWO

Wishes and Expectations of the Middle-classes

The second act begins with clear indication of Savitri losing interest in the running of the house; she has not tidied the room on the following day. One expects significant changes to take place in this act with the feeling that things would finally move in a particular direction—perhaps the family would break gradually as each individual leaves the place and opts to live life on one's own terms. Binni's comment is significant: "She (Savitri) was so withdrawn last night...and this morning...I've never seen her like this before" the situation sets the mood of expectation that Savitri would change considerably and so would the circumstances.

Savitri's defiant appearance is a prelude to Mahendranath's decision of not coming back home and Juneja's plan to meet Savitri. It is evident that Mahendranath has been staying with Juneja all this while and the latter's visit to their house is in connection with the state of affairs that exist between Savitri and Mahendranath. At the same time, the focus shifts for a while on Binni. The following conversation between Ashok and Binni makes them both conscious of their lives in relation to the surroundings:

- THE OLDER GIRL : How should I know? I feel like a stranger in this house now...
- THE BOY : Didn't you ever feel like that before...?
- THE OLDER GIRL : Before? Before, it was...
- THE BOY : You didn't even know that you felt it. And when you became conscious of it you cleared out!
- THE OLDER GIRL : Don't say that!
- THE BOY : Why get upset? I feel the same...started feeling it from the day You left...
- THE OLDER GIRL : What do you mean?
- THE BOY : Perhaps I felt it before too...but I started thinking about it only when you'd gone.
- THE OLDER GIRL : I ...don't understand...
- THE BOY : There is something in this house that...
- THE OLDER GIRL : (shattered) You think so too...? (46)

The sense of mystery created earlier in Act I with Binni telling Savitri that Manoj thinks she is not 'natural' gets re-established in this part of the play with Ashok's similar observations. What constitutes the unnatural element vis-à-vis the house remains a mystery till the very end. Nonetheless, such pointers spur the reader/spectator on to trace the clues in the text to what the issue is. The playwright makes use of the air of the house as a metaphor for the incomprehensible force governing the lives of the people in the house. Such instances add to the dramatic quality of the play. The device enables the playwright to express his concern for the incomprehensible layers of reality that are 'felt' but not 'seen'.

The focus in this part of the play further shifts away from Binni and Ashok towards Kinni who is dragged in from the street by Ashok and beaten up for talking with her friend Surekha about matters of sex, as this curiosity does not go well with her older brother, Ashok. Kinni on her side does not own up that she is in the wrong and this leads to another conflict in the house further on.

Meanwhile Savitri has decided to go out for tea with her long-standing friend Jagmohan with whom she has "something important to discuss". She says to Binni: "When you come next time I may not be here" (52). It seems that Savitri has finally resolved to move out of the house and give up her role of a wife and mother. The breaking of her necklace at this very moment symbolises the breaking of the family-ties she has held until now. The broken necklace leaves her upset but she goes to the cupboard to wear another one—which in turn suggests that Savitri has chosen another life for herself. Is this symbolism integral to the playwright's plan? As Savitri looks in the mirror she finds her hair growing grey, her eyes becoming more shadowy and suddenly finds Jagmohan behind looking silently at her from the door. He addresses Savitri—"Hello, Cuckoo"—from which we get an impression that Jagmohan has been an intimate friend of Savitri (here she calls him "Jog") and that the two have in fact been one-time lovers. This further gets substantiated with Savitri's commanding tone while speaking to him: "But I told you to come straight here, without wasting a moment" (54). The two share a kind of compatibility one expects Mahendranath and Savitri to share in matrimony. Her comment to Jagmohan "I know. I never misunderstand what you say" (55) is the case in point. This act in particular is significant in that each of Savitri's gestures and actions tell of a larger concern. Her feeling of losing something important before going out with Jagmohan and her constant hesitation at finally leaving the house create this specific version of events.

Broader Aspects of Familial and Social Life

Interspersed with the main narrative we have the narratives of the three children of the house among whom Kinni's problems draw the attention of the reader. Here, the play opens up in a general way. The problems likewise that Binni and Ashok face are partly the result of their own doing. Binni could have avoided marrying Manoj and taken up a job instead, and Ashok too had the choice to earn his livelihood independently. But he would not take up a job that will ruin his self and he must save his individual being from being tainted by the corrupt social influences. Consider whether this could actually be the case or I am stretching the point. Kinni on the other hand seems more of a victim of choices taken by her elders. Put together, these individual acts reflect the general ethos of disintegration that causes angst: a sense of helplessness pressing upon one's psyche. As soon as Savitri leaves with Jagmohan, Kinni enters the house crying and on looking "around at the emptiness of the room" runs out. She has been chided by Surekha's mother who as Kinni tells Binni "says I'm ruining her daughter and other...horrid things about us..." (60). We realize that the concept of helpful, sympathetic neighbours gets inverted in the text and for some reason we are made to feel that the cause of it lies in the house run and controlled by Savitri and Mahendranath. Do you notice a sort of matriarchal structure entering the family as an economically independent woman has become a bread-winner in the family? This inversion of the patriarchal order inside the house as against the smooth working of it outside has created the rift between the family and the neighbours and it is for this reason that Surekha's mother thought that Kinni's entire family lacked moral values. Note that 'morality' as well as the accepted value system is produced by society in order to keep the individual within the bounds of general norms. Once a person flouts these norms, s/he is considered both immoral and threatening. Does it mean that the playwright Mohan Rakesh has taken a radical stand in presenting to us the framework of a matriarchal structure as an alternative to the existing one? The answer may be

difficult to reach but we certainly are left to wonder. In consequence, our attention as readers and viewers shifts to the world outside the text.

The question of domestic violence is another important aspect of India's social life. There is a sharp reminder in the text of brutal wife-beating by Mahendranath. This is prior to the loss he incurred in his work and Savitri took upon her the responsibility of running the household. Binni in her conversation with Juneja tells him of this: "It's not a matter to be dismissed that lightly, Uncle! When I lived here it was like being...you can't even imagine what it was like...Daddy's rages when he tore Mama's clothes to shreds...when he gagged her and beat her up behind closed doors...dragging her by the hair to the WC...(shudders) I can't even recount the fearful scenes I've witnessed in this house!"(64). Our perception of Mahendranath also undergoes a change as the figure of a meek husband transforms into a ferocious animal. The conflict assumes new proportions as Savitri and Mahendranath are being analysed in their absence by the two close observers—Binni and Juneja. While Binni more or less defends her mother, Juneja is on the side of his friend Mahendranath.

Why does Juneja think it right for Mahendranath to leave Savitri? Why is Mahendranath bent on coming to the same house where he was humiliated and considered a non-entity? On this, Juneja is of the opinion that "Perhaps something can be done for a day. Or even for a week. But for ever? Nothing!" (65). In the case of Mahendranath, the house provides a sense of meaning to his existence which is why he has a strong urge to come back to it.

Soon we have Savitri back in the house facing Kinni who insists that Savitri meet Surekha's mother. Savitri pays no heed to her and indeed hits her later for calling Binni a "lump of clay". Is parental violence the answer to children's queries and questionings in the house? Or is it that situations unfolding in the house point towards things happening elsewhere, in that environment of ruthlessness commerce and trade that seeks to swallow harmonious interaction between members in a family? Go over it and analyse matters further.

Feminist Questions and Concerns in *Halfway House*

The encounter between Savitri and Juneja turns out to be a bitter one in the text. Suspicions get established and secrets revealed as each blames the other for the wrongs done to the family; Juneja accuses Savitri for having Mahendranath "in a trap" so that "he has become incapable of doing anything for himself" (67) and Savitri tells him that Mahendranath has not proved to be a 'man'. Should Savitri be blamed for her husband's incapability? Mahendranath is the same man who subjected Savitri to violence, as if to take out on her his hidden frustrations. We are forced to ask from ourselves: how could the victim of violence put him in a trap? If Juneja's view seems blinkered to us at this moment, we have to consider whether the playwright has too, a share in it.

Let us also take up the issue that Savitri has raised about Mahendranath: "Ever since I've known him, I've always found him leaning on someone or other. Particularly on you (Juneja). He's never been able to do anything without asking you. If we want to buy something, he must ask you. If we want to go somewhere, he must ask you. When he wanted to marry me, he had to ask you. He can't even breathe without asking you!" (68). According to Savitri, "the object of his existence is...as if...he were there only to fill in the gaps in the lives of others...whatever other people expect of him...or in whichever way they think they can use him" (69). Savitri has always been suspicious of Juneja for using Mahendranath and befooling him with regard to the money he owned and invested. She voices her opinion at this point to which Juneja's reply is "Mahendranath was always a bit hasty" (69). Mark Juneja's condescending tone in this remark. Savitri recounts her experiences in

marriage when Mahendranath bullied his children and beat her up, how he wanted to “change the way I walk, the way I talk, the way I ...that same Mahendra who smiles meekly among his friends becomes a fiend when he comes home” (70). We witness here the kind of violence embedded in the very structure of marriage where the woman is at the receiving end; even when the man appears “meek” to the outside world, within the four walls of his house he becomes the oppressor. We admit that Rakesh gives ample space to the character of Savitri in the course of the text generally and particularly in this section, still he fails to do justice to her character by making her desire “a man” and not Mahendranath who is a weakling. Is it possible that Savitri apprehends the subordinate position of a woman in marriage and still believes that her life would have been any different had she married a *man*? By insisting on having a ‘man’ in her life, a bold and self-assured husband, Savitri seems to have a superficial understanding of things around her, the moments of depth in her observations notwithstanding. For instance, would it not be appropriate if she wished for a life with a person who was her equal appreciated her for what she was?

In the lengthy dialogues and constant accusations between Savitri and Juneja, Binni is the silent observer; she stands in the same relationship to the other two characters as does the reader/spectator to all the characters. Initially, Savitri wishes Binni to listen to the entire conversation but later she asks Binni to leave and Juneja insists that she listen to the other side of the story. In Juneja’s words:

But every other year you’ve tried to free yourself by looking around for another man! In the beginning I was one of these men. You say you respected me then. But what you think of me now...you have also just said. After me, you were enamoured of Shivjeet...his university degree, his trips abroad, or whatever. In reality he interested you only because...he was not Mahendra. But you were also quick to point out his faults. Why wasn’t he frank? Why so much double-talk? Then you met Jagmohan. You admired him for his excellent contacts, his smart way of life, his generosity. But the real reason was the same; no matter what he was, he was Jagmohan...not Mahendra. Yet you began to find fault with him too...why he accepted even the harshest of words with a silent smile! It was a good thing he got transferred or...(73).

There are several questions that come to the fore at this point in the text. How does Juneja know so much about Savitri? He is Mahendranath’s, not Savitri’s friend. It is obvious that Mahendranath has shared these details with Juneja. Also, Mahendranath’s views of Savitri and her associates have influenced Juneja’s assessment of the same. In this sense, the above-quoted lines suggest the bias of a husband and his male friend. For them, interacting with other men in itself constitutes Savitri’s crime. It is overlooked that like any individual, Savitri is bound to meet new people, make new friends and comment on people’s behaviour. She is aware of her unsuccessful marriage and it is only natural that she would imagine a happy life with another man. Why is it expected that Savitri must find happiness with her husband? Let us recognise that both Mahendranath and Savitri are caught in the values of the upper-middle class given to self-seeking and individual progress. Juneja’s harangue on her unaccepted behaviour is actually a sermon on how women should not forget their inferior and fragile position in the marital contract. Note this for instance “Because the meaning of life to you is how many different things you can have and enjoy at the same time. One man alone could never have given them to you, so no matter whom you married, you would always have felt as empty and as restless as you do today...” (74). Juneja meant it to be ironical but see how the remark reflects back on the class in society he belongs.

Juneja is aware of the events that have taken place in Savitri’s life, and sure that Savitri tried to attract Manoj. The latter however, chose the daughter. Binni expresses her state of shock at this revelation, the first impact of which is one of disgust for

Savitri. Instead, if we look into the matter closely we find that there is no response from Savitri on the matter which is why Juneja's argument gains credence. Why is Savitri provided with no justification for this? Further, Juneja claims that after "Binni went away with Manoj you were in a frenzy. At times you nagged Mahendra, at others you lashed out at Ashok. And when you lost patience you made hysterical attempts to find a way to get out. Just then you heard that Jagmohan was back. Seeing all doors closed before you, you tried to step into the past" (75).

Juneja sums up her entire life in his comment with an air of authority. He is presumptuous to the extent that he claims to know what happened between Savitri and Jagmohan when they were out for tea. To quote:

You needn't tell me. I can tell you what happened. You said you were very unhappy. He said he sympathized. You said you wanted to leave this house. He said how fortunate it would have been if you'd come to this conclusion some years ago. You said what didn't take place then could take place now. He said he'd like it to, but there were too many obstacles...his position, your children, this and that. And then he wasn't happy in his job, he didn't know when he might quit, so he couldn't take such a step at this time. You listened in silence and kept wiping your tears. Eventually, he said you were getting late, he would take you home. You stood up quietly and got into the car. On the way, he perhaps mentioned that if you needed money he would... (76).

Note that it is only in the last line that Juneja adds a "perhaps" to his imaginative narrative, otherwise throughout his tale he is sure of what happened between Savitri and Jagmohan. In such circumstances is it justified on the part of the reader to believe Juneja word for word when we know that while Savitri was out for tea he was sitting in the house chatting with Binni? How is it then that we feel inclined to take Juneja's assumptions to be true? This is because, the playwright refuses to make his character of Savitri talk or give any kind of justification. One explanation for her silence could be that she feels put off by Juneja's allegations and therefore finds it useless to justifiably explain her conduct. Nonetheless, it finally appears that Savitri does not speak out of her guilt and there is little ambiguity regarding the matter for Rakesh seems to have projected in Juneja the voice of a sane man, going out of his way to help his friend while the real 'devil' is the woman. Juneja's assertion that Mahendranath is "attached to you (Savitri)" and helpless, makes one pity the man once again, thereby believing that the relentless Savitri has no attachment with her husband.

The play ends with Mahendranath's return to the house and it becomes clear that nothing is going to change in the life of any of the characters. This is in a way the anti-climax of the play for at the end of Act I and the beginning of Act II we were under the impression that things would change and move in a new direction, taking us perhaps to a new set of problematic. This, however, does not happen. Why? The playwright gave the background of the unchanging nature of circumstance in the Preface where an all-controlling figure of a single man plays many roles.

15.5 PERSPECTIVE AND APPROACH

Certainly, Mohan Rakesh focuses upon the problems faced by the family but is unable to indicate for the benefit of the reader a direction in which answers could be found. The play seems static and the problems insurmountable. This version and representation of life remains predominant till the very end of the play.

The direction in which characters move or develop is determined by the writer's or text's perspective. The way characters unfold in the course of the play and project a specific trait that defines them in relation to other characters marks their development. Perspective draws together the different parts of a representation in

such a way that the important and the superficial are clearly identified and separated. They are organized into a pattern so that together the contending viewpoints take us towards a meaningful resolution of issues. Mohan Rakesh's view of his times finds expression in *Halfway House* in that the family presented in the play is an ordinary family whose problems are those that the India of the time is faced with—the widening gap between the rich and the poor; the role of the middle class in such a scenario; the predicament of such a class along with the challenges it has to face; and the complex mechanism of the social system of the time. Individuals are changed by the forces in their environment and they too contribute to the change in their social surroundings.

15.6 LET US SUM UP

One can see a step-by-step growth of 'action' in *Halfway House* with special reference to the relationship between Mahendranath and Savitri under the structure of marriage and family. The text helps us understand the many layers of reality accompanying the middle-class life and concerns in post-Independence India.

15.7 EXERCISE

1. What is the playwright's intention in making one actor play the characters of Mahendranath, Singhania, Jagmohan and Juneja?
2. Critically analyse the character portrayal of Savitri in the play?
3. What is Mohan Rakesh's position on family, marriage and society in *Halfway House*?
4. Comment on the ending of *Halfway House*?