

Aims of Purushartha: Relevance to Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House*

Kharabe Ram Pundlikrao

Dept. of English
Study Centre, Prabhani, (M.S.)
M.A.N.U. University.

India is home to some of the most ancient civilizations, including four major world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Indians celebrate every religious festival with great enthusiasm. Apart from the festivals, another fundamental facet about Indian culture is a value system. The ethics of the Indian value system are the patriarchal joint-family system, varied ideas on values, and the prevalence of the moral values specially theory of *Purushartha*. An overarching theory that can provide some guidance to modern man is Indian theory of *Purushartha*. The expression 'Purushartha' means the objects of human life.

'*Purusharthas* (Sanskrit: "that which is sought by man; human purpose, aim or end") refers to a goal, end or aim of human existence.' The word 'purushartha' literally united of two words 'purusa' and 'artha'. *Purusa* means human being and *artha* means aim or goal of human life. *Purusharthas* means objectives of man. According to Hindu way of life, a man should strive to achieve four chief objectives (*Purusharthas*) in his life. They are: 1. *Dharma* (religious, social and moral) righteousness, 2. *Artha* (material wealth) prosperity, 3. *Kama* (desire) pleasure and 4. *Moksha* (spiritual) liberation, or renunciation as well as detachment. '*Purushartha*, the notion that proper living entails the pursuit of four goals first took shape in the literary traditions of the *Dharmasastras* and the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*'.

Each of the four canonical *Purusharthas* was subjected to a process of examination and elaboration which produced several key works in the history of Indian philosophy, including the *Dharmasastras* of the various authors (treating *Dharma* as religious, social and personal ethics), the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya (treating *artha* as material pursuit), the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana (treating *Kama* particularly as sexual gratification in code and conduct of the familial life) and the principle one which is concerned with the attainment of *Moksha*, often referred to as the *parama-purushartha* or 'chief end of human life'. Every individual in a society is expected to achieve these four objectives and seek fulfillment in his life before departing from here. The concept of *Purusharthas* clearly establishes the fact that Hinduism does not advocate a life of self negation and hardship, but a life of balance, achievement and fulfillment.

It is factual that Mohan Rakesh was associated with the modern Indian English Drama. His play, *Halfway House* is primarily focused on urban life and advocated a social change, in which society's progress from traditional to modern and simultaneously projected the hollowness of modern urban life and devoid of *Purusharthas*.

Halfway House or *Adhe Adhure* (1969) presents a microscopic picture of a middle class family in metropolis and projects the transition of values in the changing society of India. In *Halfway House* Mohan Rakesh presents middle aged couple Savitri and Mahendranath, their elder daughter, Binni, son, Ashok and younger daughter, Kinni. Mahendranath and Savitri's family is modern type family. It is a nuclear family that has broken with the tradition of the classical Indian joint family. It is also a family where the

traditional gender roles are changed. Savitri is the breadwinner of the family. Mahendranath, after losing his money in business and wasteful expenditure, has been jobless for years. Binni has escaped the family by marrying her mother's friend, Manoj, but she seems to have created a private hell of her own.

As already mentioned above, Instead of the man or husband being a breadwinner, there is a woman or wife, in the family, who is the breadwinner. The man being a non-earning member is reduced to a helpless position and is insulted. Savitri exclaims while looking at husband, Mahendranath, thus:

The woman (Savitri): (*picks up the pyjamas again*) Whenever I come back, the house is in a mess.

The First Man (Mahendranath): Here, give that to me.

The woman: What's the point? Couldn't you have thought of it earlier? (*opens the cupboard angrily and thrusts the pyjamas in*) Who was here for tea?

The First Man: I was.

The woman: A whole pot of tea for just one person? Did you give Kinni her glass of milk? (08)

Thus, the traditional roles of the father and the mother are reversed here and, therefore, the power of the house is shifted from the father to the mother, thereby converting the family from the patriarchal to the matriarchal system. Even she is unhappy with her husband for not having been practical in his business partnership in the past. She complains that he was made to invest some money in a company with his partner Juneja but ultimately put to great loss though Juneja had his usual profit. He (husband) suffers from a sense of constant humiliation in the family. Thus, the husband, Mahendranath is unable to complete the true sense of Artha according to the theory of Purushartha. In one of the old Sanskrit lexicons, 'artha' is said to mean-meaning, money, a thing, and possessions. *Artha* also means the attainment of riches and worldly prosperity, profit and wealth. Acquisition of means for the material well-being, therefore, is a legitimate social and moral purpose. Therefore *artha* is here as instrumental value or mean value. This value is 'useful' for attaining some desires or purposes. But Mahendranath is unable to provide *artha* or money to his family.

The Savitri's complains here shake up the very edifice of patriarchal structures. She begins with an attempt to question her husband's manhood; she castigates his dependence on other men and their using him for their ends, and climaxes in her anger at being attributed to as the cause of his failure (the consequence is domestic violence).

The woman (Savitri): That same Mahendra who smiles meekly among his friends, becomes a fiend when he comes home. One never knows when he may scratch one's eyes out or drink one's life-blood! One day he makes a bonfire of his clothes in anger. Another day he sits on my chest and bangs my head against the floor.(70-71)

What is important here is that Savitri expresses her agony by explaining behaviour of her husband. Savitri's husband, Mahendranath beats up, abuses and even fiend when he comes home; however Savitri still bears such painful event. Thus, the husband, Mahendranath does not possess the sense of *Dharma* which covers wide ranging value issues like personal virtues, righteousness. The sense of values or dharma is considered the essential criterion for distinguishing human being from animals.

Hunger, fear, anger, and sex-drive; these urges are common to both animals and human. It is the sense of dharma which is the distinguishing features of a human being. A person devoid of dharma is just like an animal.

Another very important character in this play is Savitri who has another significance concern with inner feeling. It is through Savitri that the playwright illustrates the principal question of completeness. In search of an ideal husband who would be completed in all respect. She travels from person to person. She is in search of a person who would be rich like Juneja, learned like Shivjeet, high-positioned like Singhanian, sweet-tongued and tiptop like Jagmohan and handsome and liberal like Manoj. But the truth is that how can one person alone possess all these qualities? If one has one quality, he lacks the second; if the second person is blessed with the latter, he would lack the former. She fails in her pursuit of having a complete man because she fails to understand that neither all blessings nor all banes are never concentrated in one man alone. Savitri was going against the laws of Nature. Nevertheless, Savitri, like any modern woman, is quite aware of her strength as a woman so she is bold enough to say that don't call me wife of Mahendranath; such as,

The Fourth Man: Keep talking. I'm not taking it ill. After all, you are Mahendranath's wife....

The Woman: Don't call me that-Mahendra is also a man with a family... (70)

However, Savitri is not ready to accept Mahendranath as he is. She fails to understand the meaning of conjugal life and love. Even Savitri breaks the traditional image of the chaste wife and looks for relationships outside marriage. Thus, here she fails to follow the values of *Kama* which should be attained within moral family structure. Savitri exposes and shatters conventional notions of familial values and the man-woman relationship within marriage life.

Mohan Rakesh wants to illustrate man's universal predicament from time immemorial to the present times. Savitri's predicament is the predicament of a modern, emancipated woman in the society, who is torn between two polarities where she loves her husband as well as someone else for two different aspects of their personalities. But the values of *Purusharthas* and their conventions do not allow her to appreciate or to aspire two things in two different persons. Neither persons share a woman who likes and aspires both of them nor does the society approve her to live with them. It is unfortunate that modern man or woman is unable to attain the theory of *Purushartha*.

To conclude, the theory of *Purushartha* is very important in the context of modern life. The values of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha* are relevance to the human nature in the modern age of science and technology. *Dharma* is always held higher than *Artha*, *Kama*. Infact, Dharma is that which helps man to fulfill the obligations of *Artha* and *Kama* directed to the ultimate end of *Moksha*. However, modern man finds solace in extreme materialism, drugs, and senseless lifestyles. But all these things do not lead to be happy and contented life. So, values of *Purushartha* offer as remedies to preserve morals in Indian social system.

Works Cited:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purushartha>.

M. Rakesh, *Halfway House*, A translation by Bindu Batra of the Hindi original *Aadhe-adhure*, Worldview Publications, Delhi, 2006.