

**DREAM AND DISILLUSIONMENT IN “THE GLASS MENAGERIE” BY  
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND “HALFWAY HOUSE” BY MOHAN  
RAKESH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The present paper is a comparative study of American drama “ The Glass Menagerie” by Tennessee Williams and a Hindi drama “AdheAdhure” by Mohan Rakesh translated in English as “Halfway House”. It focuses on the fact that geographical position and cultural norms may vary but human nature, virtues and vices, problems and solutions are universal. In search of perfect blissful life, human beings rely on dreams and hopes which sometimes result into distress. It also deals with the significant issues deliberated in both the dramas like the role of a woman in synchronizing the family bonds, changing human relationship, dull and monotonous life, disillusionment and escape world, dominance of mother in the family, freedom and confinement, deception and lies and abandonment in the family. The paper emphasizes on the differences in these two dramas as well.*

**Keywords:** Escape world, patriarchy, Identity crisis, abandonment, restrain

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**T**ranslation plays key role to understand literature, society and cultural norms of various countries. It also helps to compare between literary genres, ages and movements. It is a challenging task as the meaning should remain intact in both, source language and target language. Literal translation sometimes distorts the message completely, therefore, for a translator; it's a balancing act and skill. Indian drama in English translation largely contributes to enrich the flavours of Indian drama in English.

The practice of drama writing is very ancient in India and drama is considered as 'The Fifth Veda'. From ancient Sanskrit classical drama to regional drama, Indian drama has gone through many stages, phases and experiments. The experiments are in the form of themes and techniques. Indian Drama in English reflects Indian diversity in context to languages, culture and social norms and thus, facilitates dramatists to experiment multifariously. Thus, Indian drama in English translation has opened up many avenues to understand the rich and glorious journey of Indian drama in various regional languages.

The horizon of Indian English drama in English translation is widened by the eminent writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sarkar and Mohan Rakesh. The translated plays of these writers present an opportunity to compare them with the works of the famous dramatists from other countries.

Mohan Rakesh is a renowned writer who significantly contributed to Hindi literature through plays, short stories and novels. His most famous plays are "Ashad Ka Ek Din"(1958), "Laharon Ke Rajhans"(1963) and "Adhe Adhure"(1969). "Adhe Adhure" was translated into English as "Halfway House" by Bindu Batra. Halfway House gives an opportunity to compare it to "The Glass Menagerie" by Tennessee Williams.

American drama became predominant from 19th century. It showcases the American psyche, social and moral issues. It is maturing with varieties of themes, forms and techniques.

One of America's most gifted and innovative dramatists, Tennessee Williams, present many of the influences and trends that characterize modern American drama. "The Glass Menagerie" by Tennessee Williams is a memory play which is autobiographical in nature. It presents characters based on Williams himself, his dramatic mother, and his mentally fragile sister, Rose.

Both the plays emulate each other in many ways. Both the plays are realistic in nature and present the everyday life of ordinary people. Both the writers deal with intricacies in the marriage and responsibilities and fidelity in the relationships.

"The Glass Menagerie" by Tennessee Williams is story of Amanda, the mother who lives with her son, Tom and crippled daughter, Laura. The title, The Glass Menagerie i.e. collection of glass animals symbolises delicate minds of people living in the family who sometimes resemble animals. Amanda expects that Tom should shoulder the responsibility of Laura's marriage, as Laura is shy and self-obsessed girl who lives in her own illusionary world. Tom wishes to escape from his job which he hates and he is exhausted by the constant nagging of his mother. Amanda insists that Tom should find a gentleman caller for Laura. Tom finds Jim who is a schooldays crush of Laura. Jim visits Wingfield family and both, Amanda and Laura are elated by Jim's appearance in the house. But their joy is shattered when Jim declares that he is already engaged. Amanda accuses Tom that he purposely played a trick on them. Tom gets hurt and leaves home. The play ends with Tom who after many years of his departure from home is lost in the thoughts of his sister Laura whom he never forgets and cherishes her in his memories.

"Halfway House" by Mohan Rakesh is based on the story of Mahendranath, his wife, Savitri, Daughters Binni and Kinni and Son, Ashok. The title implies the incompleteness in the familial bond. The family faces financial crisis when Mahendranath's business diminishes. Savitri seeks job in a company to support her family. She considers her husband as deficient man and humiliates him. In search of a complete man, she develops relationship with different men. The harmony of the family is disturbed and bond of affection is distorted. Finally, she realizes that no man is perfect and being disillusioned, she accepts that she will have to lead her life with her husband, Mahendranath.

**Woman as a Head of the Family:**

“The Glass Menagerie” and “Halfway House” present the struggle of Amanda and Savitri respectively to settle the family. Amanda’s husband, Mr. Wingfield abandons her leaving all responsibility of two children on her. She tries her best to bring them up in a right manner. But her constant anxiety for the welfare of her family and its economic stability make her a nagging woman. Her relentless concern causes her to prattle ceaselessly. Consequently, she always argues with her son, Tom and instructs her daughter, Laura. Desertion of her husband is a mental shock for Amanda. She is always under secret fright that her son will also leave her alone to take care of her crippled daughter. Indulging in the past memory helps her to escape from harsh reality of present life. She repeatedly narrates the stories of her romantic and glorious past. Tom aspires to be a writer, but he is compelled to work at the shoe warehouse to support his family. Amanda fails to understand his dreams and desires and bombards him with her constant irritating instructions. This finally results into Tom’s departure from the house. Yet she survives this blow with her optimistic nature.

Just as she expects Tom to support the family and shoulder all the responsibilities, she expects Laura to come out of her mental and physical weakness. She feels that instead of riveting by her glass menagerie, Laura should try to be physically independent and mentally strong. When Laura fails to continue her education, Amanda feels that marriage is the only solution for Laura to solve all her problems. Bigsby comments that,

“It is Amanda who bears the greatest burden, twice abandoned and left to watch over her daughter. Though querulous and puritanical, she is allowed moments of touching vulnerability when she exposes the nature of her own pain” (Entering the Glass Menagerie 42)

Savitri in “Halfway House” is also a dominating woman who takes control of the familial responsibilities, when her husband fails in his business badly. She starts working in a company for the economic sustainability. She does not get any support or co-operation from anybody in the family. The traits of patriarchy are reflected in the behavior of Mahendranath, her husband who always treats her brutally to show his dominance as male and head of the family. Binni shares with her father’s friend, Juneja her unpleasant memory of the callousness of her father:

When I was here I used to feel many a time that I live not in house but in a cage located in a zoo. Perhaps you might not think what was happening here.

Daddy rages when tore mama's clothes to shreds. When he gagged her and beat her up behind closed doors....dragging hereby the hair to the WC (shudders) I can't even recount the fearful scenes I witnessed in this house! (Halfway House 64)

With economic independence, Savitri becomes dominant and humiliates her husband, Mahendranath. She searches virtues of a complete man which she considers Mahendranath lacks by keeping close association with different men. R. L. Nigam comments, "She begin to rate her man not by what he is but by what he is not, and by what others are." (Halfway House: Some Stray Comments Only 86)

In her quest for a perfect man she initially gets attracted to Juneja, her husband's friend as a successful and hardworking man. But this attraction diminishes, when she meets Shivjeet who is a globe trotter and a highly learned man. Eventually, this infatuation also feds up and she comes in close relationship with Mr. Singhanian who is rich and socially reputed. But she finds flaws in him too and gets fascinated by a young man, Manoj who elopes with Binny. Finally she realizes that she will never get a perfect man with all virtues. Thus her search remains incomplete.

### **Disillusionment and Escape World:**

Characters in both the dramas create an escape world of their own to keep away from stark realities of life. Amanda is always indulged in her romantic past and repeatedly narrates same stories. Bigsby opines:

For his Mother, Amanda, the past represents her youth, before time worked its dark alchemy. Memory has become myth, a story to be endlessly repeated as a protection against present decline. She wants nothing more than to freeze time; and in this she mirrors a region whose myths of past grace and romantic fiction mask a sense of present decay. ("Entering the Glass Menagerie"38).

Similarly, Tom finds out an escape world in his narcotics, going to the movies, drinking alcohol, and smoking cigarettes. He always wants to leave his job and dreams to be a writer. But his mother resists this idea and insists to continue his job to support the family. Although Tom understands his mother's anxiety, he cannot stop himself from leaving the house in search of his dream.

Laura is a delicate, sensitive girl who does not socialize easily for she is crippled. She creates her own escape world in the form of glass menagerie. She plays for hours with the glass animals. She never expresses her desire or aspiration for any young man. But her



mother is desperate to find a groom for her, as she feels that her daughter's marriage will solve all the problems they are facing. Laura's only pass time is her glass menagerie.

Savitri finds escape world in search of a perfect man to run away from her husband. Her elder daughter, Binni runs away from home with Manoj with a hope to get romantic, peaceful and secure life which she could never experience in her parental home. But her dream shatters when Manoj restricts her freedom. Finally, disappointed by manoj's conservative nature, she returns to her parental home. Younger daughter, Kinni is distressed by animosity in the house finds her escape way in her arrogance, ill manners, rebelliousness and sexual awareness.

Ashok detaches from reality and indulges in the futile activities. He wants to escape from the tensions at home and family responsibilities. He leaves his job at Air Freeze and redundantly and impulsively flirts with a girl.

Thus, different characters in these two dramas find out an escape world of their own to run away from the reality and responsibility.

### **Irresponsible Husbands and Sons:**

Amanda's husband, Mr. Wingfield abandons her abruptly. without taking her into confidence or giving her any intimation he leaves home. In the opening scene we are informed that Amanda's husband "gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town" (Menagerie23). She is in complete dark about the reason of his sudden desertion. It is a psychological shock for her which creates a permanent void and anxiety in her. Mr. Wingfield never thinks about the uncertain future of his family while abandoning it. He even does not worry about the possible difficulties of his family and especially his wife.

Mahendranath in "Halfway House" also behaves irresponsibly. When his business declines, he takes out his frustration on Savitri and beats her cruelly. Savitri expresses her agony:

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.  
(Halfway House 70-71)

He is unable to take his financial or business related decisions independently. He is dependent on Juneja. He neither succeeds in his business nor keeps control on his family. Although Mahendranth dislikes his wife's close association with other men, he cannot control her, as he is financially dependent on her.

Similar irresponsible behavior of the sons is seen in both the dramas. Amanda's hopes solely rely on Tom. She feels that he should shoulder all the responsibilities of the family after sudden departure of her husband. Although Tom understands his mother's anxiety, he wants to follow his dream to be a writer. So, when his mother irritatingly insists to be sincere in his job, he explodes:

Listen! You think I'm crazy about the warehouse? You think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers? You think I want to spend fifty-five years down there in that--celotex interior! With fluorescent--tubes! Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains--than go back mornings! I go! Every time you come in yelling that Goddamn "Rise and Shine!" "Rise and Shine!" I say to myself, "How lucky dead people are!" "But I get up. I go! For fifty-six dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being ever! And you say self--self's all I ever think of. Why, listen, if self is what I thought of, mother, I'd be where he is--GONE! [He points to his father's picture.] As far as the system of transportation reaches! (Menagerie 41)

At the end, even if he feels guilty, he abandons home to pursue his dreams, without caring for his mother and sister. Ashok in "Halfway House" is also a reason of mental torture for Savitri. He fails in B.Sc. and does some temporary petty jobs. She tries to find a good job for Ashok through her boss, Mr. Singhanian. But when Mr. Singhanian talks irrelevantly and illogically and shows more interest in Savitri, she understands that there is no hope from Singhanian to get any job for Ashok. Ashok leaves his temporary job at Air Freeze and moves around aimlessly. He is least bothered about his responsibilities and duties.

Thus, both Tom and Ashok love their respective mothers, but they care least when they trail their personal dreams and desires.

### **Mother- Daughter Relationship:**

The relationship between Amanda and Laura in "The Glass Menagerie" is interdependent and complex. Both, mother and daughter support each other to overcome the psychological barrenness. They help each other in leading life optimistically with love, concern and affection. Amanda always worries for her delicate daughter who is crippled. She feels that Laura should pursue a degree and be independent. But her dreams scatter, when she comes to know that Laura is dropped out from Rubicam's Business College. She does not lose her hopes for better life of her daughter. She thinks that marriage is next solution to make her daughter's life blissful. She persistently tells Tom to find a gentleman caller for Laura. Amanda frequently tells the story that how in one day she met 17

gentleman callers. Though she tells the same story again and again, Laura encourages her mother to repeat it. Laura knows that the romantic stories of past, relieves Amanda from her constant tensions. She praises her mother, "I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain. . . ." (Menagerie 28). Thus, Laura is just like a cool breeze who raises her mother's morale.

Amanda too encourages her daughter to overcome the physical weakness when she complains that she is crippled. Amanda says:

"Nonsense! Laura, I've told you never, never to use that word. Why, You're not crippled, you just have a little defect--hardly noticeable, even! When people have some slight disadvantage like that, they cultivate other things to make up for it--develop charm--and vivacity--and--charm! That's all you have to do!" (Menagerie 36).

Thus, Amanda and Laura are complementary to each other. Amanda is vigorous while Laura is subtle. Amanda escapes from stark reality and uncertain future through her past and Laura through her glass menagerie.

In "Halfway House" mother- daughter relations are not cordial. Savitri tortured and disappointed by her husband, never gets respect from her daughters, Kinni and Binni, although she is the only breadwinner in the family after Mahendranath's business dwindles. Binni feels that the violence in the house makes her reluctant to live there. She elopes with Manoj for safety and peace in the house, but comes back on account of his conservative nature. Even elder daughter, Kinni does not get her mother's attention and is a spoilt, rude, ill-mannered child. Thus, Savitri miserably fails to develop a special mother-daughter bond.

Finally, both the plays present economic instability leading to stretched family bonds, anxiety and fear, feeling of hopelessness, unresolved conflicts. Both the dramatists represent the scenario of modern society, where economic stability, social dignity and materialistic approach have become more important than love, care and affection. The intricacy in the relationship imprisons the present into the past.



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