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Celebrating Mohan Rakesh's Centenary: Revisiting *Adhe Adhure* in Translation through a Reception Theory Lens

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Abstract

Mohan Rakesh is one of the most celebrated and innovative post-independence Hindi litterateurs. In his lifetime, Rakesh authored and translated works across several genres, which have been widely acclaimed. He pioneered the Nai Kahani ('New Story') movement of the 1950s and modern theatre, which presented psychological realism depicting societal and cultural struggles of the urban middle class. In modern drama, Rakesh shifted the spotlight from history and mythology to real, dynamic social stories and cultural contexts. The readers' and audiences' lived experiences took centre stage in his storytelling. He disrupted the way literature was received, as each of his works showcased an individual's personal experiences rooted in their contextual settings. Audience interpreted the story based on their own sensitivities. The interpretation and reception of each of his works have been open to deep personal reflection and intellectual exploration. The present study critically analyses the reception and translations of his works as a playwright with particular reference to Adhe Adhure (1969) and its English translation by Bindu Batra titled "Half Way House". The translator's proximity with the author, who himself was a translator, drives this exploratory analysis from a fidelity perspective. Findings from this study provide a roadmap for the future for translators, academia, and theatre enthusiasts. It is relevant to the NEP2020, which endorses the integration of arts and knowledge dissemination in Indian languages, opening up huge opportunities for translators. In the context of Artificial Humanities, it further opens up avenues for AI-based and Machine Translation of Rakesh's works.

Keywords: *Mohan Rakesh; translation; fidelity; Adhe Adhure; Reception Theory; NEP2020; artificial humanities.*

Introduction

Literature brings one closest to reality. To develop socio-emotional skills and understand intercultural nuances, it is recommended to engage in reading and writing of all genres of literature. Works of several Indian litterateurs have been integral to research and education at various schools and universities. The reception of their works by eminent translators is a subject of deep analysis in the sphere of language, diction, meaning and contextualisation. One such celebrated Indian author is Mohan Rakesh, whose exemplary works in Hindi have been translated into English by several translators. His two-act play *Adhe Adhure* (1971) has been interpreted and translated into English as Halfway House. This invites researchers to pursue critical and comparative analyses of the various translations and to add new concepts to the glossary of bilingual translation. His work Adhe Adhure, particularly, has been

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acclaimed as a seminal work of urban drama and theatre. His fiction has sustained the Nai Kahani, a new-story movement, by portraying a new society and new realities. In his birth centenary year, translators and critics must revisit and explore his literary ethos through a new lens of reception. In the wake of the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP2020), the pillars of art and culture, the Indian Knowledge System, and the internationalisation of Indian education have opened avenues for translators to revisit the goldmine of playwrights like Rakesh. The current exploratory study opens the Pandora's box of new perspectives on revisiting Mohan Rakesh's literary works and their translations, and on why the lens must change now.

2. Mohan Rakesh: Modern Playwright and Proponent of Nayi Kahani

As reported by Anita Rakesh (2017) in the memoir Mohan Rakesh Ki Diary, Mohan Rakesh (1925–1972), born Madan Mohan Guglani, is regarded as one of the most influential figures in post-Independence Hindi literature and modern Indian theatre. A pioneer of the Nai Kahani (New Story) literary movement and a transformative force in Hindi drama, Rakesh revolutionised Indian theatre by introducing psychological realism, modernist techniques, and middle-class urban narratives to the Hindi stage. Rakesh's iconic play Ashadh Ka Ek Din (1958) is hailed as the first modern Hindi play. Rakesh established himself as a master dramatist through his sensitive plays Lahron Ke Rajhans (1963) and *Adhe Adhure* (1969), in which he adeptly blended Western theatrical innovations with indigenous traditions. Badal Sarkar, a noted critic on Moviebuff.com, noted that, beyond drama, Rakesh also contributed significantly to various literary genres, including novels, short stories, essays, travelogues, and translations of Indian mythology, for which he received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1968 and the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship in 1971. His life was cut short at the age of 47, but his legacy remains central to academic study and theatrical performances in India and abroad. Mohan Rakesh wrote *Adhe Adhure* in 1969. It has been translated and adapted many times for the stage and into many languages for global reception.

2.1 Theoretical Background: Reception Theory Framework

Reception Theory, developed by Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, focuses on the reader's or audience's role in interpreting a text, emphasising that meaning is co-created through interaction between the text and its audience and shaped by their cultural, historical, and social contexts (Jauss 1982). This framework is particularly apt for analysing Bindu Batra's 1999 English translation of Mohan Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure* (Halfway House), a play about urban middle-class disillusionment in post-independence India.

2.2 Translation as Reception

The history of literary criticism itself is a narrative of influence, as new methodologies are developed, adapted, and applied. At its core, Influence Theory investigates one of the most persistent and fundamental dilemmas in creative production: how an artist achieves originality and establishes a unique voice when labouring under the overwhelming weight of their predecessors. The study of literary influence is therefore a means of exploring the complex interplay of tradition, innovation, and resistance that characterises the evolution of literary movements and genres, as well as the progression of influence as a critical concept, moving from a historical paradigm of imitation to a psychological model, and finally to a post-structuralist understanding of intertextuality. This shift moved away from a simplistic, author-centric model toward a more complex, text- and reader-centric one.

Tables 1 and 2 below provide a clear comparison of these two distinct theoretical frameworks- Influence Theory and Intertextuality- and the paradigm shift to Reception Theory.

Table 1: Comparison of Influence Theory and Intertextuality

	Influence Theory	**Intertextuality**
Key Theorists	Harold Bloom, T.S. Eliot.	Julia Kristeva, Mikhail Bakhtin
Core Focus	Author-centric; concerned with the poet's psychological struggle.	Text- and reader-centric; concerned with how a text's meaning is shaped by other texts.
Nature of Relationship	Agonistic and confrontational; the poet struggles against the precursor.	Contextual and networked; the text is a creative conversation with other texts.
Scope of Reference	Primarily focused on canonical, often male, poets.	Expands to all forms of discourse, including non-literary texts, clichés, and stereotypes.
Table 2 below gives a snapshot of the paradigm shift to Reception Theory		
Table 2 Paradigm Shift to Reception Theory		
Theorist	**Primary Field**	**Core Concepts**
Hans Robert Jauss	Literary Theory	Horizon of Expectations, *Rezeptionsgeschichte*,

		Aesthetic Distance (as a historical gap)
Wolfgang Iser	Literary Theory/Phenomenology	Implied Reader, Gaps in the Text, Aesthetic Distance (as a critical space)
Stuart Hall	Cultural/Media Studies	Encoding/Decoding, Dominant/Negotiated/ Oppositional Readings

Their combined work provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the reception of literary texts, both as a historical process and as a subjective experience.

2.3 Key Concepts of Reception Theory as a Thematic Framework in the context of Batra's "Halfway House", the first English Translation of Rakesh's Adhe Adhure

Reception Theory offers a lens for examining how *Halfway House* is received, interpreted, and reinterpreted by diverse audiences. Batra's translation focused primarily on international stageability and Rakesh's artistic integrity. This revealed a fundamental tension in the translation process, in which the prime author himself was involved at stages of translation. Batra's technique of oversimplification, including omitting lengthy stage directions or descriptions deemed illegible to an international audience, raises questions about the challenges of translatability in a cross-cultural context. Thus, Batra risked losing some of the "emotional loneliness" and "psychological fragmentation" that Rakesh had so beautifully crafted. Such a translation method amounts to "rewriting," as conceptualised by André Lefevere, in which the content is transformed to serve a new purpose. While the play may become globally accessible, it ends up losing some critical native cultural nuances. The reception of the translation must therefore be viewed not just as a matter of linguistic equivalence but as a critical negotiation of cultural and emotional meaning.

3. Translations of Rakesh's plays: A case of English translation of *Adhe Adhure* as *Halfway House* by Bindu Batra

Major Hindi and English translations of *Adhe Adhure* have been for the stage adaptations. Critics continue to engage with Rakesh's work in relation to ongoing debates about modernism, post-colonialism, and the nature of Indian literature. However, his works have always raised pertinent questions about the amalgamation of Western and indigenous traditions and the possibilities for vernacular modernisms outside the Anglo-European centre.

These debates ensure that Rakesh's work remains relevant to contemporary literary and cultural discussions. However, the focus has always been on capturing and exploring the text's socio-psychological rather than linguistic aspects.

3.1 A comparative study of English translation of original text Adhe Adhure

Two major English translations covered in this study are-

• ***Halfway House*** **by Bindu Batra:** Batra's was the first ever published translation, done in close consultation with Rakesh himself before his demise. It was aimed for the global stage. This translation provides enough fodder for supporters of natural English, as it is heavily simplified while preserving cultural nuances, such as descriptions of saris and domestic tensions.

• **Adhe Adhure:** A Play in Two Acts by Steven M. Poulos and Rama Nath Sharma was intended purely for an Indian audience and is an academically oriented version, often excerpted in study materials. They retain stage directions closely, such as character costumes (e.g., Woman's "ordinary sari and blouse tastefully") and the Man in Black Suit's multiple roles.

Bindu Batra's *Halfway House* is widely regarded as a successful and significant translation that introduced Mohan Rakesh's landmark play to a global audience.26 Its success lies in its effective transposition of the play's universal themes of alienation, disillusionment, and the crisis of identity. The translation's most notable act, the re-coding of the title from a state of being (*Adhe Adhure*) to a place of transition (*Halfway House*), is a microcosm of its broader approach. It grounds the abstract, post-colonial psychological vacuum in a more universally digestible, concrete narrative, an act of domestication that, while making the work accessible, may dilute some of its original, culturally specific nuance.

3.2 Goldmine I: Frameworks Lens for deeper analysis of the English translations

Lawrence Venuti's approach: Pragmatic translation models view the translator as an active agent engaged in "rewriting". Lawrence Venuti's distinction between "foreignization" and "domestication" is particularly relevant here. A "domesticating" approach makes the text more accessible to the target audience by re-encoding cultural specificities, whereas a "foreignising" approach retains those elements and forces the reader to engage with the work on its own terms. This choice is central to the critique of

André Lefevere's Theory: This theory of translation as "rewriting" further highlights this, arguing that a translation is not a passive environment but is actively "transformed to fit new purposes," often determined by the translator's own "ideological leanings".

Rakesh's literary works should be translated and adapted with different theoretical models to enrich the scholarly discourse on Adhe Adhure. On the one hand, a translator can adopt a "foreignizing" technique so that cultural and linguistic nuances are authentically represented. This will definitely compel the reader to engage with the text on its own terms rather than domesticating its meaning. A "revisionist" translation approach, through the principles of "rewriting," recodes the play to amplify the characters' voices and choices, directly challenging the original's perceived conclusion. A translation that incorporates more of the play's unique theatricality into the text itself, perhaps through extensive stage notes or a unique formatting that visually represents the single-actor device.

3.3 Goldmine II: Author as a Mentor to the Translator: A lens of Debate on Fidelity, Translator's Agency and ownership of translation

The translator community would surely stand divided on the aspect of who owns the translation? Given that Rakesh himself is a translator and was closely involved in Batra's translation, the translator's autonomy, creativity, and originality may be called into question. Does an author-translator cripple the expressiveness of the translator? The translations must be studied through the lens of "voice of the translator". Here begins the larger debate of Fidelity and Translator's Agency. This has not been researched enough. With a rich tapestry of thematic layers, a single translation is insufficient to capture its full essence.

3.4 Goldmine III: NEP2020 Lens of Regional and Foreign Language Translations

Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure* has been translated into various other Indian languages but were primarily as stage performance versions. With NEP2020 giving impetus to art integration, the Indian Knowledge System, the globalisation of Indian thought, and the three-language policy, Rakesh's texts must be made available to regional and international audiences. His texts are relevant in interdisciplinary domains of sociology-understanding the modern Indian family, capitalism, social mobility or gender roles; psychology-to create awareness of the psycho-social and emotional dynamics of relationships in dysfunctional families; as well as develop critical insights on cross-cultural understanding of societies and history.

Regional Indian Language Translations and adaptations

• **Bengali:** Renowned litterateur, modern theatre playwright, and director Shyamanand Jalan is known for adapting and staging *Adhe Adhure* as a Bengali-language production in Kolkata. His production has been the most influential non-Hindi staging of Adhe Adhure.

• **Marathi:** Iconic Marathi playwrights such as Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar, along with many from Maharashtra's Hindi and Urdu theatre circuits, have been inspired by Rakesh's

plays, which are rooted in realism. Many shows have staged Rakesh's work in Marathi, translating and performing it for local audiences; however, these are not formally documented as translations.

• **Punjabi:** In Punjab and Delhi-NCR, Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure* has been among the most popular plays with theatre enthusiasts. The Punjabi translations were intended solely for stage adaptations and are therefore not well documented in academic sources.

• **Gujarati:** Rakesh's *Adhe Adhure* became very popular in Gujarati-language adaptations, especially in academic and festival settings. There is no documentation of these translations in the form of scripts.

• **Malayalam:** Rakesh's famous Hindi play *Adhe Adhure* has also been translated for a South Indian audience by renowned playwright N. Sasidharan and is available as a script in Malayalam titled "Pathiventha Jeevithangal".

All the regional translations mentioned above are based on formally published Hindi texts and existing translations.

Foreign language and cross cultural adaptations

• English (non Indian / foreign based):

Adhe Adhure has often been staged for the Indian diaspora. Either the standard English translation of Batra (Halfway House) or director specific adaptations have been performed.

• Russian (academic/translation context):

Russian scholars have translated Rakesh's works into Russian for purely academic theatrical purposes. However, there is no evidence for a Russian language stage production of Adhe Adhure.

Authors and playwrights who have translated A*Adhe Adhure* in India

The only documented translation of *Adhe Adhure* in India is by Bindu Batra, which is published and hailed as "the first full translation of Adhe Adhure." Beyond Batra, there is no single, consolidated list of all Indian based playwrights or authors who have translated *Adhe Adhure* into other Indian languages.

3.5 Goldmine IV: Future Translations for Three Language Policy of NEP2020

Translators, researchers, and academics can draw on past translations and attempt to publish *Adhe Adhure* in all Indian languages.

Comparative study of the English translation of the original text Adhe Adhure- Halfway House

Two major translations covered in this study are-

• ***Halfway House*** **by Bindu Batra:** First full published translation, done in consultation with Rakesh before his death. Aims for natural English flow while preserving cultural nuances, such as descriptions of saris and domestic tensions.

• **Adhe Adhure:** A Play in Two Acts translated by Steven M. Poulos and Rama Nath Sharma

Poulos and Sharma presented a translation intended solely for Indian academia, which is often included in study materials. They retain Hindi vocabulary and phrases, stage directions, and detail-related elements such as character costumes. Their translation is meant for an audience who know the Hindi language. Refer to Table 3 below for a comparison and contrast of Batra's and Poulos and Sharma's translations.

Table 3: A comparison and contrast of Batra's and Poulos and Sharma's translations.

Differentiating context	**Batra's *Halfway House***	**Poulos & Sharma's *Adhe Adhure: A Play in Two Acts***
Language Style	*Conversational, idiomatic English for stage readability. More literal, mirroring Hindi syntax for scholarly precision.*	*More literal, mirroring Hindi syntax for scholarly precision.*
Character Naming	*Uses personal names (Savitri, Binni, etc.) revealed in dialogue*	*Abstract labels like "Woman," "Older Daughter" to emphasize universality*
Tone & Fidelity	*Balances emotional intensity with modern accessibility; smooth for performances* *Retains raw anguish (e.g., "anguished for having lost the battle of life") and is closer to Rakesh's sparse prose.*	*Retains raw anguish (e.g., "anguished for having lost the battle of life"), closer to Rakesh's sparse prose.*
Availability	*Widely published and reviewed as a standalone play.*	*Common in university texts, less commercial.*
Strengths	*It earns praise for its readability and performability, making the play's existential themes accessible to English audiences. Readers on Goodreads highlight its natural dialogue, layered characters, and relatable middle-class angst, calling it a "gem"*	*It is valued in academia for its literal closeness to the Hindi original, retaining stark stage directions and raw dialogue that underscore family fragmentation. It's frequently used in studies to analyse Rakesh's sparse prose and*

	and a "must-read", though some find the ending abrupt. Scholarly notes emphasise its fidelity, with Rakesh's input, preserving psychological depth without entirely softening realism.	*cultural idioms. However, some critiques note that English versions like this "soften" the Hindi's harsh realism, potentially diluting interpretive layers.*

Batra's translation seems well-suited to stage productions and general reading for entertainment; Poulos-Sharma excels in reception studies, facilitating close textual analysis of themes. Critics like Dilip Basu have pointed out that both handle middle-class anomie well, but Batra prefers to soften some idioms for global audiences, sparking debates on domestication vs foreignization in translation theory.

3.6 Goldmine IV: Author -Translator Dynamics: Debating Fidelity and Creative Autonomy

Readers and academics laud Batra for balancing readability with authenticity, making the play's pessimism and "half-complete" characters feel visceral in English. No major critiques of inaccuracy emerge; instead, it's valued for enabling global access to Rakesh's critique of modern marriages and societal compromises. Minor notes highlight adaptive choices prioritising dramatic impact, aligning with Rakesh's vision. Batra's translation is lauded for its fidelity and performative qualities, bolstered by her direct consultations with Rakesh before his death in 1972.

Critical Reception of Fidelity

The strengths of Batra's translation are as follows-

1. Authenticity and Collaboration: As Rakesh's associate, Batra ensured the translation reflected the author's intent, making it a reliable primary source for analyses and adaptations.

2. Linguistic Vigour and Accessibility: Reviews on public platforms praise its ability to capture the "vigour, economy, and freshness" of the original dialogues, with "skilfully chiselled" lines that retain deep meaning and suit stage delivery. This has made it ideal for English productions, enhancing global accessibility and cultural adaptation.

3. Thematic Preservation: It effectively conveys themes such as marital conflict, gender roles, and social critiques, allowing audiences to relate to the characters' realism.

Halfway House by Bindu Batra is one of the most popular translations and the first-ever English translation of Adhe Adhure. As discussed by eminent critics Dilip Basu and Rajinder Nath, Batra was in constant consultation with Rakesh while translating the original play. As

a student of History and foreign languages, Batra is understood to have captured the nuances of this play authentically, both as a translator and as an arts journalist engaged in the performing arts. Batra's English translation first appeared in Enact in 1971. As this translation was carried out under Mohan Rakesh's scrutiny and had his approval, it is considered the closest to Rakesh's version. However, the translator's reception of the text is certainly subject to scrutiny. Critics have noted that *Halfway House* differs from the original Hindi text in two critical respects. Firstly, certain lengthy stage directions have been expanded, and exchanges between the characters have been omitted at a few points. This was apparently done to retain the play's stageability—for instance, before the play begins, there is a description of ages and personal appearance. The nuances of Urdu and Hindi phrases and stylistics in the original cannot be captured in their true essence in a foreign language; hence, that is also a limitation of translated texts. The reception of the original play is pertinent to bilingual translators. The translation domesticates a culturally unique, post-colonial existential crisis into a globally recognisable, sociological concept. Batra translated *Adhe Adhure* in direct consultation with Rakesh, which indicates an intent to remain faithful to the author's original play. Batra's translation is widely regarded as a successful and significant translation that introduced Mohan Rakesh's landmark play to a global audience.

3.7 Goldmine VI: Road ahead: Gaps in the Translation of Adhe Adhure

Litterateurs and critics have shared some guideposts for future translations.

1. Title Choice: A common gap is the title Halfway House, which some view as unsuitable as they seem to miss the original emphasis on emotional "incompleteness."

2. Linguistic Fidelity: Comparing several translations, Batra's *Halfway House* is potentially less precise in linguistic structures. Hence, a critical debate on interpretive vs literal translation seems pertinent in this context of fidelity.

3. Limited and biased feedback: Casual peer reviews taken by Rakesh from artists or other translators and theatre directors rarely addressed translation specifics, and academic sources use it without extensive critique.

4. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Translation (MT): The new world has thrown open a plethora of challenges for the translation industry with the advent of AI and MT. Artificial Humanities, Ethical and accountable translation is the new opportunity today.

Limitations of the study

The current study is an exploratory case study; hence, this critique is fundamentally limited by the available research, which focuses almost exclusively on a single dominant translation and relies on scholarly analysis of that work rather than on direct textual comparison across multiple translations. The lack of a rich scholarly debate on multiple English translations of *Adhe Adhure* precludes a full comparative analysis by translators. These findings must therefore be understood as a critique of the successes and limitations of a single, highly influential work, rather than a comprehensive survey of the field. The research is conducted using a case-based approach and relies solely on the author's English translation by Bindu Batra. This has been proven highly faithful, as the translation was undertaken with the direct approval of Mohan Rakesh himself. That may also come across as the author's rigidity and bias in the translation process.

Conclusion

The findings of this research can be replicated to analyse several regional translations of Adhe Adhure. This may also motivate foreign-language experts not only to attempt a fresh translation, but also to advance studies on the reception of translated Indian plays. The future is also bright for translators and explorers of human- versus computer-mediated translations in the context of Artificial Humanities and Machine Translation. Hence, the present study is very timely and feeds the curiosity about the literary translation industry. The study will certainly globalise Indian literature, which is one of the focuses of NEP2020, while also consolidating pedagogical interventions through vernacularisation, three-language policy, arts-based approaches and socio-emotional learning through drama.

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