NIRDESHAQ (The Director)

Script excerpt in English · by Arjun Sethi, Skand Rawat & Aditya Oberoi

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About this excerpt

A theatre group in Delhi is halfway through a chaotic rehearsal when five strangers walk in, looking for a director. They are Savitri and her family, the characters of Mohan Rakesh's Hindi classic *Aadhe Adhure* (Halfway House, 1969). Borrowing the frame of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the play lets these characters argue with the people who perform them.

This scene comes early in the play. The company has just taken the visitors for actors promoting a show.

Performed in Hindi and English; translated into English for this sample. The dialogue is the authors' own: no lines from *Aadhe Adhure* are quoted.

Characters

The company, a college theatre group

- DIRECTOR (Arjun)
- ABHIMANYU, production in-charge
- KABIR, GAUTAM, ARYAN, RAHUL and SANA, actors

The characters, from *Aadhe Adhure*

- SAVITRI, who keeps the family afloat
- MAHENDRANATH, her husband
- BINNI, her elder daughter
- ASHOK, her son, and KINNI, her younger daughter, are on stage but silent in this excerpt

The scene

ABHIMANYU This is getting pretty interesting, man. *(To the visitors)* Do you have a pamphlet or a card or something?

SAVITRI Meaning?

ABHIMANYU You know, show dates, timings. When are you performing?

SAVITRI We are not putting on a play.

SANA Not putting on a play? I thought you'd come to promote your show.

BINNI Look, we are not actors.

SANA Then what?

SAVITRI We are the characters of *Aadhe Adhure*!

DIRECTOR First you say you're not actors. Then you say you're playing characters from *Aadhe Adhure*.

BINNI We are not playing characters. We are the characters.

DIRECTOR That makes no sense.

SAVITRI How do I make you believe that I am the real Savitri?

BINNI Yes!

MAHENDRANATH Yes!

DIRECTOR What?!

KABIR Savitri doesn't actually exist. She's fictional.

SAVITRI And why can't a fictional character stand in front of you for real?

DIRECTOR Because fictional means it exists in the mind, not in reality.

SAVITRI Don't you bring characters to life on stage every day?

DIRECTOR We do. But that's an actor playing a character.

SAVITRI Acting may be their profession. But while the story is being played on stage, what does the audience see: the character or the actor?

DIRECTOR The character, obviously!

SAVITRI Then now that the character herself is standing in front of you, why do you refuse to believe it?

ARYAN Because characters can't just come alive on their own!

SAVITRI Why can't they? So many things in this world are beyond our understanding, and they are still true.

ABHIMANYU You can't just start believing whatever anyone tells you.

DIRECTOR Exactly. Even truth has a scope. If he's playing Hamlet tomorrow and comes and tells us he really is Hamlet, we're not going to believe him, are we?

SAVITRI No, because he would also be playing a character. That is the difference between us. We are the very characters whose lives you take on, on stage.

BINNI Yes. Perhaps with less reality than they have, but with more truth.

SANA So you're saying there's more truth in you than in us?

BINNI Is that so hard to accept? We stay exactly as we are, forever. We don't put on a different face every day to suit ourselves, the way you do.

DIRECTOR *(To the company)* Wow. So now they're calling us two-faced.

BINNI Not just you. Everyone. That's what everyone does. Today you're one person at home, tomorrow someone else at the office, and the day after, someone else again with your friends.

DIRECTOR *(Amused)* So, so then what are you doing out here, outside your play? Go back to your own world, "Character."

SAVITRI I have come to you with a complaint against my author.

KABIR You have a complaint against a writer that big? The Sangeet Natak Akademi itself has honoured him!

SAVITRI Of course I have a complaint. He never took my side. Even a great author can make mistakes.

KABIR He's the writer. He can write the play any way he likes.

SAVITRI Then he shouldn't claim he was writing on my side!

ABHIMANYU But you can't just go pointing fingers at your own writer.

SANA Why not? If this is how she was written, who else is she supposed to point at?

ARYAN Then why is Savitri always angry with Mahendranath? Mohan Rakesh wrote him too.

MAHENDRANATH Finally, someone speaks up for me.

ARYAN Uncle, that was sarcasm. I'm not on your side.

MAHENDRANATH Tch. And I thought you had some sense. *(He walks off to a corner.)*

DIRECTOR That's just passing the buck. "My life isn't a mess because of my own mistakes. It's because God had me born into the wrong house!"

SAVITRI My problem isn't the kind of house I was put in. My problem is that I wasn't given a voice. Someone else brought you into this world too. But you'd still want your voice not to be silenced, wouldn't you?

RAHUL So what do you want? Everything your way?

SAVITRI I only want my side to be shown as well!

GAUTAM What happens in the script that makes you think your side isn't shown?

SAVITRI Look at the last scene. Juneja comes in, says all those things to me, and leaves. And I just stand there like a statue. Exactly as if I had given up.

DIRECTOR Okay, okay. Got it. But what are we supposed to do about it?

SAVITRI You people love looking at stories from a new angle, don't you? That's why I came to you. You can give this play a new perspective.

(The DIRECTOR appears to be thinking deeply.)

RAHUL I mean, the story does sound interesting. If we play it out, who knows, maybe we make something new.

SAVITRI And on top of that, all the praise will be yours. "At last, someone gave Mohan Rakesh's play a new way of thinking."

(The DIRECTOR daydreams.)

DIRECTOR *(To RAHUL)* Yeah, I mean, the concept is great. Intense family drama, so many conflicts. This has the X factor! … Fine. Let's see what comes of it. *(To ABHIMANYU)* Listen, Abhimanyu, get some chairs set up here and keep taking notes.

ABHIMANYU Notes on what?

DIRECTOR Whatever "new perspective" she talks about, write it all down. And at least ask them if they want tea.

End of excerpt. For the full script or performance rights, contact the authors through players.kmc@gmail.com