

***Ashad Ka Ek Din* by Mohan Rakesh: A Tragic Tale of Love, Loss, Longing and Sacrifice**

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Abstract

Ashad Ka ek Din (1958) is written by the renowned Hindi writer Mohan Rakesh. Born and brought up in Amritsar (Punjab), Mohan Rakesh is primarily known as a story writer but he has also produced dramas of high excellence. He has to his credit five dramas which include, ‘Ashad Ka Ek Din (1958), Lehron Ke Rajhans (1966), Adhe Adhurey (1969) and Paun Tle Ki Zameen.

Centered on the life of ancient classical poet playwright Kalidas’s life (100 C.E-400 C.E), this three act play is considered to be the first modern play in the history of Hindi Drama. It captures the timeless love story of Kalidas and his beloved Mallika. In addition to this, Mohan Rakesh has tried to address various issues in it including the complexities of human relationships ,the depth of human emotions, the clash between the idealistic adherence to values and the pursuit of material well being, the clash between realism and idealism, tradition and modernism, between art and power, love and success.

Keywords: Idealism, Realism, Love, Kalidas, Passion, Emotions.

The play opens with Mallika (being drenched in rain) returning to her house after meeting her lover Kalidas. But her mother Ambika does not like their relationship. Being a worldly woman she does not like her daughter aimlessly roaming around with him and becoming talk of the town. But lost in love Mallika neither cares a fig for the dirty rumors nor about her mother’s scolding. She lives in her utopia where love is the prime feeling:

“I know that people are talking .Mother, I also know of your pain, yet for me there is no feeling of guilt. I have chosen a feeling which lives in my heart. For me this feeling is the most important one. In fact, I am in love with my own feeling which is pure, tender”. (8)

Mallika appears to be an idealistic yet strong willed independent woman who does not care what other people think of her:

“What do they say? What right do they have to say anything? Mallika’s life is her own concern. If she wants to spoil it, then what right do has anyone to criticize her?” (9)

On the contrary, her mother Ambika is critical in her attitude towards Kalidas. She feels that Kalidas is responsible for her daughter's defamation. She calls him a "self-centered person who has no love for anyone in the world besides himself" (138). She feels that Kalidas is not sincere for her daughter and would never marry her. Being a realist, she tries her level best to make her daughter realize that life has some material needs to be fulfilled. One cannot live a life based only on feelings:

His relationship with you is one in which you are an instrument of his self-love and pride... Tomorrow when your mother is dead and there would be no food in the house, how will you answer the question before you? Will this feeling be the answer to that question? (17).

But Mallika remains firm towards Kalidas as she knows that Kalidas is financially dependent upon his maternal uncle Matul so she does not force him to marry her.

A sudden twist in the story comes with the arrival of Acharaya Varuchi who brings a message from the king of Ujjaini, a promising invitation to accept the title of poet laureateship in the royal court of the great Gupta emperor. But Kalidas is reluctant to accept the offer as the mere thought of parting with his village, mountains and his beloved muse, Mallika brings him pangs of despair but it is Mallika, who convinces him in every possible way to avail this opportunity and achieve this high position in the court:

"I am the question... am not I?... I know that when you go I will feel empty inside and perhaps I will feel lonesome. Even then I am not deceiving myself. From my heart I say that you must go." (31)

She emerges as an embodiment of true love who though being devastated to heart bids him farewell:

"Believe me your going away will not mean separation. The winds, the clouds and the deer, they all go with you. I am not very far away from you. And whenever I would want to feel close to you I will go to the mountain top and there lose myself among the clouds." (31)

Afterwards, Kalidas leaves for Ujjaini.

In the second part of the play, Kalidas has achieved great name and fame with his two epics, 'Kumarsambhav and Meghdutam'. Being married to a beautiful princess Priyangumanjri, he enjoys a life full of luxury. He has been appointed the new ruler (Matrgupta) of Kashmir. In short, his life has been touching the heights of social, political and financial prosperity. Among all this, he has totally forgotten Mallika. On the other hand, life has been hard upon Mallika. She leads a pitiable lonely life in her rotting house with her old ailing mother. Irrespective of the fact that Kalidas has ditched her, Mallika still loves him madly. When she learns from Nikshep

about Kalidas's marriage to a princess, she patiently replies that equal status is necessary for a successful marriage. She manages to collect his poems and eagerly waits for his return:

"I thought that you would return ,the day would be dark ,filled with clouds , like the time before, and I would soak myself in the rain , they say look , I have read everything you have written."(42)

Kalidas returns but not alone. He visits his village one last time along with his wife before leaving for Kashmir. But guilt stricken, Kalidas avoids to meet Mallika whereas his wife pays a visit to Mallika's house. Priangumanjri says:

" I want to look at you and your house. During the days when Megadutam was being written he was often reminded of this place."(49)

It appears that she is somewhat aware of her husband's amorous relationship with Mallika and she tries to please her husband by taking good care of his ex-girlfriend. She offers her house to get repaired off, purposes her to get married to one of her attendants and accompany her to Kashmir as her chambermaid. But being a woman of high self-esteem, Mallika humbly rejects the proposal. Her mother Ambika mocks at her daughter after the insult being inflicted upon her by the queen:

"Today, he wants to pay you for your feelings. Why don't you accept it? The house will be repaired and you can live there as their chambermaid. What greater honor could you receive than this?"(56)

The third part of the play recounts Kalidas returning to his native land. Being fed up with the luxurious life of a statesman, he has lost all his interest in poetry. His creative power has evaporated in the absence of his muse, Mallika. His wife Priyangumanjri tries her level best to rekindle his creativity but she is no subtitle to Mallika. Finally, he returns to Mallika to apologies and with an offer to start a new life offer together. But it is too late now. Helpless and lonely Mallika has turned to be a prostitute:

"It has been said in Ujjaini that you spend most of your time with prostitutes....but have you seen this type of a prostitute ? Would you be to able to recognize me now?" (93)

She has an illegitimate daughter whom she calls 'the child of apathy'. This is the way life has rewarded her for her selfless love for Kalidas. She says:

"Nobody has been able to arouse the feeling that I had for you , but there are numberless images of other men....Do you know I have earned an adjective by losing my name. I have lost my identity and now I am just an adjective."(93)

The play ends with this confrontation and witnessing the bitter reality of her life, Kalidas again leaves her alone.

The acuteness sensibility and minuteness with which Mohan Rakesh portrays his characters is almost unmatched. As the whole play revolves around the love affair of Mallika-Kalidas, Kalidas appears as a central character whose life, decisions and choices affect the actions of the play as well as the life of other characters especially Mallika. But because of his constant confusion, dilemma, extremist behavior, opportunistic nature and his inability to take the right decision at the right time makes him an anti-hero. He loves Mallika deeply and passionately but could not accept her and ditched her by marrying another girl. He is reluctant to go the Ujjain and once gone he did not return. When he visits the villages with his wife, being guilt stricken he could not face Mallika. Towards the end of the play, he does return to her but only to retain his lost creativity which reflects the meanness and selfishness in his character. The playwright has highlighted the sensibility, passionate, emotional and tender nature of Kalidas's character through various incidents. Being an idealist, when he learns about the royal proposal he replies, "I am not to be sold for royal coins." He even confronts an armed soldier Dantul empty handedly to save a young buck. Initially, Kalidas has no lust for power and fame until unless he has tasted it. Aparna Bhargava Dharasadhker has rightly observed that he is an escapist as "each act ends with an act of abandonment on the part of Kalidasa, when he leaves for Ujjaini alone, when he deliberately avoids meeting with Mallika during his subsequent visit to the village, when he leaves her at home abruptly."

Except Kalidas-Mallika various other characters Ambika, Vilom, Matul, Priyanganjri, Dantul, Nishap, Rangini –Sangini, Anuswar-Anusanik appear on the stage who play quit a vital role in the action of the play.

Vilom, a perfect anti-thesis of Kalidas's character calls himself a self-declared friend of Kalidas. Kalidas is emotional and instinctual whereas the approach of Vilom is always realistic and practical. Kalidas is afraid of taking decisions and suffers from constant dilemma. On the other hand Vilom believes in taking quick and firm decisions. Vilom also writes poetry but unlike Kalidas he could not earn fame. He loves Mallika but she loves Kalidas that's why he calls Kalidas a successful Vilom and Vilom an unsuccessful Kalidas. Vilom's character throws light upon the flaws in Kalidas's character.

Priyanganjri symbolizes authoritarianism of the state power. She is a devoted and loving wife who is gravely concerned about her husband's physical and emotional well-being. She plans to take the plants, fawns, the interior of the houses, animals and even some people along with her to Kashmir so that Kalidas would not miss his villages. She could not understand that the deep delved sense of alienation that Kalidas suffers from is due to Mallika's absence in his life. Unable to have access to the depth of feelings of Kalidas for Mallika, she remains unable to replace the latter.

The inferior mental level of two attendants Anusar and Anusanik is reflected through their long repetitive dialogues. Priyanganjri is well aware of the fact that Kalidas had amorous feelings for Mallika. Still her proposal Mallika to get married to any one of her attendants and

accompany her as a chambermaid seems to reflect that the state power does not value human emotions. For it, love is a thing which could be bought and sold.

As the spotlight of the play is set upon Mallika throughout the story, it would have not been unfair to call *Ashad Ke Ek Din* the story of Mallika, who emerges as the true embodiment of passion and selfless love. She struggles hard to balance between the world of feelings, imaginations and the real one. Her existence revolves around Kalidas. Though her Mother and Vilom warn her to not waste her life for Kalidas but she remains firm in her love. She never forces Kalidas to marry her and even convinces him to go to Ujjaini because she does not want to become a hindrance in his success. While she, suffering in her desolate house with her old ailing mother eagerly waits for him to return. She feels hurt when she learns about Kalidas's marriage with a princess but she never loses hope. She buys all his books from the traders passing by perhaps with the money she earns from selling her body as she has no other source of income. Though Kalidas avoids meeting her but she still considers him to be a part and parcel of her soul. She considers her love and devotions for him to be more sublime than any other entity in this world:

“ I did not remain in your life, but you have always been a part of my life. I have never let you go away from me. You kept on writing and I have always thought that my life too has some meaning”. (92)

After sacrificing her whole life, she expects nothing in return. For her, love has become a true meditation, a part of her soul. It is her love for Kalidas which enables her to bear all the pain and suffering she faced. In return of her idealism and selfless love which she showers upon Kalidas what she gets is rejection, insult, deception and a life of misery and disgust. She pays a terrible price for her love and had to live a life full of penury and suffering. In order to earn her livelihood, she had to turn to prostitution. To her, life becomes an endless journey of wait, yearning and pain. Towards the end, Kalidas returns to her but after witnessing the harsh reality of her life he abandons her. Thus, Mallika loses all her self-respect, dignity, pride and identity. Through her fate, Mohan Rakesh has successfully portrayed the suffering of idealistic people in this world of harsh reality and sheer bitter realism.

The title of the play *Ashad Ka Ek Din*, is quite meaningful and symbolic as it has been derived from the second verse of Kalidas's play 'Meghdutam' which literally means 'a day in the month of Ashad'. Since the month of Ashad invokes an imagery of sulking sun, dry landscape and nature losing all vitality. The title of the play seems to signify that life without the loved ones becomes an endless journey of separation, pain, yearning, longings and unmatchable loss. But the playwright does not narrate the story of one day. Rather, he tells the tale of three different days being set in different dimensions of time which are being divided by an invincible wall of time. The reader can easily decode that the things have been changed enormously amongst these three days. Perhaps he tries to signify that the time once gone you can never be returned. Love which is lost once can never be acquired again.

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