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**Unveiling the Essence: Exploring Themes in Plays of Mohan  
Rakesh**

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## Abstract:

Hindi literature is spread across a wide time span and encompasses a wide variety of theme and technique in all its literary genres. Hindi drama spans across a wide time span from the early Ramlila and Rasalila to the modern dramas of Bharatendu Harishchandra, Jaishankar Prasad, Mohan Rakesh, etc. My paper attempts to bring to light the variety of themes and techniques that were used by the first modern Hindi dramatist Mohan Rakesh in his two plays *Ashadh ka Ek Din* and *AdheAdhure*. *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* is composed on the background of historical environment while, on the contrary, *AdheAdhure* is composed on the background of social environment. Modern life of chaotic society is psychologically depicted throughout the plot of both dramas by use of soliloquy. The dramas are the best pen-portrait of the middle-class human being trying to struggle his way out in the materialistic and chaotic world.

**Keywords:** Hindi drama; Modern literature; Chaos; Social environment; Soliloquy.

## Introduction:

Hindi language enjoys a special place in the Indian subcontinent due to it being the language of a majority of the people. It is also recognized as the National Language of people of India, where it is spoken by a huge majority of people across the borders of state, religion and caste. Hindi literature acquires a special place in India. Hindi literature is spread across a wide time span and encompasses a wide variety of themes and technique in all its literary genres. Hindi drama spans across a wide time span from the early Ramlila and Rasalila to the modern dramas of Bharatendu Harishchandra, Jaishankar Prasad, Mohan Rakesh, etc. They highlighted the rich variety of theme and technique. My paper attempts to bring to light the variety of themes and techniques that were used by the first modern Hindi dramatist Mohan Rakesh in his two plays *Ashadh ka Ek Din* and *AdheAdhure*. The translation of these dramas in English allows them to be relished not only by non-Hindi user of India but also by many foreign readers.

## Biography of Mohan Rakesh:

Mohan Rakesh (1925-72) is a famous Hindi short-story writer, novelist and playwright. He belongs to the modern Hindi literary movement of *naikahani* (new short story). Some of his plays are first written as short stories. For example, *The Great Swans of the Waves* is first a short story. N. Choudhuri points out: "With Mohan Rakesh Hindi drama makes a departure from pseudo-modernism and traditional symbolism to the drama of 'non-communication' - the modernman's failure to understand himself or to understand the other



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person and their mutual failure to understand each other, which is the real tragedy of modern life". (Choudhuri, 512-13) Mohan Rakesh is greatly influenced by Marxism. He says: "We called ourselves progressive because most of us, including me, agree with the philosophical aspects of Marxist thinking...." (Rakesh, 1973). Yet he does not completely align himself with the 'die-hard progressives'. Consequently, he is criticized by both progressive and non-progressive writers. (Rakesh, 1973). He also makes use of history and legend in *One Day in Ashadh* and *The Great Swans of the Waves* to throw light on contemporary problems. He justifies this: "I don't think that there's any harm in exploiting a particular character or situation in history for the sake of saying something modern, particularly if using such a character or situation would make it easier for the writer to do so." (Rakesh, 1973). His plays elucidate the suffering of men and women, especially at psychological level, as they fall victims of socio-economic hierarchy and cultural hegemony.

### ***Ashadh Ka Ek Din:***

*Ashadh Ka Ek Din (One Day in Ashadh)* is a debut Hindi play by Mohan Rakesh written in 1958. It received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for the Best Play in 1959 and has been staged by several prominent directors to critical acclaim. The drama is about the historical figure of Kalidas, the great Sanskrit poet and playwright. The historical facts about the life of Kalidas are very rare. Much of the detail available is through his epics and poems. Mohan Rakesh uses the historical story of Kalidas as a background in this play. It is not merely the Kalidas of Sanskrit literature, but a modern man attacked by internal mental conflict and contradiction. He is afraid of the problems that his chaotic, realistic society presents. Characters like Mallika are imaginative characters. The title of the play is taken from Kalidas's work *Meghadutam*. It means a day in the month of Ashadh. Since the month of Ashadh is usually the onset period of the monsoon in North India, the name can be understood to mean One day during the Monsoon.

*Ashadh ka ek din* is a three-act play centered on Kalidas' life, sometime in the 100 BCE-400 CE period. In the first act, he is leading a peaceful life in a Himalayan village and is romantically involved with Mallika. However, he is invited to appear at King Chandragupta II's court in far-off Ujjayini. Torn between his current idyllic existence and love on one hand, and the desire to achieve greatness on the other, he leaves for Ujjayini in a conflicted state of mind. Mallika wants the best for the man she loves, so she encourages him to go to Ujjayini. In the second act, Kalidas has achieved fame and is married to a sophisticated noblewoman, Priyanganu, while Mallika is heartbroken and alone. Kalidas visits his village with his wife and a small



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group of attendants. He avoids meeting Mallika, but Priyanganjari does. Priyanganjarahumiliatingly offers to help Mallika by making her a royal companion and marrying her to one of the royal attendants, but Mallika declines. In the third act, Kalidas reappears in the village. Mallikais now married to & has a daughter from Vilom. Vilom is a bad character whom Mallika and Kalidas always hated for questioning their relationship from a worldly perspective. Mallika learns that he has renounced his courtly life and the governorship of Kashmir that he had been granted. Kalidas comes to see Mallika but, learning of her situation, despairs. The play ends with him leaving her house abruptly. Mallika, in a soliloquy says, "Even if I did not remain in your life, you always remained in mine. I never let you wander from my side. You continued to create and I believed that I too am meaningful, that my life is also productive." (Rakesh, 1958.)

Aparna Bhargava has observed that each act ends "with an act of abandonment on the part of Kalidasa: when he leaves for Ujjayini alone; when he deliberately avoids meeting with Mallika during his subsequent visit to the village; when he leaves her home abruptly."(Dharwadker, Aparna Bhargava.) The play portrays the personal price that both Kalidas and Mallika pay for his decision to reach for greatness. As Kalidas deserts Mallika and moves to Ujjayini, his creativity begins to evaporate, though his fame and power continue to rise. His wife, Priyanganjari, struggles in vain to replicate his native surroundings but she is no substitute for Mallika. In the final meeting between Mallika and Kalidas at the play's conclusion, Kalidas admits to Mallika "that the man she had before her was not the Kalidasa she had known." (Rakesh, 1958.) He reveals to her that "Whatever I have written has been gathered from this life. The landscape of Kumarasambhav is this Himalaya, and you are the ascetic Uma. The Yaksha's torment in Meghaduta is my own torment and you are the Yakshini crushed by longing. In Abhijnanashakuntalam, it was you whom I saw in the form of Shakuntala. Whenever I tried to write, I reiterated the history of your and my life." (Rakesh, 1958.)

In modern times, it is generally seen that people establish their political and other connection so that they may reap the benefit of such connections when they require. It is only Mallika who tries to persuade Kalidas to go to Ujjayani so that his talents may fully blossom. She has no vested interest of her own. She loves him for his poetic talents. This is the reason that despite his poverty, she craves to enjoy his company as portrayed in the beginning of the play. Kalidas is also tempted to material well being as he suffered the life of destitution in his childhood. Although he is appointed as a national poet, he accepts the position of a ruler to become rich and to take revenge on those who had humiliated him in his bad days. He admits to Mallika when he comes back from Kashmir as an unsuccessful ruler:



“You were surprised that I was going to take over as a ruler of Kashmir. You might have felt it quite unnatural. But it does not appear unnatural to me. It was a natural reaction of a povertystricken life. Possibly it was the mood to take revenge on those who had humiliated and made fun of me some times”. (Rakesh, 1958)

The characters like Ambika, Matul and Vilom and Kalidas himself appreciate the material success in life as they understand that wealth is essential for happy life. Thus, the playwright has successfully exploited the historical event into modern context.

*One Day in Ashadhaby* Mohan Rakesh exemplifies how the social deformity weakens human love and relations. The play makes the character of Kalidasa represent a writer who cannot resist the temptations being offered by the state and other agencies. He ignores his commitment to the people and the place that he owes his glory to. In the play, the poet succumbs to the royal allurements and betrays Mallika who loves him and who inspires him in writing great plays. Kalidasa becomes a successful poet while Vilom remains a peasant. Mallika is a victim of cultural prejudices. She runs after Kalidasa who runs after royal honours. She doesnot love Vilom who offers to marry her. She cannot perceive the tenderness of his heart hidden under his rough behaviour. Vilom lives with Mallika who is forced to accept him by poverty. All of them ruin their life by trying to scramble up the ladder of social hierarchy.

The dialogues of the play are brief, well-knitted and alive. They are in match with the plot, character and environment. With this, there are few soliloquies in the play. It is used to express the internal conflict and contradiction of a character. For e.g. in act – II, Kalidas does not come to meet Mallika. She expresses her internal conflict and contradiction through a soliloquy. The play ends with him leaving her house abruptly. Mallika, in a soliloquy says, "Even if I did not remain in your life, you always remained in mine. I never let you wander from my side. You continued to create and I believed that I too am meaningful, that my life is also productive." (Mohan, 1958)

The soliloquies are not tedious to the readers though they are long. The use of soliloquy is done to highlight the mental condition of the character. This provides depth to the dialogues and makes debatable. Rakesh is successful in expression of modernityin topic and dialogue also. Mohan Rakesh uses poetical language only for the characters which are connected to deep thought and poetic nature. The language of other characters is simple, natural and realistic with the use of colloquial words.



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Though *Ashadh ka Ek Dinis* written on the historical character of Kalidas, it is not a hisotircal drama. There are many liberties taken by Mohan Rakesh in creating this character. Mohan Rakesh has not mentioned about Gupta Emperor anywhere in this drama. We have no knowledge about the early life of Kalidas. The play depicts Kalidas as a man of village. The village is situated ata side of a beautiful hilly area. The dramatist is completely successful to drawthe pen-picture of the external environment and atmosphere of that village where Kalidas lived. The use of soil dishes, wood to light, use of rice, etc. depict the historical time in a village area. Matul, supporter of Kalidas, is described as a man of animalhusbandry. Milk, Sugar, Ghee, Honey etc. are mentioned as the substances ofdrinking. External natural beauty is described well through beginning dialogues of Mallika. In this society, the women can move freely. Mallika freely wanders in the hilly areas alongwith Kalidas. The difference between rural villagers and urban people is clearly mentioned. The villagers are possessed by qualities virtues like sympathy, selfishness, desireness, jealousy etc. Matul is a character of selfishness, Vilom presents jealousy and Nikshep is of sympathy. On the other hand, the urban characters belong mostly to royal society are arrogant in their behavior. At the political level, Kalidas becomes the ruler of Kashmir but is forced to leave his post. Mohan Rakesh develops an environmental atmosphere for the mental conflict and contradiction of the characters.

The play follows all the Aristotelian unities. The plot of the drama *Ashad Ka Ek Din* is so brief that it can be easily played within a limited period of two or three hours. The plot is divided into three acts only which may be considered as the beginning, development and climex. Its scene sequence is also favourable to the stage performancc. It is confined into a single scene in the house of Mallika. The main plot is about the love story of Kalidas and Mallika. Withthis sub-plots are present. But they are described only by looking through the window of Mallika's same house. Horse riding of kalidas is performed by sounds of galloping only which is easily presented on the stage. This is an example of off-stage action. Thus, there are no problems of scenes changingwith the change of events of the plot.

The drama is a systematic presentation of the life of Kalidas. Few elements are borrowed from existing tales and fables in the Indian society. With this, to give a modern outlook, the dramatist has depicted Kalidas as a character suffering from internal conflict and mental contradiction through which he wants to clear the purpose of spontaneous creation of literaryworks. Courtship is an obstacle to the spontaneity of creation. The depiction of love triangle is to depict the thought and realism in drama. Kalidas becomes the ruler of Kashmir, but he fails. Mohan Rakesh is success indepiciting the truth of contradiction between politics andliterary creations.



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There is the Platonic love of Mallika for Kalidas. Kalidas writes everything out of his love for Mallika. She sacrifices her life on her love with Kalidas. She says 'She has married Vilom but she does not love him.' (Mohan, 1958) On the contrary, Kalidas loves Mallika but he has married Priyangu Manjari. The drama addresses modern society's problem of love and marriage. Their lives are destroyed due to the ego of Kalidas and Mallika. Kalidas left her due to his ego and she married Vilom due to her ego.

### ***Adhe Adhure:***

*Adhe Adhure* is the third drama composed by Mohan Rakesh, published in 1969. It established him as a great and famous realistic dramatist not only in Hindi literature but also in the world literature. It was composed on the basis of contemporary life condition of modern society. This drama has mainly been prepared as a lively portrait of a middle-class family.

Mahendranath, the hero, lost his total capital in a business and Savitri, the heroine, maintained the family burden by her small payment of service. Both of them were upset with each other. They search new path to uplift the family condition but were unsuccessful. This arouses the feelings of irritation and even hate against each other. But they are forced to live together. Savitri feels that Mahendranath, her husband, is a man of less personality, suppressive and incomplete man. She desired a complete husband to run her family. She does not tolerate the dependence of her husband on his friend Juneja and his service to others. Savitri's contempt for her husband is seen when she says, "That he's never had any confidence in him. The test for everything in life has been you. Whatever you think, want, do, he too must think, want and do. Why.....? Because you are a man. And he? He is not even half a man! (Mohan, 1969)

As her husband fails to fit her image of a masculine man, Savitri runs after several men but fails to realize her dream. She is not satisfied with Mahendranath, and so tries to find the complete man in Singhanian, Juneja, Manoj and Jagmohan. Savitri wants her son Ashok to settle down and invites Singhanian home to introduce him to her son. Singhanian and Jagmohan are the members of the urban rich class who show off their riches and high social status, take undue advantage of the weaker sections and exploit women employees for gratifying their sexual lust and for pleasure.

The incompleteness of wife and husband's relationship influenced all the family members. Binni, the elder daughter of Mahendranath and Savitri, is married to Manoj but is unable to adjust. There seems to be some sort of estrangement between Binni and her husband. But now she is remaining at mother's home, and



she is quite upset and dissatisfied. My son Ashok is unemployed and has failed to find any satisfactory job. He is living like an avagabond. The younger daughter becomes rebellious, perversive and fretful. As a whole, this family is a tragedy in itself. It is completely tragic scenery of a lower-middle class family. The play reveals the pretentious nature of upper middle-class Indian society and women's urge to become economically independent.

Archana Durgesh writes, "*Halfway House* expresses tragedy, helplessness, vacuum, egoism rise of individualism, feeling of futility, and search for meaning in one's existence, distance of authority, and laws of traditional values, a feeling of loneliness and alienation in contemporary life. The plot of the play is made of an average middle-class family life." (Durgesh, Archana.) Thus, Mohan Rakesh has prepared a psychological portrait of a ruined middle-class family in the context of modern suppressed, depressed and oppressed society.

The main source of the plot of this drama is an image in the mind of the dramatist created from a realistic short-story written by Anita Rakesh, his wife. It is a realistic drama. The plot is concerned with a ruined middle-class family in modern society. Mohan Rakesh has drawn a pen-picture of a ruined middle-class family suffering from various psycho-economic problems.

The drama begins with the soliloquy of Mahendranath. He comes on the stage and expresses the internal mental conflict and contradiction which clears the manifestation of the drama. These dialogues of Mahendranath indicate that the drama is composed on the basis of psychological analysis. The soliloquy places him in the category of a modern man infested with internal conflicts and confusions. The words of Ashok to his mother bring out not only his agitation and restlessness but his dislike of his mother's extra-marital relations. The dialogues of the drama fit the drama as a realistic, social drama.

*Adhe Adhure* is a drama of searching plot in plotlessness. Its dialogue composition is attractive. Style of its dialogue composition is so active and satirical that the plot reveals automatically. Juneja, the partner of Mahendra satirizes Savitri's treatment of Mahendra. He argues, "It is Savitri who always makes him feel low." (Mohan, 1969) She aspires for life which Mahendranath cannot give her, which no men can possibly give her. Juneja's words are relevant, "The point is that if any of these men had been part of your life instead of Mahendra, you would still have felt that you had married the wrong man. You would still have encountered a Mahendra, a Juneja a Shivajeet, or a Jagmohan and thought and reacted in the same way." It's a scathing satire on the overt aspirations of Savitri due to which she fails to understand her husband or his





real situation.” (Mohan, 1969)

Thus, she wants a masculine man who can provide her all material luxuries. This involves sexist culture on the other. To follow her idea, Mahendranath has to exploit others or let himself be exploited by others. Thus, the play thus showshow not only men but also women perpetuate gender deformity.

The drama depicts the middle-class society suffering from economic crisis. With this, the internal thinking of major characters like Mahendra and Savitri is also portrayed. All are living a life full of conflict. All are trying to get hold of something external support, especially economically, so as to fulfill their internal lives. The children are feeling isolated due to the disturbed lives of their parents. They find support in wrong things. Ashok secretly reads obscene novels. Binni runs away and marries Manoj but returns back to her family.

This drama is confined into only onemain plot. No subordinate plot is added here. The drama is not divided into acts or scenes. Of course, the interval is kept at the midst of the drama, but the scene does not change. The total story is arranged at the same place which is the house of Savitri and Mahendranath. The events happen within a few days. This makes it a successful social drama.

The drama is a portrayal of a realistic life and tragic story of a ruined middle-class family. The drama depicts the uneasy, lonely and suffering man and woman. Though they are married, they are not in harmonious relations. This affects their children’s lives too. The desire of the human to obtain which is not with the self forces them to ignore what is available to them. The play highlights this ideology in its best form.

### **Conclusion:**

Mohan Rakesh has emphasised on characterdevelopment in all his dramas. None of his characteris heavenly created or superman. He has made the pen-picture of social and individual problems in the modern context. All his dramas are composed with minimum numbers of characters. His characters are portraits of social and invididual problems in modern context. He has placed all his characters from real society having faults, weaknesses like Mahendranathand easy social natured Kalidas.



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Mohan Rakesh is a technical dramatist and expert in dialogue composition. All his dramas have occupied top position in Hindi Literature because of his wise dialogue composition. Language used in dialogues is considered as the experimental language for drama. The atmosphere makes a drama effective and attractive. *Ashad Ka Ek Din* is composed on the background of historical environment while, on the contrary, *Adhe Adhure* is composed on the background of social environment. Modern life of chaotic society is psychologically depicted throughout the plot of both dramas by use of soliloquy. The dramas are the best pen-portrait of the middle-class human being trying to struggle for his way out in the materialistic and chaotic world.



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