

DRAMATIC TENSION IN ASHADHA KA EK DIN

N. C. Thakur

In *An Introduction to the study of Literature*, W.H. Hudson writes, 'Some kind of a conflict is, however, the datum and very backbone of a dramatic story'. A. Nicoll, too, in *The Theory of Drama* asserts that "All drama ultimately arises out of conflict". Both have enumerated the manifold varieties of conflict from the purely outward, between two opposing forces, to the inward, going on within the mind of a hero. W.H. Hudson sums up by saying that "with the opening of this conflict the real plot begins, with its conclusion the real plot ends ..." A. Nicoll traces the inner and outer conflict from the Greek tragedies down to the modern comedies. Undoubtedly, some of the best dramas, especially tragedies, are based on conflict. But it is difficult to agree with W.H. Hudson that 'a play in which the element of conflict is slight will always be found defective as a play, however great its other merits may be'. Because it is not the lack of conflict but of dramatic tension which makes a play defective as a play.

The very word drama is derived from a Greek word which means deed or action. Differentiating drama from lyric and epic poetry, Aristotle in his *Poetics* says, "...the name of 'drama' is given to such poems, as represent action." Comparing epic and tragedy, he again asserts that tragedy "is an imitation of an action" Emphasis on action is found also in Dhananjay's *Dasarupa*. There he writes, 'Drama is an imitation of various actions.' Imitation of action, therefore, is the essence of drama. Action begets reaction, and this interaction leads to conflict. There is plenty of conflict in all drama, therefore but not as 'a datum and very backbone of a dramatic story' as found in Greek tragedy.

Conflict, especially outward, the collision of the hero with outer antagonistic forces and the setting of the one against another, undoubtedly creates dramatic tension. It excites the audience. But for the higher kind of audience, which Aristotle distinguishes from the lower both in the *Politics* and the *Poetics*, and for the intelligent and discriminative minds — the *sumansah* of Bharata — a good dramatist uses other and more subtle varie-

ties of dramatic tension. S.W. Dawson in *Drama and the Dramatic*, while talking about action and tension in drama, mentions that, besides conflicts, it is through suspense, surprise and irony, that a dramatist creates tension.

To create dramatic tension, in *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*, Mohan Rakesh has used not only conflict but suspense, irony, surprise and many other devices also. Conflict in this play is mostly outward. Because of their contradictory ideas or intentions many characters come into conflict with one another and create tense situations. The first to conflict are Ambika and Mallika, the two characters with whom the play opens. The values of the mother and the daughter are different. One's life is made up of feelings and the other's of work. Ambika sums up their different attitudes towards life when she says, 'Mother's life is not made up of feelings, it is made up of work'. These different stances are the outcome of their different reactions to Mallika's relationship with Kalidasa. Ambika is troubled because the 'sort of relationship' that Mallika is having with Kalidasa augurs no good for her. Because of him she is being talked about throughout the village. Ambika wants Mallika to overcome her feelings and get settled in life. She thinks that Mallika's feelings are 'only an illusion or self-deception' and can not 'fulfil' the necessities of life. As Mallika 'enters shivering in her wet clothes', Ambika goes on winnowing paddy. Mallika, thrilled with her new experience, goes into raptures over the first day of Ashadha and its downpour. It does not elicit any response from Ambika. She only examines her from head to foot and continues working. Mallika lovingly puts her head on Ambika's shoulder and kisses her head after a while. All this affection and cajoling on Mallika's part does not get a word out of Ambika. When Mallika, sensing her stern silence, asks her, 'why don't you say something?', Ambika looks accusingly at her and answers in a dry as dust manner, 'The dry clothes are inside on the bed.' Seeing this opening of Act I we doubt that something is out of joint. This doubt is strengthened when we hear the lyrical outbursts of Mallika being punctuated by the most prosaic short utterances of Ambika. This doubt turns into certainty, when in response to Mallika's most lyrical outburst, "...I still feel the thrilling touch of the raindrops. Every pore of my body is wet...", we see Ambika silently wiping her eyes with her wrapper. This mounting inner tension comes out into the open. When she is about to take up the winnowing basket again Mallika firmly restrains Ambika's hand and asks her, "Mother, you have not said a thing."

(For a moment Ambika looks angrily at her, then she looks away.)

Ambika : Agnimitra has come back today.

(Lifting the basket she returns to her former place. Mallika remains standing.)

Mallika : He has come back?

Ambika : From where I sent him.

Mallika : Sent him?

(Her lips begin to tremble as she comes over towards *Ambika*).

Haven't I told you that there is no need to send *Agnimitra* any place?

(Her voice becomes progressively more agitated)

You know I don't want to be married. So why do you keep trying?
Do you think that my words are meaningless?

(Taking the paddy in her hands *Ambika* rubs it and lets it fall into the basket.)

Ambika : I am beginning to see that what you say is going to be true.
Agnimitra says that people are not prepared for this sort of relationship. They say

Mallika : What do they say? What right do they have to say something?
Mallika's life is her own concern. If she wants to waste it, what right has any one to criticize her?

(*Mallika* shakes her head in an effort to suppress her agitation.)

Ambika looking angrily throws in the bombshell by announcing that *Agnimitra* has come back. This disconcerts *Mallika*, who for a moment stands still. Then there is quick sharp exchange between the two as indicated by short sharp sentences: "He has come back?" "From where I sent him." "Sent him"? Then with her lips trembling she moves towards *Ambika* and her voice rises progressively with her steadily mounting agitation till it bursts and almost in a shout, "What do they say? What right do they have to say something?" These clashing attitudes of the two create a conflicting situation full of tension.

This tension subsides a little when *Mallika* tries to suppress her agitation and, as a gesture of reconciliation, places her hand on *Ambika's* shoulder. Pleading for understanding she says, "Why aren't you trying to understand me?" This momentary release in tension again starts mounting because *Ambika* is not in a reconciliatory mood yet. When *Mallika* tries to explain her relationship with *Kalidasa* and her 'own feeling which is pure, tender, very immortal. . .', *Ambika* 'wrinkles up her face' and sarcastically ridicules her feelings. "And I am repulsed at such feelings. Pure, tender, immortal! Aah!" She says. The tension becomes tauter when she announces that she

hates Kalidasa and, on hearing him outside, with wrinkles deeping on her forehead, abruptly walks off the stage.

When Kalidasa enters he is fondling a wounded fawn in his arms. He asks Mallika to bring some milk for the fawn. As he is trying to coax the fawn to drink milk, Dantul, 'a gentleman from the royal family', steps in. When asked by Kalidasa why he had dared walk into a stranger's house, he disdainfully counter questions Kalidasa. He wants to know why, against all the canons of hunting, Kalidasa has picked up the fawn which was hit by his arrow. When Kalidasa says, "I see you don't come from this region", Dantul sneers. "I admire your perceptiveness!" he says tauntingly, "Even my dress shows that I am not a local resident." Kalidasa wants to make it clear that he had not made the observation because of his dress but because of his behaviour. Dantul, paying no heed to it, becomes almost abusive. He says :

Oh, then did you notice the lines on my forehead? It seems that you practice astrology in addition to stealing.

On Mallika's remonstrating against this accusation, Dantul asserts his right over the fawn that is hit by his arrow and menacingly says,

Therefore it is my property. So, will you, return my property to me?

Unperturbed by all this Kalidasa tells Dantul that deer hunting is forbidden there and, as Dantul is a stranger and not acquainted with that, he won't be treated as a criminal. It is too much for Dantul's ego to stomach. He sneers again and says.

I see, the villagers are going to judge the crimes of the royal family. Do you, a simple villager, know even the primary meaning of 'crime' and 'justice'?

Coolly retorting that he was surprised to find that words also were the property of the royal family, Kalidas picks up the milk and takes it to the fawn. He ignores Dantul's demand to give him the fawn. He asks Mallika to put the fawn on the bed or a blanket. When Ambika disapproves of it by saying that 'the bed and blankets are for people to sleep on, not for animals', he takes the fawn from Mallika's arms and goes towards the door. Dantul watches him in anger. The tension goes on increasing.

Dantul : And is a gentleman of the royal family, Dantul, just going to sit here and watch you go?

Kalidasa : That depends on the gentleman's pleasure.
(Without stopping or looking at him, Kalidasa goes to the doorway.)

Dantul : Perhaps you need to have a taste of the pleasures and displeasures of this gentleman.

(Kalidasa goes outside. Only his words can be heard.)

Kalidasa : Perhaps.

Dantul : Perhaps?

(With his hand on the hilt of the sword, he starts to follow....)

In this short confrontation between Dantul and Kalidasa, Mohan Rakesh has progressively built up tension. Dantul is haughty and sarcastic. He becomes abusive and contemptuous, then angry and threatening. In the end he loses all restraint and is ready for physical assault. This visible conflict between the two creates tension. This tension becomes all the more dramatic because of the behaviour of Kalidasa who is cool and calm and unruffled in sharp contrast to Dantul's angry, abusive and agitated behaviour.

In the same Act Mohan Rakesh brings face to face four people — Mallika, Ambika, Kalidasa and Vilom. Mallika is inimical to Vilom who intensely dislikes Kalidasa. Ambika hates Kalidasa who is not at all friendly to Vilom. By their gestures, movements and dialogue they make their feelings very apparent. The conflicting feelings of these characters make the scene very tense and taut.

When Mallika and Nikshep go out to persuade Kalidasa to go to Ujjaini, Vilom comes in and asks Ambika what she had thought about Mallika's marriage to Kalidasa. "I think that before he goes to Ujjaini," he says to her, "he and Mallika should be married. Otherwise . . . you must have thought about it". She is very upset and does not want to think about anything at that moment. She wants him to leave her alone. But he insists on being there to meet Kalidasa and talk it out with him. Her asking him to go away, and his insisting on staying and wait for Kalidasa gives us an inkling that something unpleasant is going to happen. This suspense creates dramatic tension. At that moment, as expected, Mallika and Kalidasa enter. This is the first encounter between Kalidasa and Vilom — the two young men of the village—who are in love with Mallika. Vilom is aggressive and Mallika, who loves Kalidasa, wants to shield him from Vilom. Mohan Rakesh in this scene very cleverly creates tension through their words and actions. Their verbal duel full of insinuations and innuendoes, their unpleasant questions and sarcastic answers, their glancing sharply and staring long, and their measured steps, all highlight their conflict and thus create dramatic tension.

(Anger and hatred appear in Mallika's eyes as she looks at Vilom. She goes over to the window. Kalidasa comes near him).

I know just how anxious you are to see me Say, are you trying out any new meters these days?

Vilom : Writing poetry is not my line of work.

Kalidasa : I know you have another occupation. (For a moment he stares in Vilom's eyes.) This occupation has probably killed your interest in poetry.

Vilom : Today, of course, you can be proud of your occupation.
(Going near the torch he rubs the handle. The torch light shines on his face.)

I have heard that you have an invitation from the capital.

Kalidasa is a poet. He is a successful poet who is being honoured by the State. Vilom, too, has tried to rival him but has failed. Kalidasa by asking him about his trying out new meters rubs him at the raw point and that, too, in the presence of Mallika. When he denies that writing poetry is his line of work, Kalidasa insinuates that his interest in poetry has been killed by another occupation, his intriguing, maligning and intruding into other people's lives. Vilom does not take it lying down. He admits that Kalidasa has been successful in his occupation and has received an invitation from the capital. But he wants to know where it will lead him. "Won't you forget about this countryside in all the glitter of the capital?", he enquires of Kalidasa. He glances at Mallika and then focussing his stare at Kalidasa he continues :

I have heard that, when a person goes there, he becomes very pre-occupied. There are so many kinds of attractions there . . . theatres, taverns, and other sorts of enjoyment.

He not only insinuates that Kalidasa is the type of character who will yield to temptation and be lost in it but also warns Mallika of the impending consequences of clinging to Kalidasa and rejecting him. The tension created by this cut and counter cut in this verbal duel is heightened by Mallika's asking Vilom to leave the room. With disgust showing on her face, she says, "Arya Vilom, this is not the time or place for this talk. I hoped you wouldn't be there."

Vilom, when he was first asked by Ambika to leave, had said that he had come to talk to Kalidasa. Now on being asked by Mallika to leave and not to talk like that, he says that he has come to see Ambika whom he had not seen for several days, and enquires whether doing such a thing was very surprising. Instead of Mallika answering him, Kalidasa says,

There is nothing unexpected for Vilom to do. Of course, his doing nothing would be a surprise.

Vilom sarcastically tells Kalidasa that there is probably nothing in Vilom's nature that escapes him. Then bandying words about opposites being close to each other, Vilom comes to the point. He had moved close to Kalidasa and moving closer now 'puts his hand on Kalidasa's shoulder' and asks :

I want to know if you are still the same Kalidasa?

(He casts a meaningful glance at Ambika)

Kalidasa : I don't understand what you mean.

(He removes his hand from his shoulder.)

Vilom : What I mean is are you the same person you were yesterday?

(Mallika, in anger, comes over from the window).

Mallika : Arya Vilom, I cannot stand this sort of nonsense.

Vilom has become aggressive. He asks Kalidasa the awkward question whether he still is the same Kalidasa that he was before recognition had come to him. What he wants to know is whether Kalidasa has the same feelings for Mallika that he had before, whether he was going to stay in the village and marry her or was he going away to Ujjaini and ditch her. Kalidasa is visibly disturbed. Before he says something and commits himself to one thing or the other, Mallika, who had with difficulty persuaded him to go to Ujjaini, intervenes and sharply rebukes Vilom for the nonsense that he is talking. Vilom strongly insists on asking the question which he says is 'a very sensible question'. He wants to draw in Ambika on his side. Turning to her, he says, 'Isn't my question a reasonable one? ... well Ambika?'

(Bothered by the question, Ambika stands up.)

Ambika : I don't know anything about this, and I don't want to know anything.

(She starts to go inside)

Vilom : Wait Ambika! (Ambika stops and looks at him) Until yesterday the relationship between Kalidasa and Mallika was the talk of the village.

(In anger Mallika steps forward.)

Mallika : Arya Vilom, you

Vilom : Keeping that in mind, isn't it fitting that Kalidasa make it clear whether he is going to Ujjaini alone or

Mallika : Kalidasa does not have to answer your question.

Vilom : When did I say he had to? Possibly Kalidasa's conscience might force him to give an answer. Well, Kalidasa?
(Kalidasa turns. They face one another.)

Before answering his question, Ambika stands up. By bringing in action in between the dialogue, Mohan Rakesh has created a dramatic pause which heightens the dramatic tension. She refuses to be on his side and starts to go away from there. He asks her not to go. Ambika, 'stops and looks at him.' With all the characters standing tense, Vilom comes out with the most unpleasant thing that he could say about the relationship between Kalidasa and Mallika. It infuriates Mallika who steps forward 'towards him'. The moment becomes very dramatic. Vilom, ignoring her outburst, continues with his nasty question. Afraid that it might lead to unsavoury consequences, Mallika again tries to intervene. Ignoring all this, when Vilom hurls his question directly at Kalidasa, he turns towards him and they face each other. Coming face to face of these two inimical persons is again a moment of great dramatic tension. When Vilom goes on insisting on getting an answer from Kalidasa, Mallika tries to separate them. She steps in between them and tells Vilom that he should leave her house at that very moment.

Thus confronting these bitterly opposed people and punctuating their cutting remarks with appropriate pauses created by their gestures and movement, Mohan Rakesh uses conflict to create dramatic tension. There is inner conflict too in the minds of Mallika and Kalidasa. The conflict in Mallika's mind has been conveyed by her actions and behaviour. She wants Kalidasa to go to Ujjaini. For that purpose, disregarding Ambika's admonition, she goes to the temple to persuade Kalidasa to go. When she brings him home, they have to face Ambika and Vilom. Vilom insists on asking him a question. Not getting any answer to his question Vilom goes away. She finds Kalidasa quietly looking out of the window and asks him whether he is brooding again. She reminds him that he had promised her to go to Ujjaini and asks him whether by not going he could make her happy. She says,

You think that by turning down this opportunity and remaining here you will make me happy.

(She turns away and looks at the ceiling, trying to hide tears in her eyes.)

I know that when you go I will feel empty inside, and perhaps I will feel lonesome. Even then I am not deceiving myself.

(Trying to smile she looks at him.) From my heart I say that you must go.

Kalidasa : I wish you could see your eyes right now.

From the core of her heart she wants him to go. Yet there are tears in her eyes which she tries to hide behind her forced smile. She asks him to go and when he mentions that it means he must leave her, it is too much for the poor divided heart. As if shocked, she jumps up and involuntarily says, 'No! I won't tell you to go.' In the next breath she again says go. This shows the inner conflict that is going on in her mind. Mohan Rakesh also externalizes her inner feelings by the outward symbols of 'the sound of loud thunder and heavy rain' and 'the dark clouds that are gathering.'

But the inner conflict in *Kalidasa's* mind he has not dramatised at length. Most of it has been narrated through *Kalidasa* in Act III. Therefore it fails to create dramatic tension.

Like conflict between characters, contrast between their behaviour, gesture, movements, and dress, also creates tension.

As already seen above, conflict between *Mallika* and *Ambika* creates tension. This tension becomes more intense by the contrasting behaviour and condition of the two. *Mallika* is thrilled by her new experience that she has got by getting drenched in rain. She is lyrical both in speech and action. *Ambika* is dry, short and sharp in her speech. *Mallika* is happy and humming. *Ambika* is sad and crying. This visible contrast between the two adds to the tension created by their conflict over *Mallika's* relationship with *Kalidasa*.

Similarly, *Dantul's* encounter with *Kalidasa* is made doubly tense. In sharp contradiction to *Mallika* and *Kalidasa*, who are in rustic clothes, *Dantul* is dressed in regal raiment.

He is also adorned with a sword and arrows. He has tried to kill a fawn. *Kalidasa* is doing his best to bring it back to life. Besides seeing this distinct contrast in their attire, we hear their contrary ways of talking. *Dantul* is sneering and taunting. He is excited and abusive. *Kalidasa* on the other hand is cool and calm, absolutely unruffled. This contrast, creating more tension, heightens the conflict.

Contrast also creates dramatic tension even if there is no visible conflict between two characters. In Act II great tension is created by highlighting the contrast between the simple, rustic and innocent people of the village and the sophisticated urbanites, especially, between *Mallika* and *Priyangu*. The room is dilapidated with peeling plaster and broken chairs. The clothes are torn and patched with different coloured material. *Mallika* is wearing a loose unkempt wrapper. *Rangini* and *Sangini*, the Scholars, and *Annsvar* and *Anunasik*, the officials, are in well spruced, rich and gaudy dresses, and *Priyangu* is in her regal robes. They are clever and worldly-wise. They are

living in a superficially intellectual world. They lack depth and feelings. Priyangu wants to tear down the very house that Kalidasa loved. Mallika wants to preserve it. She is outraged to hear about it. This contrast between affluence and abject poverty, artificiality and sincerity, superficiality and depth of feelings creates dramatic tension even though there is no visible conflict between Mallika and Priyangu.²

To create dramatic tension Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter have used pause and silence very effectively in their plays. Mohan Rakesh has not indicated pauses as such. But he has created the same type of tension by creating another type of pause in between the dialogues. One becomes conscious of these pauses if one follows the meticulously worked out directions for actions. As we have already seen, an action carried out at a critical moment in the dialogue creates a dramatic pause. When Mallika is trying to make Ambika understand her feelings for Kalidasa, Ambika ridicules her feeling and says that feelings do not fulfil the necessities of life. At that time Mallika 'raises her head and looks at the ceiling for a moment.' There is a pause in their dialogue. This is followed by :-

Mallika : The material needs of life are not the only needs, Mother!
There are others.
(Ambika begins again to winnow the paddy.)

Ambika : That may be. I don't know.
(Mallika stares at Ambika for a few seconds).

Mallika : Then it is true that, like the others in the village, you are suspicious of him and dislike him.

Ambika : The other people do not know him as well as I do.
(For an instant their eyes meet.)
I hate him.
(The sign of pain, tension, and helplessness all come out on Mallika's face).

Mallika : Mother!

In this short dialogue practically every sentence is punctuated by an action. Every action takes sometime. Mohan Rakesh has specifically mentioned duration of time in these stage direction : Mallika looks at the ceiling for a moment; she stares at Ambika for a few seconds; their eyes meet for an instant. Knowing the value of a pause in dramatic dialogue, Mohan Rakesh has made judicious use of it. Having failed to convince Ambika that feeling which is pure, tender and even immortal has some meaning, Mallika starts a new topic. The new topic coming after the pause attracts our attention and makes us inquisitive about the outcome. Mallika wants to know from

Ambika if she, too, like the other villagers, dislikes Kalidasa. Instead of making her reply at once that she disliked him, Mohan Rakesh delays the answer. He first makes her give reasons for her feelings which are stronger than the feelings of the other people. They do not know him as well as she does. This has created a pause. Mohan Rakesh adds another pause! For an instant their eyes meet. And then comes the answer — “I hate him.” This pause before her answer adds more punch to her strong feelings. It is not dislike but hate that she feels for him.

Mallika wants Kalidasa to go to Ujjaini. He is hesitant. He does not want to uproot himself from his only ground, from the land where he has many ties. He is afraid that ‘the new ground can also starve’ him. But she insists that Kalidasa should go. At that moment ‘lightening flashes and distant thunder is heard’, and she says,

May be it will rain again... It is getting dark already. The Acharya must be waiting for you.

Kalidasa : Are you telling me?

Mallika : Yes! Please you will see I will be happy after you are gone. I will wander through the countryside and each evening watch the sunset from the temple....

Kalidasa : Does this mean I must leave you?
(Mallika, as if shocked, jumps up.)

Mallika : No! I won't tell you to go. You are going, so I only pray that your path will be clear Go.
(Kalidasa closes his eyes for a moment. Then hurriedly he goes out)

Kalidasa is hesitant and Mallika is insistent. This creates uncertainty. This uncertainty is increased when we watch Mallika crumbling under the pressure of her emotion which she is heroically trying to suppress. She asks him to go. But when Kalidasa says the same thing in other words, when instead of Mallika's ‘go’, he enquires whether that means that he should leave her, it comes to her as a shock. It almost unnerves her. “No! I won't tell you to go.”, she says. Then mustering all her courage she says the next sentence, then pauses and says the final go. As she has paused, Kalidasa pauses, too. He closes his eyes for a moment before he hurriedly goes out. These two pauses, one indicated by the three dots and the other by his closing his eyes for a moment, are very dramatic. They bring the tension to a breaking point.

There is another type of suspense that creates tension. In Act I, ‘The sound of hoofbeats is heard in the distance. Ambika gets up and goes to the

window. Mallika stays seated for a moment, then she, too, goes and looks out of the window. The sound of the hoofbeats comes closer, then fades away.' Ambika tells Mallika that '... whenever they do appear something terrible happens. Sometimes you hear of wars and sometimes of a plague.' The last time that she had seen them there was the plague in which her husband had died. Again we hear the hoofbeats in Act II. When Mallika goes inside to administer medicine to Ambika and Nikshep goes to the window, 'he hears the sound of hoofbeats outside approaching then fading.' When Mallika comes out, Nikshep says,

It looks as if visitors have come again today.

Mallika : Who?

Nikshep : Possibly government officials. Right now, I see two figures like I saw the time when the Acharya came to take Kalidasa.
(A slight chill passes through Mallika's body.)

Mallika : The same people?
(She tries to laugh in order to suppress her feelings.)

Do you know what mother says? She says that whenever these people have come, something has happened. Sometimes it has been war, sometimes the plague
But nothing happened last time.

Nikshep : Nothing happened?

Last time the Acharya had taken away Kalidasa. From Ujjaini he has not sent a word to either Nikshep or Mallika. He has married the Gupta Princess there. Here Mallika has fallen into circumstances that have reduced her to sorry plight. The plaster in the room has fallen out the conchshell and lotus have lost their colour, the chairs are broken, the utensils are lying uncleaned and her clothes are unkempt. Something unfortunate has happened. There are hoofbeats again. It creates great suspense. Will something unfortunate happen again?

Besides this suspense, Mohan Rakesh creates another type of suspense through the sound of hoofbeats. Hardly had they finished talking about the unfortunate outcome of the visit of the riders to the village, when the hoofbeats are heard again. Nikshep hurries to the window and exclaims, "Yes, yes! no, but why not!" The sound of the hoofbeats fades away and he comes away from the window very excited. Mallika asks,

Why are you suddenly so excited, Arya Nikshep?

Nikshep : I just saw one other figure on horse back.

Mallika : So? you too have started wasting your time anticipating the worst?

Nikshep : But this was a very familiar figure, Mallika.

Mallika : Familiar?

Nikshep : I am sure it was Kalidasa.

(Mallika stands as if she is paralyzed, holding the clothes in her hands. Her voice lowers.)

Mallika : Kalidasa How could it be?

Nikshep : I saw him with my own eyes. He was riding towards the mountain top. Others may not recognize him in his royal robes, but Nikshep's eyes cannot be mistaken ... I will go find out right now. These officials must have come, with him.
(Highly excited he departs.)

The hoofbeats are heard again. Nikshep goes to the window. He is very excited. It is shown by his physical movements and conveyed by his, 'Yes, yes! no. but why not.' He is excited because he has seen someone, someone like Kalidasa, and not because he has started wasting his time 'anticipating the worst.' Kalidasa is there. He has gone to the mountain top. He has not come to see Mallika. Will he or will he not? Vilom voices these doubts in the same Act when, after the visit of Rangini, Sangini, Anunusik, Anuswar and Priyangu, he says, "Isn't it strange that Kalidasa himself didn't think it appropriate to come by here?" Then he says that he is sure that Kalidasa will come sometimes as 'people do not break relationships like this.' Mallika does not want Vilom to be there at that moment. She asks him over and over again to go and leave them in peace. He says,

I know you find my being here disagreeable. This isn't anything new
... But I want to stay just a while longer.
(Again he looks outside.)

I see a rider coming from the mountain. Perhaps this time he may want to stop for a few moments. If he does, then I will be able to find out how he is. We are very old friends.

He insists on staying longer to meet Kalidasa, about whose coming there he is not certain. This uncertainty he conveys by saying, "Perhaps, he may. . . . If he does" Mallika on the other hand is sure that he would come. She does not want him to stay there, If he has to meet him, he should

meet him somewhere else. She is so excited and beside herself that suddenly she goes over to Vilom, grabs his sleeve and tries to pull him away from the window. This conflict between the two creates tension. This tension goes on increasing with the rising intensity of the conflict and the approaching sound of the hoofbeats.

Mallika : Please don't insist on staying here

(She tries to pull him by the sleeve. But Vilom doesn't move from where he is. The sound of distant hoofbeats can be heard.)

.... I'm telling you, you must go. This is my house and I don't want you here right now.

(Vilom does not move. The hoofbeats come clear. Mallika walks away from him, comes over to Ambika, and takes hold of her shoulders.)

Mother, tell him he must leave. I don't want anything unpleasant to happen here

(When Mallika shakes her, Ambika bends like a dead body The hoofbeats sound close. Mallika leaves Ambika and moves towards Vilom.)

Arya Vilom, I have asked you to leave. You

(At that moment the hoofbeats sound very close, then they begin to fade away. Mallika stands transfixed. Slowly Vilom turns away from the window.)

Vilom : I am leaving.

Thus using contrast, conflict and suspense at one place, Mohan Rakesh creates dramatic tension which is rarely seen in dramatic literature.

Mohan Rakesh creates tension also by manipulating entries of characters in a dramatic manner. Most entries, because they introduce a new element and thus start and speed up new reaction, are dramatic. But some entries are so apt and well-timed that they create greater tension. In Act I, Ambika and Mallika have had an argument about Mallika's relationship with Kalidasa. It has resulted in Ambika's emphatic pronouncement of her hatred for Kalidasa. She hates him as she feels, "My house is being ruined by him." Hardly has she uttered these words when Kalidasa is heard outside the doorway. Kalidasa's entry at this particular moment becomes very dramatic. Similarly, in the same Act Ambika's entry becomes very effective when she returns from the inner room where she had gone to avoid meeting Kalidasa.

Kalidasa has brought in the wounded fawn. Dantul follows him to demand it as it has been wounded by his arrow. Kalidasa refuses to do so, saying,

The fawn belongs to the mountains. And we belong to the same mountains as these creatures do. You are mistaken if you think we will put him in your hands.

Then turning to Mallika, as he says, "Mallika, put him on the bed or on a blanket." Ambika comes out from inside and retorts, "The bed and the blanket of this house are not for fawns." Her inimical attitude refusing the bed and the blanket for the fawn adds to the already existing tension that has been created by the conflict between Kalidasa and Dantul.

Similarly, Kalidasa's entry when he comes with Mallika, is very dramatic. Vilom has visited Ambika and wants to know what she has done about Mallika. Kalidasa and Mallika should be married before Kalidasa goes to Ujjaini. Ambika is not willing even to think about it at that moment. When Ambika protests that by telling her all that he was not easing her unhappiness and says, "Vilom! I am asking you to leave me alone . . . now", he replies,

I think right now it is imperative that I be with you, Ambika. I came here to tell him, not you. I am hoping that he'll come here soon with Mallika. I saw her going towards the temple. I want to wait here for Kalidasa.

No sooner has he uttered these words than Kalidasa, with Mallika behind him, comes to the doorway and says, "You won't have to wait any longer. Vilom!" Kalidasa's entry at this particular dialogue of Vilom is electrifying. It brings face to face two antagonistic characters. It heightens our expectancy of ensuring conflict between the two.

Ambika's entry in Act II is also very dramatic. She is ill and lying in bed inside. Mallika is busy talking to Priyangu, who in her own clever way wants Mallika to go with her to Kashmir. She wants her to marry one of the two officials she had sent to the house earlier. Mallika is shocked at the proposal. Priyangu, not knowing the depth of her feelings for Kalidasa, thinks that she has not liked the two officials, and says,

It seems that neither of these suits you. Well, they are not the only two in the Kingdom. There are numerous other officials. Come with me. Whomsoever you wish among them. . . .

(Abruptly Mallika sits down on the seat, and reacting strongly, she bites her lips.)

Mallika : Please stop talking about it.

(Because her throat tightens, the words are not clearly spoken. The inside door opens and Ambika comes out. But because of her illness she takes each step trembling, stopping to steady herself. Priyangu begins to move towards Mallika.)

Priyangu : Why Don't you want to have your own home and family?
(Very slowly Ambika moves towards her.)

Ambika : No. She has no such desire.

(Turning quickly, Priyangu looks at her. startled, Mallika jumps up.)

Mallika : Mother!

Ambika : Her heart has no such desire because it responds only on the level of feelings. As a result, her life

Mallika is abjectly sitting there biting her lips. Priyangu is towering over her and tempting her with the most precious things to a woman : her own home and family. At that crucial moment we see Ambika coming out on her faltering feet. When, instead of Mallika, she answers Priyangu's question that she has no such desire, both are startled. Priyangu turns quickly and Mallika jumps up. The slow faltering movements of Ambika, her unexpected utterance and the quick movements of the other two create a very dramatic situation full of tension.

As entry of a person at a crucial moment creates dramatic tension, the introduction of something unexpected and incongruous creates tension. In Act III the cry of the baby is very dramatic. Kalidasa has just come back. He has told Mallika that whatever he wrote in Ujjaine reflected his love for and separation from Mallika, that she was 'the asutere Uma' in *Kamarasambhav* that she was before him in the form of Shakuntala, and that the pain of the Yaksha in *Meghdut* and the lamentations of Ajo in *Raghuvansh* were expressions of his own torment. He has also seen the epic of infinite chapters written on the blank pages by tear drops and drops of sweat, by the finger nails that have scratched it and the teeth that have bitten them. Conscious of their love for each other, he thinks of starting his life anew. Then turning to Mallika, he says,

But there is life to live beyond this. We can make a new beginning from this very moment.

(Just then the baby's crying is heard. Mallika jumps up to go to the baby. Kalidasa looks at her with a troubled expression.)

Kalidasa : Mallika!

(Mallika stops and looks at him.)

Mallika : My gift.

(She goes inside. Stupefied, Kalidasa returns from the window.)

Kalidasa : Your gift?

His hope of starting a new life is shattered. He is troubled and stupefied, that she has a baby. Hardly had he steadied himself of this mental and emotional shock when there is a knock at the door and drunken Vilom appears in the doorway. His entry at this moment adds to the already tight-stretching tension created by the cry of the baby.

In the end when Kalidasa is thinking of 'a day in Ashadha one time like' that day, he feels that the same throbbing awareness is there, and that his same heart has feelings and passions. Mallika, hoping against hope, asks him,

You said that you wanted to make a new beginning.

(Kalidasa sighs)

Kalidasa : I said that I wanted to make a new beginning. Possibly it was the struggle between desire and time. I see that time is more powerful because

Mallika : Because?

(At that time the baby begins to cry again....)

At that tense moment the cry of the baby is far more eloquent than any reply that Kalidasa would have given.

Besides dramatic entries that create tension, constant introduction of new people and ideas also produces tension. Mohan Rakesh has made ample use of this device in *Ashadha Ka Ek Din*. The first entry in Act I is of Mallika. She is drenched in the downpour of Ashadha and is happy. She is full of the experience that she has had. This experience is conveyed to us in about half a dozen of Mallika's dialogues. This feeling of happiness and exuberance is juxtaposed with the depressed feelings and tears of Ambika. At that moment sound of hoofbeats is heard. In about six dialogues the fear about the visit of the officials is finished. Then the topic about Mallika's marriage starts which leads to conflict between the mother and the daughter over Kalidasa's rela-

tionship with Mallika. It is brought to a finish in twenty-two dialogues. Then Kalidasa enters with a wounded fawn. After a short while we have Dantul entering in search of the fawn. He vehemently demands that the fawn should be returned to him and Kalidasa politely but very firmly refuses to yield it up. During this tussle Ambika enters and retorts to Kalidasa who leaves with the fawn. He is followed by the changed Dantul who has come to know about Kalidasa's identity. Left alone the mother and the daughter revert to the same question of Kalidasa's relationship with Mallika. They cannot see eye to eye with each other. At this point Matul comes in. He is in search of Kalidasa who has refused to go to Ujjaini to be the court poet. Matul is still venting his ire against Kalidasa when Nikshep comes in and invites Matul's ire on himself. After Matul has left to attend to the Acharya, Nikshep discloses the purpose of his coming there. It is to ask Mallika to persuade Kalidasa to go to Ujjaini, as he has taken shelter in the temple and refuses to accompany the Acharya. Nikshep is of the view that only Mallika can persuade him to go. He asks her to accompany him to the temple. Disregarding Ambika's injunction, Mallika goes out with Nikshep to see Kalidasa. Hardly had they gone out when Vilom enters to enquire whether Kalidasa is going to marry Mallika before he goes to Ujjaini and to know what Ambika is going to do about it. When he gets no response from Ambika he declares that he would wait for Kalidasa there and ask himself this question. At that moment Kalidasa and Mallika come in. This confrontation leads to some very tense moments as already seen above.

In this Act there are ten entries besides the introduction of a member of sudden and new ideas with turns and counter turns in the plot and of the sound of hoofbeats. This keeps our attention keyed up to a very high pitch.³ Similarly in the other two Acts there are constant turns and counter turns in plot and idea which make the play dramatically tense.

Act II starts with Nikshep and Mallika. Nikshep is feeling sorry for having asked Mallika to persuade Kalidasa to go to Ujjaini. Several years have passed. He has not cared to send a message even. It is rumoured that he has married the Gupta Princess after having 'vowed that he would never marry.' Mallika is trying to find excuses for this lapse on his part. While they are still discussing Kalidasa's long absence and silence, the sound of the hoofbeats is heard. Nikshep goes to the window. He sees a rider and is very excited. 'Others may not recognize him in those royal robes, but Nikshep's eyes cannot be mistaken.' He rushes out to meet Kalidasa. Mallika is overwhelmed. 'She bites her fingers and upon feeling the pain walks mechanically to the window.' At that moment Rangini and Sangini, two total strangers, walk in. When Rangini and Sangini go out, Mallika ponders over what she had thought she would do when Kalidasa comes back to her. She is expecting him to come and there is a knock at the door. She jumps up and goes to open the door. She is bewildered as instead of Kalidasa she sees Anuswar and Anunasik. Then enters Matul and dismisses the two officials. He goes out with

them and returns with Priyangu. After Priyangu has dismissed Matul, she has the opportunity to talk to Mallika. During their conversation Ambika comes in. Disgusted by Ambika's condition and behaviour and unsuccessful in her mission to persuade Mallika to go with her to Kashmir, Priyangu leaves the mother and daughter. The mother is sarcastic and upbraiding the daughter when Vilom comes in.

Thus by introducing number of people in Act II, as well, Mohan Rakesh gives many turns and twists to the plot. Their frequent turns in ideas and situations keep the audience alert and creates tension. This tension Mohan Rakesh heightens by introducing the unexpected.

Instead of Kalidasa there enter Rangini and Sangini and then Anunasik and Anuswar. As already seen above the sound of approaching hoofbeats again raises her expectation that Kalidasa would visit her. Again it remains unfulfilled as the sound of the hoofbeats recedes to another direction. The expectation and the uncertainty of Kalidasa's visit to Mallika keeps up tension in Act II. It is not only Mallika but Vilom also who keenly waits for Kalidasa's arrival, though the motives for this of these two are dramatically opposed to each other.

In Act III there are not many entries but a number of new ideas are introduced. Matul's entry is to prepare the ground for Kalidasa's visit. He informs that Kalidasa has left Kashmir. It also highlights the changed circumstances of Mallika. He takes shelter from the rain in Mallika's house as he says, "whatever you may be you are the same Mallika to me, today." Whatever you may be are very pregnant words. The full implication of these words comes as a stunning blow when Mallika says,

Do you know what my life has been like during these years? What I have experienced? What I have been through?

(Abruptly she goes to the inner door and opens it with a jerk. She points to the cradle.)

Do you see this child? This is the child of my destitution The rumour from the traders is that you spend much of your time in Ujjaini visiting prostitutes. But have you seen this part of it? Can you recognize me today

There are fewer entries in this Act, but it introduces a number of new ideas. Through the two long speeches of Mallika and Kalidasa, Mohan Rakesh fills in the gaps in their story. Both narrate the experiences, mostly mental upheavals, that they have undergone. Then Vilom's entry and the cry of the baby add to the new situations created by the dramatist to upkeep the tension in the play.

Irony in drama is the communication through word and gesture to the privileged spectator of a meaning hidden from the characters. The judicious use of ironies, too, in a play creates dramatic tension. In *Ashadha Ka Ek Din* Mohan Rakesh has made use of ironic utterances, gestures and situations for this purpose.

When in Act I Ambika hears the sound of the hoofbeats she remarks that whenever the officials come something terrible happens. Mallika, while reporting this to Kalidasa, says that it sounded strange after the thrilling experience of rain. Something terrible happened then. Is something terrible going to happen now? This creates tension. In Act II Mallika and Nikshep hear the sound of hoofbeats again. On hearing the sound of hoofbeats 'a chill passes through Mallika's body' and 'she tries to laugh in order to suppress her feelings and says,

Do you know what Mother says? she says that whenever these people have come, something bad has happened But nothing happened last time.

Nikshep : Nothing happened?

(Mallika looks away from him and busies herself looking after the wet clothes.)

Mallika : What happened? whatever happened was good.

The audience, like Nikshep, knows that whatever Mallika is saying is not true. The going away of Kalidasa, which was the unfortunate result of the officials' visit in Act I, has done good to neither Mallika nor Kalidasa. This ironic statement of Mallika creates both tension and suspense. We want to know what unfortunate thing is going to happen this time. Something very unfortunate does happen : Kalidasa comes to the village but goes away without seeing Mallika.

In Act I when Ambika is sitting alone in darkness, Vilom enters carrying a torch in his hand. Ambika does not want him there at that moment. When she asks him to leave her alone instead of talking to her about how important it is for Kalidasa to marry Mallika. Vilom says,

I think right now it is imperative that I be with you, Ambika! I came here to tell him, not you. I am hoping that he will come here with Mallika.

But when Mallika says to him, "Arya Vilom, this is not the time or place for this talk. I hoped you wouldn't be here.", he says,

I know that you are not happy to see me here right now. But I came to see Ambika. We haven't seen each other for several days. This is not such a surprise, is it?

The audience knows what Mallika and Kalidasa perhaps do not that Vilom was there not to see Ambika but to talk to Kalidasa whom he ironically calls a friend. They are not close, as Kalidasa says, 'all opposites are close to each other.' In this confrontation between Vilom and Kalidasa there is great tension, as we have already seen above. Besides conflict, sarcasm and innuendo, irony, too, in this scene makes it very dramatic.

Similarly in Act III, tension is created by the use of irony. Mallika on hearing from Matul that Kalidasa has left Kashmir, taken the vow of Sanyasi and gone to Banaras, thinks of her life and what has become of her. She talks about her life of destitution and of the 'child of her destitution.' This indeed is a big change in her life. When Kalidasa comes in tired and in 'torn royal robes', Mallika continues staring at the changed Kalidasa. She is surprised at his arrival and at the change in him. She says,

Surprised ... I can't believe that you are you, or that it is I who is looking at you.

Kalidasa : I see that you are not the same Everything has changed. Or possibility it only appears to have changed in my eyes.

Mallika : Really, it is hard to recognize you.

(Kalidasa look at her for several moments Then with a sad smile he gets up and goes to the window.)

Kalidasa : And you, too, are difficult to recognize. I expected everything to be the same, just the same but nothing is the same.

(He walks and looks around.)

You have changed everything.

(While looking around he paces from the window to the other side of the room.)

Everything has been changed.

Mallika : I haven't changed.

Kalidasa, looking at the room with 'everything broken and scattered about',

with the seat 'no longer covered with tiger-skin' and moved to a different position, says that 'Everything has changed' and that nothing is the same again. But these words have more meaning for the audience than what they have for Kalidasa. Mallika is not the same Mallika that she was when he left her and went to Ujjaini. She is now the mother of, as she says, the child of her destitution. When Mallika says, "I haven't changed.", the audience knows that it is not true, at least at one level. She has not changed as regards her feelings for Kalidasa but otherwise there is a radical change in her. Thus the words acquire double meanings, one for the characters and the other for the audience. This dichotomy in meanings creates dramatic tension.

Scattered throughout this play are utterances which turn out to be prophetic. The tension is released when they come out to be true. It has already been noted how Ambika's remarks about unfortunate things happening on the arrival of the horsemen came out to be true, and how they created dramatic tension. In Act I Vilom tells Kalidasa for the benefit of Mallika,

I have heard that when a person goes there he becomes very pre-occupied. There are so many kinds of attractions there ... theatres, taverns, and other sorts of enjoyments.

This idea about Kalidasa being attracted by other sorts of enjoyments is repeated in Act II. Years have passed and no word has been heard from Kalidasa. It has made Nikshep very unhappy as he has heard 'so many other things', about Kalidasa from the traders that pass that way. That Kalidasa has succumbed to 'so many kinds of attractions' there is echoed again in Act III. This time it is Mallika herself who says, "The rumours from the traders is that you spend much of your time in Ujjaini visiting prostitutes." In Act I Vilom has come uninvited to know whether Kalidasa is going to marry Mallika before he leaves for Ujjaini. His presence and irritating questionings upset all, especially, Mallika. She asks him to leave the house. With a contemptuous laugh he looks at Mallika and says, "Your unwanted guest may come again. Please forgive me for those times also. . . ." The unwanted guest comes again in Act II and is as obnoxious as before. When he appears again in Act III, Vilom forces his way into the house and sarcastically echoes the words again: 'Now Vilom is an even more undesirable guest in this house.' He adds more punch to the already existing tension created by his forced entrance and reference to his being "undesirable guest" by saying, "But, he comes rightfully. Isn't that correct? In this house he now welcomes Kalidasa. Right?" This reversal of their positions also creates dramatic tension. The 'undesirable guest' is now the rightful host in that house who can offer with Mallika their hospitalities to Kalidasa.

Mohan Rakesh creates tension also by using incongruous dialogue between two characters. Mallika has come back after getting drenched in

rain. She is effusively talking about her experience of getting soaked in rain. Ambika is reticent. And when Mallika, noticing this says,

....Talk to me.

Ambika : What should I talk about?

Mallika : Anything. Be angry with me for coming back all wet. Or say that you are tired and, therefore, I must do the rest of the paddy. Or say that you have been alone in the house, and thus you haven't been happy.

Ambika : I feel just fine.

(She takes back the basket from her.)

And when do I have company in this house? Aren't I alone even when you are there?

(Once again she seizes the basket and puts it away by the large jar.)

Mallika : So even when I am here you still feel alone in the house.... Sometimes you complain that I disturb all of your work by living here and other times it is that

(She puts her arm around Ambika's neck from behind.)

Tell me why are you so serious.

Ambika : I have boiled the milk. Mix sugar with it and drink.

Mallika : No first answer me.

Ambika : And go lie down on the bed for a while. I still have to

Mallika : No, mother, I don't need a rest. I am not tired. I still feel the thrilling touch of the raindrops. Every pore of my body is wet. Why don't you say something? If you are going to be like this, then I won't talk to you either

(Saying nothing, Ambika wipes her eyes with her wrapper)

Ambika does not say why she is not talking. To Mallika's "Tell me why you are serious" she replies, 'I have boiled the milk'. When she insists on getting an answer, Ambika continues with her thought, "And go lie down on the bed." By these incongruous answers the suspense is lengthened and tension is

created. There is another incongruity. When Mallika asks her to say that being alone in the house she has been unhappy, she says that she is fine. This verbal statement is inconsistent with her demeanour and expressions. This inconsistency is heightened when Ambika is seen wiping her eyes with her wrapper.

There are a number of places in this play where Mohan Rakesh creates dramatic tension through incongruity. When Kalidasa enters carrying a wounded fawn in his arms he asks for some milk for the fawn. Mallika brings some milk and talks about her mother being angry with her. He does not respond to what's troubling her. He goes on with his train of thought and she with what is bothering her. She seeks some sympathy but all of it is lavished by Kalidasa on the fawn.

In the same Act when Kalidasa and Mallika are left alone, he goes over to the window. She asks him why, after having promised to her to go Ujjaini, he is brooding again. He turns to her impulsively and says, "Think again Mallika. It is not just a question of accepting the honour and patronage. I have a much more important question than that". "I am the question Aren't I?" She asks. No immediate answer is given to that by Kalidasa. She presumes that she is the question. With that presumption in her mind she goes on persuading him to go. The answer to this question comes after a while. No she is not the big question. She is only one of the ties which he has with that land. "By leaving her I would uproot myself from my only ground", is the big question that is troubling him. This incompatibility between what she feels and what he thinks, also, creates dramatic tension.

Dramatic tension, therefore, is not created by conflict only. A good playwright creates it through suspense, pause, irony, through incongruity and contrast, and through surprise created by constant turns and counter turns in idea and plot also. Though in *Ashada Ka Ek Din* there is no conflict in the sense in which W.H. Hudson uses this word, yet it is a tension-packed play because of the apt and artistic devices that Mohan Rakesh has very masterfully used in it.

NOTES

1. The quotations, at places with minor changes by the author, are from Sarah K. Ensley's translation as published in *Enact* No. 32-33.
2. For detailed study of contrast in *Ashadha Ka Ek Din* see the authors article in *Sangeet Natak* No. 40.
3. The following are the new ideas and turns and counter turns, besides the ten entries introduced in Act I:
 - (i) New experience of Mallika
 - (ii) Depression of Mallika.
 - (iii) Sound of hoofbeats.

- (iv) Mallika's relationship with Kalidasa and Ambika's frowning on it.
- (v) Kalidasa's entry with the wounded fawn and Dantul's claiming the fawn.
- (vi) Dantul's informing about Kalidasa's being called to Ujjaini.
- (vii) Matul's confirmation about Kalidasa's being called to Ujjaini.
- (viii) Matul's disclosure of Kalidasa's refusing to go to Ujjaini.
- (ix) Nikshep's confirmation of Kalidasa's refusing to go to Ujjaini.
- (x) Mallika's going to the temple to persuade Kalidasa to go to Ujjaini.
- (xi) Vilom's insistence to know whether Kalidasa would marry Mallika before going to Ujjaini, there being many diversions that would change him.
- (xii) Kalidasa being of two minds!
- (xiii) Mallika's persuading him again.
- (xiv) Kalidasa's going reluctantly.
- (xv) Mallika's breaking down under emotional stress.