

## Strains of Hope and Despair

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Everyone has their favourite monsoon song from Hindi films- from the iconic Sahilendra/Shankar Jaikishan's *Pyar hua Ikrar Hua* to the crass *Tip tip barsa paani*. My own is a relatively unknown song which has two versions, a duet by Asha Bhonsle and Rafi and a Rafi solo, both of which use the monsoon as a trope. The song is *Aaj ki raat badi shokh badi natkhat hai, aaj to tere bina neend nahin aayegi* from that eminently forgettable film "Nai Umar ki Nai Fasal" whose only redeeming feature was the fabulous songs penned by Gopaldas Neeraj and composed by Roshan.

Barsaat, badra, purwai, kale badal, badariya, sawan, bijli- all of these evoke the monsoon- the months of sawan and bhadon, when the cool purvai (easterly) wind is the harbinger of the South-West monsoon over the parched North Indian plains. The monsoon showers presaged by dark badariya, bring relief from the scorching heat. Married women come back to their parent's house and meet up with their childhood friends and ride the swings under trees laden with ripe mangos with the koyal singing. *Ab ke baras bhej bhaiya ko babul* by Shailendra captures that nostalgic longing.

Shailendra grew up in Mathura and was thus very familiar with the many emotions which the monsoon evokes. Longing for the beloved when the dark clouds form in the firmament is captured so vividly in that amazing Salil Choudhury composition, *O Sajna, barkha bahar aayi*. The sitar prelude to the song reminds one of the sounds of raindrops. Incidentally, this prelude was a favourite of the maestro Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. Of course Shailendra's first song for Bollywood was also a monsoon song, the title track from Barsaat where Nimmi meets Premnath for the first time. He went on to not just give words to *Pyaar hua ikrar hua* in Shri 420, but also the hilarious *Lapak Jhapak tu aa re badarwa* from Boot Polish as well the haunting *Allah Megh de paani de* from Guide.

Monsoon finds its place in both Indian classical and folk music. Raag Malhaar and its variations (Gaud Malhaar, Miya ki Malhaar, Megh Malhaar) were very popular with the earlier generation of music composers in Bollywood. Whether it was Naushad's

*Dukh Bhare din beeto re bhaiya* from Mother India, or Vasant Desai with *Bole re papihara* or Roshan with *Garjat Barsat Sawan aayo re*, songs with a monsoon theme were invariably based on these ragas. In folk music, Kajri sung during the months of Sawan and Bhadon in Eastern UP and Bihar has been popular since it typically expresses the yearning for one's beloved when the dark clouds gather.

The longing of a maiden for her beloved has found many expressions in Hindi film songs. R.D.Burman's first composition as an independent composer, *Ghar aaja ghiran aaye badra* from Mehmood's Chote Nawab to his haunting *Sawan ke jhoole padhe* are just two examples. A very wet Zeenat Aman trying to catch the attention of a brooding Manoj Kumar by singing *Hai Hai yeh majboori, yeh mausam aur yeh doori* is a somewhat flirtatious example of the same emotion.

And of course lovers singing in the rain can be found in countless films. Talat and Lata singing the melodious *Aha rimjhim key yeh pyaare pyaare geet liye*, a Shailendra composition set to Salil Choudhury's music from *Usne Kaha Tha* is a classic. From *Rimjhim ke tarane lekar aayi barsaat* to *Bheegi bheegi raaton mien, Run jhun run jhun* and *Aaj rapat jaayien*, there is something about the lovers romancing in the rain which filmmakers find hard to resist, though the rain is usually artificially created on the set. And yet, there is something about romancing while being drenched which touches our hearts.

Monsoon is obviously not only about lovers pining for each other or frolicking in the rains. The monsoon is possibly the most crucial economic determinant for rural India—given that large parts of the country are still dependent on rain fed agriculture, a failed monsoon can be disastrous for the economy. Recently, we saw the stock market crashing when a private weather forecaster predicted a below average monsoon but picking up when the Met department said it won't be so bad. In fact, as the Harvard historian Sunil Amrith shows, the monsoon has been an important factor in shaping the sub-continent's history.

Hindi cinema has explored this theme too. The farmer waiting expectantly for the rain or dancing with joy when it comes has been portrayed in many films. Who can forget the farmers dancing to *Hariyala sawan dhol bajata aaya* in the Bimal Roy classic *Do Beegha Zameen*. Or more recently, the joyful *Ghanan Ghanan* in *Lagaan*. Or even the prisoners singing to *Umadh ghumadh kar aayi re ghata* in *Do ankhien barah haath*.

Love, longing, and hope have found their place in Hindi film music many a time. But once in a while, a song manages to talk about something else which the monsoon brings- despair and hopelessness for those who don't have a roof over their heads. The first antara of the duet *Aaj ki raat badi shokh* from *Nai Umar ki Nai fasal* has Asha Bhonsle pining for her beloved. In the second antara, the tempo and the mood changes and the hero tells his beloved to wait till he can put a roof over the heads of those who spend their lives braving the monsoon showers under leaky thatched roofs and for whom life begins and ends on a footpath. But that was another era of Hindi film music- we seem to have come a long way from that to *Aaj rapat jaayien*.

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