



A Forgotten Classic

A M Santani is deeply moved by the delicate portrayal of human emotions in an old film, Kamal Amrohi's Daera.

This film was first released in Mumbai's Naaz theatre in the year 1956 or so. It ran only for few weeks and was then withdrawn. But it was a masterpiece of a film. It had several unique features. Its hero Nasir Khan, Dilip Kumar's younger brother and heroine Meena Kumari never come face to face or converse with each other throughout the film. Almost all the characters speak in subdued tones as if they are aware of the impending doom. The film has one of the most authentic temple song I have ever heard on Indian screen '*Devta to ho mera sahara, maine thama hai daman tumhara*' beautifully sung by Mubarak Begum in lilting music composed by Jamal Sen.

The film tells the story of a young girl (Meena Kumari) married to a very old man, which was by no means uncommon in those days. They come to town for treatment of the old man and rent a cottage in the compound of a big house owned by a landlady. The despair is writ large on the face of Meena Kumari. She attends to her husband's needs and then lies down on the bed kept outside the cottage, deeply engrossed in her thoughts. This is when Nasir Khan happens to see her from the balcony of his house and feels fascinated by her. In the course of the film there is a song sung by Talat Mehmood which is so haunting and in his characteristic soft voice, that arguably it is Talar Mehmood's best song – '*Ankhon mein ansoo to nahin, aag se dil jalta hai, dil jalta hai.*'

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One day her husband goes to another town to collect his pension and is reported to have been killed in a train crash. There is lot of commotion in the landlady's house and an eloquent discourse in defence of widow remarriage. The lady acquiesces to Nasir Khan's entreaties to marry Meena Kumari and her consent is also obtained. Suddenly the news comes that the old man is alive and is coming back. This totally shatters Meena

Kumari. Though there are no dialogues to depict her actual plight, you can feel the pain and the agony. On the one hand, she feels relieved that her husband is coming back and on the other there is a painful realisation that her chance to have better life is lost forever.

The film ends with lot of music in the landlady's house. Nasir Khan is getting married to some other girl. Meena Kumari is lying on the bed and watching the festivities around her. Slowly the music stops and the lights go dim. Now there is light only in the bridegroom's room. The camera is focussed on Meena Kumari's face who is perhaps thinking that this marriage could have been hers.

And then this light too is put off. Meena falls asleep. Early morning the alarm clock rings. It's time to give medicines to her husband. She does not get up. She is no more. A highly moving film. Our present day movie makers can take a few tips from this film. It certainly is worthy of revival like the other better known films. ❖