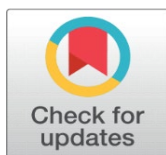
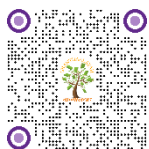


# SILENT CRIES OF INDO-PAKISTANI WOMEN AS PORTRAYED IN NAGA-MANDALA AND KALA MEDA BHES, A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO FEMINIST PLAYS

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## ABSTRACT

“One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one. Gender is not a stable identity but a performative act constituted by repeated societal norms” [Butler \(1990\)](#). The paper under analysis pertains to the two fresh and ground-breaking plays *Naga-Mandala* and *Kala Meda Bhes* by Indian and Pakistani playwrights who are quite successful and prolific writers in the arena of South Asian Literature. The aim of this study is to discover the shushed and quietened voices of women in the both plays in one way of the other. The paper is based on a qualitative research with the use of textual method and discourse analysis particularly on both the plays with the help of websites, poems, dictionaries and papers to support this research. The paper will trigger the feminist elements and identity of the Indo-Pakistani women with comparative analysis. Researchers may comprehensively draw two conclusions from this paper i.e. The suppression of the female genders due to male patriarchy in Indo-Pakistani Society and the lack of logical reasoning, supernatural elements and superstitions in both the society as represented in both the plays under-discussion.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pakistani Women, *Naga-Mandala*, *Kala Meda Bhes*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is neither any exaggeration in nor any doubt about this assumption that *Naga-Mandala* and *Kala Meda Bhes* are among the distinguished master pieces among the genre of South Asian Literature. Both the playwrights, Girsish Karnand in *Naga Mandala* and Shahid Nadeem in *Kala Meda Bhes*, have tried their utmost to pen down the themes of present Indo-Pakistani society and few unlawful atrocities committed in it while toying with the ignorance and innocence of the people in general and women in particular. As far as the expression of the plays is concerned that seems to be based on realism because the playwrights hardly employed any hyperbolic expression which may impede readers in grasping the subject matter of the textual

make-up. In both of plays, the territorial and societal culture has been portrayed in such a manner as creates a poignant imagery in the minds of the readers while going through.

The superstitions and religious belief of the people, who adhere to them blindly, have been presented in an artistic way. If the play, *Kala Meda Bhes*, is pondered upon in a critical manner, the readers become acquainted with a factual and glaring point that after getting an ox in dowry of his wife, Allah Wasaya plans to give it to the shrine-service of Pir so that latter may be pleased and resultantly he may have a son as a reward. "Wasaya: May be, offer it to the shrine's service. I might get a son as a reward" Nadeem (2002), p.3. In the same manner, *Naga-Mandala* also reveals the manifestation of superstitious elements when the readers see when Rani not bitten by the cobra during the trial after the demonstration, people (Elders) start regarding her as goddess and ask her for blessing and expect charismatic miracle i.e. the elder III, also asked for the blessings to Mother for their children Karnad (1990), p. 40. The philosophers of ontology, metaphysics, epistemology and natural theology, argument that faith and reasons go side by side. If any of them exceeds in its intensity, the person either become superstitious or become agnostic or atheist.

If viewed critically from the thematic aspects of the play under critical discussion, a noticeable point comes into limelight that extremely vociferous voices of the women remain unheard, and ignored despite their being high-pitched and intolerably louder. Even though the people, from the far neighboring areas, could listen to it as the text reveals that Kurudavva, *Massi* and *Opra* (Stranger) who were not living in very much close vicinity but both of them could sense, estimate and listen to the silent cries of *Rani*, *Sundari* and *Sohni*. Similarly, as the sound of atomic explosion, which was extremely of high frequency, couldn't be heard by the people who were very much in the close vicinity of the targeted place in Nagasaki<sup>1</sup> during the World War II but people who were far from the explosion could listen to it.

If talked about *Sohni*, she tries to make her silent cry audible to the *Maasi* but she says that none pays heed to the voices and consents of the woman. "Maasi: who every asks a woman's consent? *Sohni*: That's right. No one asks girls about such matters. *Sundari*: May God's course be upon all of you. You are so unashamed. Aren't women human" Nadeem (2002), p. 169. In the same manner, it can be mentioned here that *Appanna* doesn't talk to *Rani* nor listens to her for having lack of affection, mutual understanding and marital bond. She further explained to the *Kurudavva* regarding her machine or robotic life. She regrets of having excessive commands and directions from her controller who asks her to do the things as required in the syllabus such as "Do this", "Do that" and "Serve the food". Further she says that she is bored to death. There is no one talk to Karnad (1990), p.9! Here, it can be seen that *Rani* is representation of all women who are objectified in Indo-Pakistani society. They are limited to household and mothering being captive in four walled house. On account of having a robotic life, they are also bored to death and for them, life seems to be bizarre.

Without any hyperbolic expression or exaggeration, it can be said emphatically that both the plays, in one way or the other, present and highlight the shushed voices of Indo-Pakistani women, caged or jailed women who are regarded as product-like entities as far as the thematic aspects of the plays are concerned. In the play *Naga-Mandala*, from the character of *Rani*, it can be assumed that she is like a caged bird. Her husband, keeps her locked at home and remains whole day and night away from

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<sup>1</sup>Nagasaki is a Japanese city. It suffered a nuclear attack in August 1945.

her. She has no one to talk to with the exception of Kurudavva who experimentally visits Rani with an urge to discover the existence of living being at Appanna's house. Kurudavva finds a Rani, a caged bird in the house of Kappana, an oppressor who keeps her locked in the house [Karnad \(1990\)](#), p.10.

Furthermore, it can be seen that Rani shows her helplessness, alienation, aloofness and spacious and audial confinement when she is interrogated skeptically by Kurudavva regarding her mutual and marital understanding with her husband. Having heard the silent cries of Rani, Kurudavva gives her solace and asks her not to cry. "Don't cry child, don't cry, I haven't come here to make you cry. Does he lock you up every day like this? Rani: Yes, since the day I came here" [Karnad \(1990\)](#), p.10. Hence it can be estimated and assumed who Appanna is not letting a single stone unturned to suppress, confine and cage Rani physically, mentally and vocally. The women of Indo-Pakistani society can be found in the same state and situation as she has to abide by all the rules and regulations framed by male. She is neither expected to be vocal, nor allowed to think and plan her own future nor free enough physically to select a work place to be independent financially.

As far as the play *Kala Meda Bhes* is concerned, in the play, readers and researchers come across a substantial point that by every critical yardstick, this play unveils the fragmented, tormented, downtrodden and unheeded personalities of women who are victimized and exploited by the society in general and male chauvinism in particular. The women, somehow or the others, are regarded as living or non-living object of daily use. In the beginning of the play, we come to know that Wassaya is exceptionally happy on account of being given an ox on his second marriage with Sohni who has brought the ox in her dowry. "Wassaya: She is no robber. She has, in fact, brought wealth for our house. If she had not brought that ox, I would have been without a job" [Karnad \(1990\)](#), p.10.

Undoubtedly, it became a source of income for Wassaya and for his family. On the other hand, Sundari, who is the first wife of Wassaya, suffers and is degraded time and again on account of not providing child to her husband. "But the first wife, Sundri, is not happy. If she could bear baby for her Husband, he will not have to spend money on his second marriage. Which woman would not be unhappy if another woman is brought into the house into the house as her rival" [Nadeem \(2002\)](#), p. 150)?

Song:

"A wife or an ox, they have to die one day.

Cry if you want to, but they have to die one day.

When wife dies, little children cry for her.

When ox dies, little slaves mourn for him.

The green field have to become barren one day.

Blooming flowers have to die one day.

The full utensils have to come empty one day.

If enemy dies, friends will also die one day" [Nadeem \(2002\)](#), p.161.

In the mentioned song, it can be understood that woman is regarded as commodity or thing particularly useful in the house for the domestic chores without being cared and treated like human beings. The text of the play under our discussion reveals a very sarcastic point regarding the personalities of men in the play *Kahal Meda Bhes*, when Ditta's first wife dies, so he mourns and keens not for her eternal departure or parting rather he feels sorry and is shaken with grief from head to toe on account of impediments in the works which were associated with his wife. "Ditta:

Oh, dear parted wife. Why have you left the children motherless? Who will take care of them? Who will wash their clothes and bathe them” Nadeem (2002), p. 160?

Hence, it can be assumed and understood blatantly that women have been presented in the play some useful commodities without considering to be human being like man. There is another context in which Ditta exposes his grief regarding unavailability of the services rendered by his deceased wife. Further, it can be seen that she is bound to get up in the morning and giving breakfast to kids. Not only this, she has to massage the legs of her husband, feed the ox tied in the courtyard and wash dishes in the kitchen. She wanted to lie down for a while. She lay down and then never got up. Children kept crying, legs kept aching, ox remained hungry but she never woke up Nadeem (2002), p. 162. Out of any doubt, Nadeem has tried his utmost to pen down and elucidate the robotic duties of a woman like Maya Angelou’s poem *Woman Work* in which Angelou has expressed her sympathetic sentiments about the tiresome and head-breaking works and responsibilities of a woman: “I’ve got the children to tend... And the cotton to pick” Angelou (1978).

Hence, it would be pertinent to mention here that like Maya Angelou, Nadeem has also tried his level best to bring the unseen, ignored and unheeded works of Indo-Pakistani women in the lime light and with great determination, has made the unheard, ignored and inaudible voices or screams of women audible through his play *Kala Meda Bhes* which is under our analysis. Another worth-mentioning point for the substantiation of our plea is that throughout the play, Wassaya kept desiring, longing and yearning for a son not daughter because he knew that daughter would be a source burden on his shoulder and, son would be his helping hand in making money. “Wassaya Maybe, offer it for the shrine’s services. I might get a son in reward” Nadeem (2002), p. 151.

From the arguments and points mentioned above, it can be assumed that Nadeem, having employed all his artistic technicalities, have succeeded in portraying and elucidating Wassaya as stereotypical man of Indo-Pakistani society, who does not bother about the vociferous voices of women, Sundri and Sohni who remain unheard, ignored and inaudible throughout the play. If viewed critically, a quite appealing point comes into limelight that Appanna, being a stereo typical and fiercest husband of Rani, thinks and regards her to be an untouchable because he never wants anyone to talk to her. He always wants her to be wall-locked and boxed in the boundary house so that none could talk, feel and listen to her cries, inner griefs of aloofness and alienation. She bound not to talk to anyone nor anyone can talk to her Karnad (1990), p. 14.

Rani, one account of being alienated and aloof, feels deadly bored and has been mentally sick as it can be seen that she has unconquerable nostalgia and many times, goes in soliloquy owing to finding none around her. “Rani: (*Eye filling up*) why do you tease me like this? She is tired of suffering from her own loneliness Karnad (1990), p. 23. Hence, we can see that she is highly ignored, unheeded and alienated. Furthermore, we see that Appanna, considering Rani be an inferior creature, beats her fiercely and calls her slut on account of darkening his face in front of the villagers. When she is beaten, the cobra sees it and keeps moving frantically without noticing Karnad (1990), p. 23.

If the both texts are viewed in the light of feminist theory in a befitting manner, a point comes into limelight that both the plays *Naga-Mandala* and *Kala Meda Bhes* are interlinked completed with the first wave of feminist. Before discussing the plays, considering to be interlinked with feminist theory, it will be pertinent to discuss feminism. As far as the term feminism is concerned, it is a movement dealing

with politics, economy and culture, fighting for the legal status and rights of women in particular and other genders in general. Different writers such as poets, playwrights, story-writers and novelists, have tried their utmost to introduce the true spirit and essence of Feminism in their writings and emotional outpours.

Initially, the first wave of feminism concentrated on advocating for women's equal rights in contracts and property, as well as opposing Chattel marriage, a marriage refers to a form of marriage where one spouse, typically the wife, is considered the property or "chattel" of the other, usually the husband. In United States, this phase of feminism is seen to have concluded with the achievement of women's suffrage across all states. This progress resulted from significant institutional changes driven by feminist writers who challenged social, cultural, and political inequalities. According to Estelle Freedman, first-wave emphasized rights like suffrage, while the second wave focused on broader equality issues, such as ending discrimination. Second-wave thinkers viewed women's social and political differences as interconnected and insisted women to see their own lives politically.

Third-wave emerged as a reaction to the perceived shortcomings of 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of feminism. A significant aspect of third-wave feminism is its post-structuralist approach to gender and sexuality. Third-wave frequently focuses on 'micro-politics' and question the second wave's ideas about what is useful for women. If viewed both the plays with the lenses of all three waves of feminism, it is quite certain that Nadeem and Karnad have imbibed the essence of feminism in *Naga-Mandala* and *Kala Meda Bhes*. "Maasi: whosoever asks a woman's consent? Sohni: That's right. No one asks girls about such matters. Sundari: May God's course be upon all of you. You are so unashamed. Aren't women human" Nadeem (2002), p.169? In the mentioned line, it can be seen how the girls and females are ignored by the male chauvinism and patriarchy. In the same manner, Karnad also points out the same view about women and suppression of women. The plays are two evidences which show man's desire to keep woman shushed and confined in the four walls of the house by using to tools of anti-socialization.

The following quotation lays emphasis and proves Nadeem to be a pure feminist as it connects women merley with domestic servant and really tangible portraiture of objectification. She wanted to lie down for a while. She lay down and then never got up. Children kept crying, legs kept aching, ox remained hungry but she never woke up" Nadeem (2002), p. 162. Furthermore, it can be seen that Karnad has also shown great concerns for woman and tried to portray her female protagonist fighting with the dominating clutches of male chauvinism and patriarchy. When she is beaten, the cobra sees it and keeps moving frantically without noticing Karnad (1990), p. 23.

Having summed the argumentations on the topic above captioned topic, the idea may be hammered home that the voices of the woman in both plays are silenced by the Indo-Pakistani society in general and its male chauvinism in particular. By every critical yardstick, women are regarded as merely useful products or entities which are used for the sake of being used. Through points discussed above, it can be asserted and estimated that in both plays, women are suppressed and assassinated emotionally and mentally in a frequent manner as far as the thematic aspects are concerned. Ditta and Appanna, somehow or the other, are the true and ditto image and manifestation of male chauvinism which is exceptionally rooted and integral part of the indo-pak society in the both plays. Having been self-centered and exceedingly particular about the conventionalities of the society and one's reputation, they butcher the feelings, desires, identity and sentimentality of women at the altar of society and self-made norms and standards made by men for woman.

Through this research, it can be said thumping that in both the plays, the playwrights, having feminist approach to reveal the atrocities of the male dominance, have employed first formulation of “gender trouble”.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

None.

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