

An Interpretation and Understanding of Human Emotion Fear Through Bhayanaka Rasa in Dina Mehta's *Brides Are Not For Burning*

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Received: July 9, 2024 Accepted: October 1, 2024 Online Published: December 12, 2024

doi:10.5430/wjel.v15n2p194

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n2p194>

Abstract

This research delves into the subtle exploration of human emotions, specifically honing in on the depiction of fear through the artistic lens of Bhayanaka Rasa in Dina Mehta's play, *Brides Are Not for Burning*. Emotions are a fundamental aspect of the human condition, and this study aims to uncover the complex layers of fear as portrayed in the narrative. Drawing inspiration from classical Indian aesthetics, as well as performing and theatrical arts, Bhayanaka Rasa encompasses a multifaceted range of emotions associated with fear, horror, and apprehension. By examining Mehta's portrayal and its impact, this research enriches our interpretation and comprehension of the significant role played by Bhayanaka Rasa in evoking and navigating feelings of fear and agitation. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, this study examines the encapsulation, manifestation, and expression of Bhayanaka Rasa by the characters and situations, providing valuable insights into the convergence of emotions, artistic portrayal, and human experiences. By shedding light on the interpretative aspects of fear within the drama, this research enriches the ongoing conversation on emotions in literature, presenting a significant viewpoint on the thoughtful influence of apprehension in the domain of dramatic representation.

Keywords: Anxiety, Bharat Muni, Horror, Indian English Drama, Natyashastra, Rasa Theory

1. Introduction

Emotions are the colourful threads that connect the many stories that make up the rich tapestry of the human experience. Fear, a powerful and transforming feeling that has been portrayed in a variety of artistic mediums, such as drama and literature, sits at the centre of this emotional landscape. This research undertakes a thorough investigation of human emotion, with a specific emphasis on the portrayal of fear through the perspective of Bhayanaka Rasa in Dina Mehta's poignant play, *Brides Are Not for Burning*. Literature, a potent means of self-expression and comprehension, has long served as a mirror reflecting the rainbow of human emotions. Exploring these emotional dimensions—from love to wrath, from happiness to sorrow—improves our capacity to deeply connect with characters and stories. Across cultural and chronological borders, fear or terror emerges as a compelling force amidst this rich emotional fabric. It invites viewers and readers to interact with the frailties of the characters, creating profoundly relatable connections.

Bhayanaka Rasa, often referred to as the Aesthetic of Fear, is a significant and vital concept in Indian classical performing arts, encompassing drama, dance, music, and literature. Rooted in the *Natyashastra*, an ancient treatise on dramaturgy attributed to the sage Bharata Muni, Bhayanaka Rasa is one of the nine primary rasas or emotional states that form the foundation of Indian aesthetics. This aesthetic sentiment is dedicated to evoking fear, dread, or terror within the audience. It plays a fundamental role in engaging the audience emotionally, enhancing the artistic experience, and providing a significant understanding of human emotions and experiences. The generation of fear is influenced by various determinants, such as transgressions against supervisors and kings, encounters with wild animals (such as tigers), vacant houses, forests, mountains, and wild elephants, as well as exposure to condemnation, nocturnal gloom and silence, and the sounds of owls and Rakshasa.

The anubhavas (effects of emotion) themselves manifest as trembling of the hands and feet, palpitations of the heart, stupor, dryness of the mouth, licking of the lips with the tongue, sweating, trembling of the limbs, feelings of alarm, seeking protection from others, attempting to flee, and expressing loud lamentation, among other reactions. As stated by Masson and Patwardhan (1970)

Now (the rasa) called bhay āna / cahas fear as its permanent emotion. It arises from such vibh āvas as ghastly noises, seeing of supernatural beings (ghosts), fear and panic due to the (cries) of owls (or the howling of) jackals, going to an empty house or to a forest, hearing about, speaking about, or seeing the imprisonment or murder of one's relatives. (Mason & Patwardhan, 54).

The human mind tends to retain and readily retrieve events that leave a lasting impression. Fear is widely regarded as the most deleterious within the spectrum of human emotions. Intense fear has the potential to be fatal, as it can result in the demise of animals, including humans, through a literal manifestation of fear-induced mortality. The famous scholar, Kanti Pandey (1959) has described Bhayanaka rasa as

Bhayanaka rasa (terrible) derives from experiencing fear which the Natya Shastra sorts into feigned fear, fear from wrongdoing, and fear from danger. It is represented by shaking hands, wide opened eyes scanning for danger, and backward movement. This rasa is reserved for characters of lower origin, children and women for, according to the cultural norms of the time, their fear is genuine. However, venerable characters can occasionally display feigned fear as well, such as in the case of a scholar in front of a king, or a king in front of a god. (Pandey, 219).

Thus, at its core Bhayanaka Rasa revolves around the expression and experience of fear. It aims to evoke this intense emotion within both the characters portrayed in a performance or narrative and the audience. Priyadarshi Patnaik (1996) in his book *Rasa in Aesthetics* has stated the cause of this fear. In the context of an extended timeframe, fear can be attributed as the underlying factor behind a perceived danger, or even the mere expectation or potentiality of such danger (Patnaik, 175 - 179). Eliciting Bhayanaka Rasa in Indian drama is a sophisticated and multidimensional process. It involves a combination of storytelling, characterization, atmosphere, and performance techniques. When executed effectively, it not only evokes fear but also provides a platform for exploring the depths of human emotions and the darker aspects of our psyche. It reminds us of the power of drama to immerse us in the world of fear and, in doing so, enables us to confront and understand our own fears and anxieties.

2. Literature Review

While conducting a literature review in the pertinent field, the researcher noted significant observations, followed by delineating the study's necessity, objectives, and methodology. Shobhana Devi Panday's study (1996), "A Critical Analysis of Kalidasa's Abhijnanashakuntalam in the light of the Rasa Theory", underscores the importance of re-evaluating the works of the celebrated poet Mahakavi Kalidasa through the lens of the Rasa Theory, thus emphasizing its intrinsic relevance. Kalidasa's works have been extensively studied, with scholars conducting detailed critical analyses of his beliefs, ideals, and historical context, as well as engaging in in-depth discussions on his portrayal of love and beauty. Every word of Kalidasa's poetry and drama has been meticulously examined and subjected to rigorous critical scrutiny. However, much of this research tends to focus on the outward, more visible aspects of his literature, often neglecting the deeper, more nuanced elements present within his works. In her thesis, Shobna Devi Panday addresses these intrinsic aspects of Kalidasa's writings, offering a fresh perspective on his literary contributions.

Gregory P. Fernando in his thesis "Rasa Theory Applied to Hemingway's 'The Old Man and The Sea' and 'A Farewell To Arms'" (2003) aimed to clarify the utilization of Rasa, a Sanskrit Literary Theory, in Ernest Hemingway's novels "The Old Man and the Sea" and "A Farewell to Arms". This research study explores the validity of rasa, the Sanskrit literary theory, as an aesthetic framework. It also briefly examines the perspectives of various thinkers, including Greek, Western, and Indian scholars. The focus of this research is not to engage in critiques of rasa theory but to apply it as it stands to selected novels, demonstrating how a writer's imagination can evoke in the reader or spectator a range of emotions, leading to their corresponding rasas. The study aims to present a modern perspective on rasa theory, emphasizing its relevance to contemporary literary criticism by highlighting its humanistic approach. Since rasa theory revolves around human sentiments as a core component of any literary work, whether it be fiction, poetry, or drama, its objective is to guide individuals beyond human suffering toward inner peace and tranquillity.

Régine Michelle Jean-Charles' 2019 paper, "The Affect and Aesthetics of Fear in Évelyne Trouillot's Novels," investigates how fear serves as a reoccurring emotion for characters in Trouillot's writings, often surfacing before they take any action. Jean-Charles analyzes Trouillot's use of terror in her works, including *Rosalie l'infâme*, *L'Œil-totem*, *Absences sans fronti ères*, and *Le Rond-point*, to explore its aesthetics. He emphasizes that fear is a multifaceted and useful emotion that emerges from a variety of political, social, historical, and personal situations. In these works, dread arises from various sources: the terror of slavery causing the slaves to run and become maroons, to succumb to sexual exploitation, to preserve deadly silences, or even to kill their new-borns to save them from a life.

Klapper's article "The Aesthetics of Fear in Ingeborg Bachmann's Novel Fragment *Das Buch Franza* (2012)" investigates the aesthetics of fear in Ingeborg Bachmann's unfinished novel *Das Buch Franza* (1965/66), focusing on how the depiction of fear, particularly through the figure of the anxious, victimized woman, critiques gender norms, rationality, patriarchy, and fascism.

In the academic paper "Hamlet: A Rasa-Dhvani approach" Sangeeta Mohanty (2006) conducts an extensive analysis of the entire play, integrating the concept of rasa comprehensively, particularly concentrating on the development of different emotional tones. Kavita Khurana's dissertation in 2008, "A Study of the Rasa Quotient in Bhansali's Film Saawariya" investigates the potential relationship between traditional Indian theatrical principles and their representation in Hindi cinema. Specifically focusing on the context of Hindi cinema as a distinct genre, this analysis centres on Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film Saawariya and delves into the symbolic significance of colours. The aim is to assess how the film's set designs, colour schemes, costumes, accessories, and props correspond with the Indian aesthetic theory of rasas, as outlined by the philosopher Bharata in the *Natyashastra*. Nepal Nanda's thesis (2013), "Application of Shringara Rasa in Kalidasa's Abhijnanashakuntalam," aims to investigate the incorporation of shringara rasa in Kalidasa's Abhijnanashakuntalam. The research centres on analysing the play to gain insight into the utilization of shringara rasa within its storyline.

This study offers a detailed examination of the concept of shringara rasa, encompassing its lasting emotional state referred to as sthayibhava Rati.

The thesis titled “The Note of Compassion in the Selected Novels of Thomas Hardy: A Study in the Light of Rasa-Dhvani Theory” written by Shweta Massey (2014) investigates the Rasa-Dhvani theory and its efficacy as a critical tool. In her paper, “The Natyashastra and Indian Cinema: A Study of the Rasa Theory as a Foundation for Indian Aesthetics,” Alisha Ibkar (2015) delves into the broad impact of Rasa and the aesthetic principles outlined in the Natyashastra on multiple aspects of Indian cinema. This encompasses the performances of actors, acting methodologies, music, sangeet (musical sequences), background scores, and the emotional reactions evoked from viewers.

The thesis titled “Bharata’s Natyashastra-based Theatre Analysis Model: An experiment on British South Asian and contemporary Indian theatre in English” authored by Mrunal Prabhudas Chavda, (2015) introduces a tool that offers an alternative approach to analysis. By broadening the existing analytical frameworks, it enables the investigation of emotional expressions and cognitive states of performers during their enactments. This thesis endeavours to interpret the movements and gestures of actors while providing a structured framework for their examination. Drawing upon the Natyashastra and principles of rasa/bhava, this study proposes a novel perspective for analyzing theatrical performances. In the article “Depiction of ‘The Rasa Theory’ in Indian Folklore – Based Movies – Tracing the Relevance of Raudra – Rasa as a Pervasive Theme in Kantara” by Pratikshya Tripathy, Krishnaprada Dash, and Anshuman S. S. Mohanty (2023), the authors explore the recurring trend of Indian literature and traditions being portrayed in cinema. This portrayal serves to familiarize audiences with the customs and cultures of distant regions.

Neelam Raisinghani’s article “The Potential and the Real: Dina Mehta's Brides are not for Burning” (2005) recounts the story of Laxmi, a woman who faced a tumultuous upbringing and an unsatisfactory marriage, ultimately leading to her tragic end. Laxmi's choice to take her own life is linked to various factors, such as the demands for a dowry, mistreatment by her in-laws, and disparaging comments regarding her infertility.

Durgesh Bhausaheb Ravande's article (2020), “Dina Mehta's Brides are Not for Burning: Ravaging the Wall of Deception,” offers a critical analysis of present-day societal concerns, specifically spotlighting the issue of bride burning. The play scrutinizes the ethically questionable practices within the legal system and law enforcement agencies.

In Shivani Vashist's article (2013), “Burning Brides: Dina Mehta's Marginalised Women in Brides are Not for Burning,” the author begins by examining the common traits of patriarchal societies, both worldwide and particularly in India. Within the play, Malini is depicted as a defiant figure who wrestles with fundamental existential inquiries and undergoes a feeling of estrangement from herself while confronting the injustices suffered by her sister, Laxmi. In her work, “Subdued Echoes of Violence and Terror in Dina Mehta's Getting Away with Murder and Brides are Not for Burning,” Anindita Ganguly (2014) conducts an analysis of these plays, viewing them as stories portraying episodes of violence and oppression. Despite the efforts of numerous women's liberation organizations, the goal of creating a society founded on fair principles remains unfulfilled.

Thus, the review of literature evaluates and analyse the existing body of works done by the previous researchers. Although the Rasa theory is widely recognized in Indian classical arts, there has been a lack of research applying this theory to contemporary Indian drama. The main aim of this research is to analyse and interpret the diverse application of Bhayanaka Rasa in Dina Mehta's *Brides Are Not for Burning*, concentrating particularly on the portrayal, embodiment, and expression of fear by the characters and situations. To achieve this goal, the study scrutinizes various occurrences in the drama to pinpoint occasions and indicators of fear from the viewpoint of Bhayanaka Rasa. By closely examining the emotional trajectories of the characters, the research seeks to enhance our understanding of the interaction between artistic portrayal, human experiences, and the profound influence of fear.

3. Novelty of the Study

The importance of this study lies in its capacity to deepen our understanding of fear as a pivotal motif in literature, particularly within the domain of theatrical representation. By unravelling the artistic intricacies of Bhayanaka Rasa in *Brides Are Not for Burning*, this research adds to the wider conversation on emotions in literature and stagecraft. Furthermore, the insights obtained from the study will impact readers, audiences, and scholars, fostering a greater appreciation for the depiction and analysis of fear and horror in the realm of dramatic arts.

4. Materials and Methodology

The primary text under scrutiny in this investigation is Mehta's *Brides Are Not for Burning*. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this study aims to uncover the intricacies of Bhayanaka Rasa, elucidating its function in eliciting and managing feelings of fear. This methodology is supplemented by the gathering and analysis of secondary sources. The author conducted a comprehensive review of books and articles, as well as online research, to deepen their understanding of Bhayanaka Rasa. This process involved taking detailed notes and highlighting key insights. Subsequently, the gathered data was organized and refined to extract pertinent information. As a result, the study is specifically focused on examining how Bhayanaka Rasa is portrayed in the selected work.

5. Theoretical Framework

The Rasa hypothesis is a cornerstone of Indian aesthetics and the performance and theatrical arts, having been introduced by Bharata Muni in his famous work Natyashastra during the country's prehistoric era. Rasa, which means “essence” or “juice,” refers to the aesthetic

experience or the spiritual and emotional connection that art evokes in the viewer. It establishes a structure for comprehending and assessing the emotional influence of creative and artistic presentations.

As mentioned by Chakravarty (2023) in her article, “According to the Rasa theory, there are nine primary rasas: love (sringara), laughter (hasya), compassion (karuna), anger (raudra), valor (vira), fear (bhayanaka), disgust (bibhatsa), wonder (adbhuta), and tranquility (shanta). Each rasa is associated with a specific emotional state (bhava) conveyed by characters or performers. The portrayal of rasas involves various elements such as vibhavas (stimulants or determinants), anubhavas (consequents), sthayibhava (permanent emotional state), and alamkaras (ornamental enhancements). Vibhavas establish the context and triggers for experiencing emotions, while anubhavas encompass artists' appearances, physical movements, vocal variations, and other physical aspects. The sthayibhava acts as the basis for the manifestation of rasa, and alamkaras contribute to the aesthetic appeal”. (Chakravarty, 387).

The Rasa Sutra, attributed to Bharata Muni, is a foundational text that outlines the principles of Rasa theory. It states, “Vibhava-anubhava-vyabichari-samyogad rasa-nishpattih,” meaning that the combination of determinants (Vibhava), consequents (Anubhava), and transitory emotions (Vyabichari Bhava) leads to the manifestation of Rasa. This sentence is pivotal for understanding the concept of rasa. While various interpretations exist, the basic meaning of this verse is that rasa emerges through the conjunction and simultaneous presence of vibhava (causes), anubhava (effects), and sancaribhavas (temporary emotional states). Bharata offers one more example to help clarify this idea “ “When various condiments and sauces and herbs and other materials are mixed, a taste is felt, which is different from the individual tastes of the components and when the mixing of materials like molasses with other materials produces many kinds of tastes, so also along with the different bhavas the Sthayi bhava (prevalent or permanent emotional state) becomes a taste, which is rasa, flavour or a feeling.” (Rangacharya, 1998). This suggests that when we analyse a poem, play, or novel, specific elements or events evoke happiness, some elicit feelings of sadness, and others may even prompt mourning as they engage and stimulate our psychological and physical states, leading us to experience various emotions.

The Rasa theory recognizes the significant role of the audience in attaining the aesthetic encounter. The viewer's emotional responsiveness, empathy, and involvement with the presentations are pivotal for experiencing and enjoying rasas. The complete realization of rasas arises from the interaction among actors, characters, artistic elements, and the audience. This dynamic interaction is integral to a holistic experience of the emotional and aesthetic dimensions. The Rasa theory maintains its impact in modern performing arts, spanning across theatre, dance, music, and literature. It furnishes an extensive lexicon and organizational structure for examining and relishing the emotional and aesthetic facets of artistic representation. Delving into and mastering rasas not only enhances the artistic experience but also provides profound understanding into human emotions and the capacity of art to evoke and communicate these emotions. This research delves into the depiction of Bhayanaka rasa, with a primary emphasis on the play *Brides Are Not for Burning*.

6. Discussion

Dina Mehta's *Brides Are Not for Burning*, as the title suggests, theatrically portrays the violence against women who fall victim to the dowry system. Dedicated to women who are capable of choosing and becoming whatever they aspire to be, the drama is a powerful critique of societal ills and won the first prize in the worldwide playwriting competition sponsored by the BBC. The play challenges and criticizes the patriarchal system and societal assumptions that confine women to subordinate roles. In addition to addressing complex issues like misguided and unemployed youth, religious fanaticism promoted by missionary agencies, and the growing greed for material wealth, the play delves into the dichotomies between appearance and reality, truth and falsehood, and the real and surreal. Central to the drama is the theme of fear, which is intricately woven throughout, lining up with the concept of Bhayanaka Rasa. Bhayanaka Rasa, one of the nine emotional states (Rasas) in classical Indian aesthetics, focuses on fear, which emerges from a perceived threat, often manifesting as terror, dread, or anxiety. Mehta skilfully explores these dimensions of fear through her characters, dialogues, and societal critiques, vividly portraying how the oppressive structures in the play evoke fear at both personal and societal levels. By doing so, *Brides Are Not for Burning* draws attention to the emotional and psychological toll, the systemic violence takes on its victims, while also exposing the broader societal complicity in perpetuating such fear.

The play opens in the Desai apartment room with the announcement of the bride Laxmi's death. It seems that her husband and in-laws drove her into a suicide rage. The play's protagonist, Malini, the bride's sister, is subsequently driven by conflicting impulses to pursue worldly goals with her lover Sanjay, revolutionary ideals of anarchist Roy Mukherjee, and her own quest for existence and identity. Buried deep within her lies the agony of her sister's terrible demise, and she fights because she thinks Laxmi is still capable of receiving justice. The drama kicks off with a dramatic conversation between Malini and her father, Mr. Desai, in the home of the middle-class Gujarati family. During their conversation, it becomes clear that Laxmi, the family's older married daughter, died from serious burns sustained at her husband's home. Malini, the younger sister, believes her sister Laxmi's death was the result of a bride burning, or the death because of dowry. The sudden demise of the elder daughter puts Mr. Desai, the father into shock which he is unable to overcome.

The drama intensifies the family's anguish over the loss of their oldest daughter Laxmi and brings forth the reality and ugly face of the patriarchal society where daughters and brides are seen as burden and a way to earn money. The fear of the unknown reason for the untimely death of the daughter intensifies the atmosphere of the drama. As aptly said by Kuwabara (2005) “The more one discusses and thinks about death, the more one becomes afraid of it because fear breeds fear” (Kuwabara, 1257 - 1272). The death of a married daughter is reported as a suicide with unidentified causes, which prompts many to speculate about how the daughter-in-law was mistreated by her in-laws for not bringing back more goods and money from her parents' house.

Also, in addition to facing many gender-based restrictions, cultural norms, and religious dogma, modern Indian women suffer from crimes such as forced marriage, physical and psychological abuse, sexual assault, rape, kidnapping and abduction, and forced suicide which Nubile (2003) stated as

In modern India the situation is still far from an ideal, liberated, democratic model. Indian women keep on struggling against the burden of tradition, against the legacy of the past and the orthodoxy of patriarchal system (Nubile, 27).

The fear experienced by Laxmi, reflects the internal psychological aspects of Bhayanaka Rasa. Laxmi's fear extends beyond the physical threat of violence to encompass a profound emotional turmoil. Her ongoing dread of domestic abuse, societal oppression, and the relentless cycle of dowry-related violence saturates her life. Living in constant fear of further victimization, she feels trapped in an inescapable and toxic environment, heightening her anxiety. This depiction of fear within her mental state aligns with the theorists' focus on the internal dimension of Bhayanaka Rasa, where the anticipation of suffering plays a central role. Laxmi's in-law's family forces her to endure hardships throughout her life. The fact that her father is a clerk and did everything in his power to satisfy the in-laws' appetite led them treating Laxmi like a servant and their willingness to punish and humiliate her in every manner they could. Both Laxmi's sister-in-law and mother-in-law treated her like a beast. Laxmi was compelled to burn herself one day as a result of this severe agony. Her in-laws as well as her parents dominated and controlled her. At a young age, she was forced to abandon her studies "Because with Mother always pregnant and ailing, she had to babysit" (Mehta, 17).

The father had thought that her lack of education can be replaced with dowry and it proves fatal for her. As days went on, the demands of the marital family multiplied hundreds of times as they assumed that "a government clerk makes so much on this side" (Mehta, 13). They believed that Mr. Desai had enriched himself through illicit payments and kickbacks. Because of his illogical thought and action, he unintentionally becomes a villain for his kids. Because she did not bring sufficiently huge and satisfactory dowry, Laxmi was tortured in her in-laws' home and treated more like an object than a subject. Laxmi's home, which should be a safe and comfortable place, has been changed into a scene of horror and persecution. This reversal of meaning heightens the sense of anxiety and fear, as the place supposed to protect her becomes the scene of her death. The bridal wedding dress, which normally represents joy and celebration, becomes a symbol of fear and death in the context of the play. It serves as a reminder of the risks that marriage can bring for women in a country where dowry deaths are widespread. The outfit, once a sign of hope, has been twisted into a symbol of incarceration and brutality.

The play's engagement with the systemic issue of dowry deaths introduces a broader societal fear. The dowry system, where young brides like Laxmi are burned to death if their families fail to meet financial demands, represents an external threat that creates terror within the community. Bhayanaka Rasa in this context is expressed through the anticipation of violence from societal norms. The symbolic weight of dowry deaths, as discussed in the play, invokes fear not just among the women characters but also within the audience, who are forced to confront the horrifying reality of a society complicit in such crimes. Mr. Desai was unable to purchase peace and luxurious life for his poor innocent daughter. What she received at the end is a painful death. The brutal dowry system, which is surely a by-product of the patriarchal societal structure, has Laxmi as its victim. As mentioned by Kumar and Narendra (2006), the tyranny and subjection of women play a major role in maintaining the androcentric system (Kumar & Narendra, 141 - 149). The drama raises a number of issues that shame the patriarchal system, and the atrocity inflicted on women make the readers shudder in fear. The playwright through Malini have raises a lot of questions which brings out the real and ugly truth of the society, the terrible truth which grips the minds of the readers in fear and panic. The ugly truth is that if Laxmi had had a healthy bank account to support her, she may have lived a happy life in her husband's home. As Malini rightly said "Freedom is money in the bank, You think if Laxmi had a fat bank account they could have trampled over her?" (Mehta, 21).

There is no doubt that this commercial and opportunistic view of marriage and relationships is a sign of the broader breakdown of morals in society. One after another horrifying facts comes into light after the death of Laxmi. She has been falsely accused of being an infertile, a barren woman incapable of bearing a child for the Marfatia's, the marital family. Laxmi's mother-in-law frequently condemns and taunts her of being infertile. The real fact of the matter comes out when Arjun, the younger brother confronts the family. It is Vinod who has the problem. He is azoospermia and have hidden the fact from Desai family before marriage. Five years into marriage, Laxmi was still unable to reproduce and was blamed. Nobody cares to unravel the real reason. Only when Arjun in a fit of rage speaks out, the audiences and the family members came to know the real truth

It's the truth! ... That's what he is, your Vinod. Eunuch. He should work in a harem. Why did he play the endless farce of dragging Laxmi bhabhi from one holy man to another? Vinod couldn't father a child if you b-bought him ten wives and pushed him into bed with each one in turn (Mehta, 81).

The Marfatia family have very carefully and neatly concealed the truth from everyone that Vinod has tried a variety of allopathic, herbal, and homeopathic treatments in all kinds, amount, paste, powder, pill, and injection to treat his infertility. Instead, everyone took their turn to humiliate and insult Laxmi for no fault of her. Vinod's mothers and sisters persistent pestering causes Laxmi to experience extreme mental anguish and ultimately decides to self-immolate in order to liberate herself from her spouse and the life of constant humiliation. And also, her mother-in-law was the one who encouraged her to lock herself in the kitchen and burn. Moreover, she prevented other family members from smashing the door in an effort to save Laxmi before "the garland of fire ... already embraced her flesh, and declared Let her finish what she has started inside there ..." (Mehta, 78). She is married off to a "family of vultures" (Mehta, 17) who

tormented and humiliated her endlessly for dowry. The doctor was summoned three hours after the accident took place but “how can a doctor revive a half-cooked corpse with no skin to speak of?” (Mehta, 78). The entire incident of killing the innocent bride Laxmi in the name of dowry terrorized and horrified the readers. The whole circumstances and the happenings related to this tragic incident makes us shiver in fear.

However, the cruel events didn't stop here. After the death of Laxmi, it is revealed that before her death, the in-law's family have insured her life with a cumbersome amount of 80,000 rupees and the nominee of the money is her husband Vinod Marfatia. This matter of insurance claims exposes another instance of serious discrimination against women, as it is well known that numerous unfortunate Indian women are killed in order to obtain insurance payments, with the crime being reported as an accident or suicide. This tragic condition and terrible ending of Laxmi could have been avoided if she was well trained and educated in her early years. But being the elder sibling, she has to take care of her younger brother and sister and manage the house as their mother was always sick and pregnant. She was a drop out from school, helping out her father and his “endless breeding and spawning” (Mehta, 17) and this is only because a girl is seen as a temporary member of the family, she is denigrated. This situation is very copiously described in *The Scarlet Plague* by London (2008) as

In the midst of our civilization ... we had bred a race of barbarians, of savages; and now ... they turned upon us like the wild beasts they were and destroyed us... (London, 105 -106).

Thus, the fear Laxmi faces is not just physical but also emotional, as she dreads the continuation of violence and the lack of escape from the abusive marriage and her mother-in-law consistently took advantage of her situation. Since Laxmi moved into her marital family home, Vinod's mother has been making fun of her father for not keeping his word about the dowry. Her two sisters-in-law begin to recite that a goddess of wealth, known in Hindu religion as Laxmi, has entered their home and that as a result, everyone shall flourish. They mocked her by saying that “a goddess of wealth had entered their home with clothes fit for a servant and jewels not worth the name” (Mehta, 16). The husband Vinod, instead of protecting and supporting his wife, joined the group of his mother and sisters like an obedient son and humiliated her for the inability of the father to stuff them with handsome dowry non-stop. The play alludes to a deeper and more extensive story that exists outside of the enclosed areas of the Desai rental room, Sanjay's living room, Vinod's company, Tarla's kitchen area, and the in-laws' living cum dining room. It is not only the story of a specific lower middle-class Gujarati family. The drama portrays the awful and horrible reality of women's life in patriarchal societies. Mehta uses intense conversations and confrontations to amplify fear. Accusations, moments of silence, and sharp exchanges between characters heighten the tension. The conversations about dowry, societal expectations, and patriarchal oppression are charged with the fear of repercussions, adding layers of anxiety for both the characters and the audience. The rising tension reflects the theorists' description of Bhayanaka Rasa, where the emotion of fear grows through the anticipation of danger or violence, before reaching a climax. This prompted Chitins (1998) to remark that

“The hierarchical system of social organization, where there are categories of dominant groups and subordinate groups, is inevitably accompanied by the victimization of the latter through subtle pressures, and power of ideology ...” (Chitnis, 11).

She receives the same treatment as a servant, with her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law taking advantage of any chance to disparage her with sarcastic comments and harsh language. The main culprit responsible for Laxmi's tragic ending is her father Mr. Desai. When his character tells how he abandoned his first wife after ten years of marriage because she had six miscarriages, the initial feeling of pity and compassion that his character elicits quickly fades. The way he describes his first wife's physical ability to bear children makes the audiences feel disgusted and contempt against him

“Her hips were wide, some women are made for child-bearing ... unlike poor Sujata, whom I sent back to her parents after ten years. Docile and obedient she was. Sujata. But she miscarried each time she became pregnant ... I sent her away after ten years and six miscarriages ... but your mother was curved like a goddess ... (Mehta, 14).

Treating women as either the object or another in relation to the male who is the subject is one of the defining characteristics of patriarchal civilizations around the world. Women are sought after, loved, and caressed. She serves as the dioptré of her male partner, who entirely and insolently disregards her feelings and thoughts in favour of treating her as his own reflection in a narcissistic manner. She is non-existent; she is what makes the male present when he is absent. The father treated his wives bluntly and callously and he received the same treatment for his own daughter from the Marfatia family. Only his sheer mistake of unmindful spawning and breeding costs Laxmi her life. Had he invested time and money for Laxmi's education and career, she would have lived her life happily and peacefully. The Desai family also behaves selfishly. The circumstances behind Laxmi's tragic death intensifies the horrific tale of women in their in-law's house and the way Laxmi was forced to put an end to her life makes the audiences cringe in fear giving rise to bhayanaka rasa. Laxmi had to give her life in order to atone for the avarice of her husband's family as well as for her father's blatant ignorance and foresight.

In the drama, Mehta has skilfully used dialogue to heighten fear through intense conversations, accusations, and strategic silences. Phrases like “brides are not for burning” carry a symbolic weight beyond their literal meaning, emphasizing the horror of dowry deaths where young brides are set on fire due to unmet dowry demands. The interactions between characters reveal the underlying tension and fear that women like Laxmi endure. Mehta also evokes fear by addressing the deep-seated societal issues in Indian culture, such as dowry, domestic violence, and gender inequality. This fear extends beyond individual experiences, confronting the audience with the unsettling reality of a world where such violence is normalized and women are continually dehumanized. The play thus taps into a broader

existential fear about societal complicity and the persistence of these atrocities. The realistic portrayal of the characters' struggles, coupled with the normalization of dowry deaths and domestic abuse, grounds the fear in everyday reality, making it both relatable and immediate for the audience. Through her portrayal of characters, dialogue, and dramatic techniques, *Brides Are Not for Burning* powerfully evokes Bhayanaka Rasa, vividly capturing the fear women face in the grip of systemic violence and oppression. By doing so, Mehta critiques the societal structures that perpetuate such fear and delivers a strong condemnation of society's complacency in the face of these brutal realities.

In the play, the vishayaalambanavibhava (the cause and the reason) that evokes bhayanaka rasa includes the tragic and horrible death of Laxmi by burning, the pathetic judgement of the coroner declaring the murder as an accident and suicide, the betrayal of the marital family, Sanjay, Tarla and Roy, the misdeed of the father to marry off the daughter without proper education and going beyond his limit of showering and offering dowry and others. These give rise to ashrayaalambanavibhava (the result of the cause and reason) which includes the evil deeds committed by the people and the grim and uneasy atmosphere created because of the act. Vyabicharibhavas or the transitory feelings include trembling, fear and panic arises due to the crisis, hearing and speaking of the murder of the elder sister. The sthayibhava or the permanent emotion of this rasa is fear and horror and this feeling prevails throughout the play as it is profusely displayed by the characters. These horrific situations create a feeling of fear in the minds of the readers giving rise to bhayanaka rasa.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the drama *Brides Are Not for Burning* by Dina Mehta exemplifies Bhayanaka Rasa, or the aesthetic of fear, and demonstrate how malleable this emotional component is to a variety of theatrical storylines. The play uses a variety of dramatic devices to arouse the audience's sense of suspense and terror, including characters, story development, setting, and dialogue. The drama *Brides Are Not for Burning* explores themes of fear. The drama explores themes such as anxiety of social expectations, impulses that don't align with society conventions, and the fallout from breaking tradition. Fear grips the drama from the very beginning with the news of the burning of the hapless bride in the name of dowry following with the revelation of the dark and petrifying mentality of the people. Of all things considered, the way Bhayanaka Rasa is portrayed in this play aims to emotionally captivate the audiences by engrossing them in the complexity of human condition and its darker facets. The play lingers with us because of the skilful use of dramatic devices and narrative techniques, which serve as a reminder of the theatrical medium's ability to both enthrall and unnerve us. However, the study is focussed only in its exploration of Bhayanaka Rasa or the aesthetics of fear in Dina Mehta's *Brides Are Not for Burning*. Further research can be done on integrating psychological or trauma theory to examine how the portrayal of fear in *Brides Are Not for Burning* aligns with real-life experiences of trauma, abuse, and domestic violence.

Acknowledgements

Not Applicable.

Authors' contribution

Kheya Chakravarty was responsible for study design, revising, data collection and drafting of the manuscript and Dr. Thenmozhi M revised it. Both the authors have contributed equally All authors read and approved the final Manuscript.

Funding

The research is not funded by any funding agency.

Competing interest

The authors declare that there is no competing interest to declare.

Informed Consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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