The Discursive Nexus
A Scholarly Forum for English Studies and Critical Inquiry
Research Journal, Department of English, Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune
Volume- 1, Issue - 1 | January, 2025 | ISSN 3107-4359

A Comparative Study of Bhayanaka Rasa in *Macbeth* and *Nagamandala*

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ABSTRACT

This research paper studies the construction and evolution of the bhayanaka rasa (fear) in two plays, Macbeth by William Shakespeare and Nagamandala by Girish Karnad, by utilising the semiotics framework and emotional mapping framework. In Bharat Muni's "Natyashastra", Bhayanaka rasa is represented as fear, anxiety, and apprehension. In both the selected plays, bhayanaka rasa serves as a crucial emotional driver. By analysing the semiotic elements such as symbols, imagery, and cultural signifiers, alongside the emotional trajectories of characters, this study investigates how fear is represented, transitioned, and resolved within the narratives. The semiotic framework helps explore the role of culturally significant symbols in order to examine their contribution to the audience's experience of the rasa. For example, in Macbeth, blood, darkness, and supernatural elements, whereas in Nagamandala, the snake and the firelight. Simultaneously, the emotional mapping framework tracks how fear emerges and evolves within key moments of the selected plays while also visualising the impact of the rasa on progression of the characters and the plot. The study also uses the Freytag's Pyramid tool to locate significant instances where bhayanaka rasa intensifies, aligning these peaks with character arcs and dramatic structure. This comparative analysis explores how the fear emotion is universal and highlights its cultural and contextual adaptations. In Macbeth, fear emerges through the psychological unraveling of characters, as their ambition and guilt drives them into a tragic spiral. In contrast, Nagamandala play explores fear as a societal and personal construct with its roots in patriarchal norms and cultural myths. The paper argues that bhayanaka rasa functions not only as an emotional response for the audience to experience but also as a narrative mechanism.

Keywords: Bhayanaka rasa, Macbeth, Nagamandala, semiotics, emotional mapping, Freytag's Pyramid.

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Introduction

In Natyashastra, Bharat Muni introduces nine important emotions or rasas that serve as the foundation of Indian aesthetics. Among these, *bhayanaka rasa*, or the emotion of fear, plays a significant role in shaping the audience's psychological experience as they indulge themselves in a play. This specific rasa incorporates a spectrum of fear emotion such as dread, anxiety, and apprehension. These emotions arise from situations that create anticipation of danger or harm. The study of bhayanaka rasa across different cultural contexts and narratives, such as *Macbeth* written by William Shakespeare and *Nagamandala* written by Girish Karnad, offers a unique perspective on how fear as an emotion is not only a universal human emotion but also a powerful narrative mechanism. Analysing these texts through the lens of bhayanaka rasa allows for a deeper exploration and understanding of the cultural specificities that play a role in influencing the portrayal of fear in plays, hence connecting Indian and Western dramaturgy together.

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The primary objective of this paper is to explore the construction and evolution of bhayanaka rasa in *Macbeth* and *Nagamandala*. The paper aims to identify and analyse the elements that contribute to the representation of fear in both plays, map the emotional trajectories of characters as they experience and respond to fear, use Freytag's Pyramid to pinpoint the moments where fear intensifies and impacts the plot the most, and compare the cultural and contextual data of fear in these narratives.

This study employs a combination of semiotics and emotional mapping frameworks to analyse the portrayal of fear in the selected plays. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, offers a powerful tool for analysing how fear is constructed and conveyed in literary texts. Originating from the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics focuses on the relationship between signifiers (such as words, images, symbols) and what they signify. In the context of this study, the semiotics framework will be employed to examine the symbols and imagery that contribute to the overall portrayal of bhayanaka rasa in *Macbeth* and *Nagamandala*. For instance, in *Macbeth*, elements like blood, darkness, and the supernatural serve as primary signifiers of fear. The consistent recurrence of these symbols enhances the audience's sense of dread and anxiety. Similarly, in *Nagamandala*, symbols such as the snake and the firelight are deeply rooted in Indian cultural contexts, carrying connotations of danger and mysticism. This semiotic analysis will explore how these symbols function within their respective cultural narratives to evoke fear, hence highlighting the universality of bhayanaka rasa.

The emotional mapping framework tracks the emotional arcs of characters and the audience's emotional responses throughout a narrative. It visualises how emotions like fear emerge, peak, and resolve, providing a structured approach to understanding the impact of bhayanaka rasa on the plot and character development. In this research, emotional mapping will be applied to both plays to chart the intensity and evolution of fear. For *Macbeth*, this involves illustrating Macbeth's path of paranoia and guilt which leads to his tragic downfall. In *Nagamandala*, emotional mapping will focus on the protagonist Rani's journey through fear, shaped by societal norms and personal insecurities. This framework will help in identifying pivotal moments where fear either empowers or entraps characters, thus serving as a catalyst for the narrative's progression.

Freytag's Pyramid, a dramatic structure model developed by Gustav Freytag, describes the five key phases of a narrative: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. This tool will be utilised to locate significant instances where bhayanaka rasa intensifies within the structure of both plays. In *Macbeth*, Freytag's Pyramid will help in pinpointing the play's climactic moments, such as the murder of King Duncan and the appearance of Banquo's ghost, where fear reaches its utmost intensity. Similarly, in *Nagamandala*, the pyramid will be used to analyse the tension built around the fear of the unknown, represented by the snake and the societal consequences of Rani's choices.

Analysis of *Macbeth* through Bhayanaka Rasa

In *Macbeth*, bhayanaka rasa is a dominant force that shapes the narrative and influences both the characters and the audience. Shakespeare crafts an atmosphere of dread, which begins with

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the ominous prophecy of the witches and pervades the entire play. The witches' prophecy, *"All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis! All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor! All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!"*, sows the initial seeds of fear and ambition in Macbeth. The supernatural element here introduces an underlying sense of unease and foreboding as it signifies a world where laws are suspended.

Shakespeare uses imagery to evoke fear. Blood is a recurring symbol throughout the play. Macbeth's line, *"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas in incarnadine, / Making the green one red"* (Act 2, Scene 2), illustrates his overwhelming guilt and the stain of murder that haunts him. Blood symbolises not just the physical act of murder but the psychological fear of eternal damnation and retribution. Similarly, the darkness in *Macbeth* represents the concealment of actions and the unknown. Lady Macbeth's call to *"Come, thick night, / And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell"* (Act 1, Scene 5) highlights her fear of being judged. The use of darkness imagery emphasises the fear of exposure and the moral corruption that drowns the characters.

The supernatural occurrences, such as the appearance of Banquo's ghost and the visions of the dagger heighten the sense of fear. When Macbeth hallucinates the dagger leading him to Duncan's chamber, *"Is this a dagger which I see before me, / The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee"* (Act 2, Scene 1), it reflects his inner turmoil and fear of the impending murder. Banquo's ghost, a manifestation of Macbeth's guilt and fear, becomes a powerful visual representation of bhayanaka rasa in the play. During the banquet scene, the ghost's appearance terrifies Macbeth, causing him to unravel in front of his guests. *"Thou canst not say I did it; never shake / Thy gory locks at me"* (Act 3, Scene 4) demonstrates how fear, guilt, and the supernatural collide, destabilising Macbeth's grip on reality.

The transformation of Macbeth's character is driven by escalating fear. Initially a valiant warrior, Macbeth's fear of losing power and status urges him into a spiral of constant and desperate actions. His fear is not just of external threats but of the prophecy itself, which he then misinterprets and manipulates to justify his actions. Lady Macbeth, too, is consumed by fear, though it emerges differently. Her initial dismissal of fear (*"A little water clears us of this deed"* – Act 2, Scene 2) transitions into obsessive hand-washing and sleepwalking, as her subconscious fears surface. Her line, *"Out, damned spot! Out, I say!"* (Act 5, Scene 1), reveals her fear of the moral consequences of their actions, playing a role in her mental disintegration and death.

Applying Freytag's Pyramid tool, the exposition introduces the eerie setting and the witches' prophecy, that sets a tone of fear. The rising action includes the murder of Duncan, the sighting of Banquo's ghost, and Macbeth's subsequent descent into paranoia. The climax reaches its peak with Macbeth's encounter with the witches for the second time, leading to the falling action as his reign crumbles. The resolution culminates in Macbeth's death, where fear shifts from being a motivator for evil to the audience's fear of unchecked ambition and moral decay.

Analysis of *Nagamandala* through Bhayanaka rasa

In *Nagamandala*, the bhayanaka rasa emerges from the deeply rooted societal norms that dictate the lives of its characters, especially Rani. The fear she experiences is seen in the

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expectations and rigid patriarchal rules imposed upon her. Her marriage to Appanna, who is controlling and emotionally distant, summarises the fear of subjugation and the societal pressures faced by women in Indian society. For example, Appanna's constant locking of Rani in the house symbolises her physical and emotional imprisonment. As described in Act 1, *"He comes every night, eats, sleeps, and leaves. Locks me in during the day. I am alone with the walls.",* explains the fear of isolation and control, central to the bhayanaka rasa in a domestic setting. Rani's entrapment is not only physical but also psychological. It illustrates the oppressive societal expectations of women to be submissive and confined to the domestic sphere.

The supernatural elements in *Nagamandala* heighten the bhayanaka rasa through the personification of fear in the form of the snake. The snake, a significant figure in Indian folklore, represents both a threat and a mystical protector, blurring the lines between reality and myth. For example, the snake's transformation into a man who comforts and loves Rani is central to the play's narrative. In Act 2, the snake reassures Rani, *"Rani, don't be afraid. I am not just a snake. I am your husband.".* This transformation creates a layered fear format – the fear of the unknown (the snake's mystical nature) and the fear rooted in reality (Rani's actual husband, Appanna). The snake's ability to shift forms adds a layer of unpredictability as well which helps amplify the audience's sense of bhayanaka rasa.

Rani's psychological journey is a testament to the constant fear instilled by her surroundings and her own mind. Her fear is not just of Appanna but also of the unknown future, societal judgment, and the supernatural. For instance, Rani's inner turmoil is evident when she first encounters the snake in its human form. In Act 2, she cries out, *"What do you want from me? I am just a simple woman trapped in a life of fear."* This quote highlights her internalised fear and confusion. The snake's human form becomes a projection of her desires and fears, reflecting her inner conflict and the psychological impact of her isolated existence.

Symbols like the snake, the lamp, and the firelight are integral to the construction of bhayanaka rasa. Since these symbols draw from deep cultural roots in Indian mythology and folklore, the fear they evoke is more potent and relatable to the audience. The lamp serves as both a literal and metaphorical guide for Rani. In Act 1, *"The lamp flickered, casting shadows that danced like spirits, a silent witness to Rani's growing fear."* This flickering lamp represents the thin line between safety and fear. The shadows it casts symbolise the unknown, playing on the audience's innate fear of the dark and the unseen, therefore enhancing the bhayanaka rasa.

Rani's evolution throughout the play is marked by her responses to fear. Initially a passive character, her journey through fear leads to her eventual empowerment and self-realisation. When Rani finally confronts Appanna in Act 3, it signifies her growth. She declares, *"I have lived in fear long enough. Now, I am no longer afraid."* This transformation from fear to courage is pivotal. It illustrates how bhayanaka rasa, when confronted, can lead to personal empowerment. This resolution of fear provides a cathartic experience for both Rani and the audience, completing her emotional arc.

The blending of folklore and reality in *Nagamandala* also serves to enhance the bhayanaka rasa. The play uses traditional myths to reflect on contemporary societal issues that are faced by countless women. This makes fear as an emotion both a timeless and timely theme. Hence

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the oral storytelling tradition, where tales of snakes and spirits are passed down, forms the backdrop of Rani's experiences. As the Storyteller mentions in the Prologue, *"In the stories of old, the snake was always a harbinger of both doom and destiny.",* this interplay between the ancient and the present situates Nagamandala in a space where fear crosses time, linking Rani's personal fears to a collective cultural consciousness.

Comparative Analysis

The two plays, *Macbeth* and *Nagamandala*, although rooted in different cultural and historical contexts, share commonalities in their portrayal of fear while highlighting unique cultural adaptations.

Data for Bhayanaka rasa in *Macbeth*

Act	**Scene(s)**	**Description of fear**	**Key elements**	**Freytag's pyramid element,**
Act 1	Scene 3	Fear and ambition sparked by the witches' prophecy.	Prophecy, supernatural fear.	Exposition
	Scene 5	Lady Macbeth's fear of Macbeth's nature and her summoning of darkness to hide their deeds.	Fear of exposure, darkness imagery.	Exposition
Act 2	Scene 1	Macbeth's hallucination of the dagger, signifying his fear of the murder he is about to commit.	Hallucination, internal fear.	Rising action
	Scene 2	Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's immediate fear after Duncan's murder.	Blood imagery, fear of discovery.	Rising action

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	Scene 4	Fear in the kingdom after Duncan's murder.	Unnatural events, societal fear.	Rising action
Act 3	Scene 1	Banquo's suspicion instills fear in Macbeth about his own safety.	Paranoia, prophecy fear.	Climax
	Scene 4	Banquo's ghost appears, terrifying Macbeth during the banquet.	Supernatural fear, guilt.	Climax
.Act 4	Scene 1	Macbeth visits the witches again, fearing his future and seeking reassurance.	Prophecies, supernatural elements.	Falling action
Act 5	Scene 1	Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking, driven by her subconscious fears.	Guilt, psychological fear.	Falling action
	Scene 5	Macbeth's fear of the advancing army, though masked by false bravado.	Fear of downfall, prophecy culmination.	Resolution

Analysis Insights:
Exposition: Introduces the initial fear from the prophecy and Lady Macbeth's fear of failure.
Rising Action: Builds with internal and societal fears post-Duncan's murder.
Climax: Peaks with Banquo's ghost and Macbeth's increasing paranoia.
Falling Action: Continues with Lady Macbeth's psychological unraveling.
Resolution: Macbeth's fear of defeat.
This structure shows how fear is distributed throughout the play, with the Rising Action and Climax containing the highest concentration of fear-related scenes.

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Data for Bhayanaka Rasa in *Nagamandala*

Act	**Scene(s)**	**Description of fear**	**Key elements**	**Freytag's pyramid elements**
Act 1	Scene 1	Rani's fear of isolation and oppression in a patriarchal marriage. She is locked in a room, physically and emotionally confined.	Patriarchal control, isolation.	Exposition
	Scene 2	Rani encounters the snake for the first time, evoking fear of the supernatural and the unknown.	Fear of the Unknown, Supernatural Elements	Inciting incident
	Scene 3	The snake transforms into a man, complicating Rani's perception of reality and fear of transformation.	Reality vs. Myth, Transformation, Psychological Fear	Rising action
Act 2	Scene 1	Rani fears societal judgment and the constraints of a patriarchal system, feeling trapped in her marriage.	Societal Expectations, Patriarchal Control, Fear of Judgment	Rising action
	Scene 2	The snake (in human form) reassures Rani, but her fear of supernatural elements and her	Fear of the Supernatural, Fear of Change, Conflict Resolution	Climax

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Volume- 1, Issue - 1 | January, 2025 | ISSN 3107-4359

		predicament remains.		
Act 3	Scene 1	Rani begins to overcome her fears, taking control of her narrative and breaking free from the emotional chains.	Overcoming Fear, Empowerment, Self-Awareness	Falling action
	Scene 2	Appanna's return resolves the tension, with Rani no longer afraid of the snake or her husband.	Confrontation of Fear, Empowerment, Emotional Liberation	Resolution

Analysis insights

The table for *Nagamandala* demonstrates how fear evolves through the play. It begins with Rani's psychological fear and isolation in Act 1, shifts to supernatural fear as she encounters the snake, and further develops through her internal and societal anxieties. The fear peaks in the climax as Rani faces both the supernatural and patriarchal oppression. In the falling action, fear recedes as she gains confidence, progressing in the resolution where she achieves emotional liberation and overcomes her fears. The table captures how fear transitions from an external, supernatural threat to a more internal, personal conflict.

The emotional mapping framework used to analyse these plays charts the emotional progression of characters as they experience fear. In *Macbeth*, fear is not a singular moment but a recurring emotion, closely tied to the characters' actions and moral choices. Macbeth's growing anxiety as his reign becomes unstable (Act 3, Scene 4) demonstrates a shift in how fear intensifies as guilt and ambition collide. Similarly, in *Nagamandala*, Rani's fear begins externally through the mythical snake, but evolves into a more personal and internal fear driven by societal expectations and patriarchal control (Act 2, Scene 1). The climax in both plays represents the peak of bhayanaka rasa—Macbeth's descent into madness and Rani's confrontation with her fears.

Both tables illustrate the emotional trajectory of fear in relation to the structure of the play. In *Macbeth*, fear intensifies through the rising action and reaches its peak in the climax(Act 3, Scene 4). The use of Freytag's Pyramid places Macbeth's psychological unraveling as a direct consequence of his fear of losing power. In *Nagamandala*, the table shows a gradual build-up of fear in the rising action, with significant emotional shifts seen in the climax (when Rani confronts the snake and societal expectations) and falling action, where she transforms and regains control.

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The semiotic analysis reveals distinct symbolic elements in both plays. In *Macbeth*, fear is represented through symbols that contribute to the psychological deterioration of the characters. For example, the blood on Macbeth's hands symbolically connects to his mounting guilt and fear of being discovered, representing his internal conflict (Act 2, Scene 2). The constant references to darkness and the supernatural further amplify the dread, particularly when Macbeth and Lady Macbeth confront the consequences of their violent deeds (Act 3, Scene 2). In contrast, *Nagamandala* employs culturally specific symbols like the snake and the firelight to evoke fear. The snake represents both an external, supernatural threat and an embodiment of Rani's internal fear of betrayal and loss of control over her life. The firelight serves as a symbol of transformation and illumination, showing how fear eventually leads Rani to self-realisation. The snake's fear-inducing presence in the play symbolises the external forces (patriarchal oppression) that Rani must confront, while also reflecting her inner turmoil and psychological fear (Act 1).

In *Macbeth*, the tragic arc is constructed around Macbeth's fear and his attempts to overcome it through violence. The climax of the play is when Macbeth is consumed by fear, leading to his downfall. Fear, therefore, drives the tragedy, as it highlights the consequences of hubris and unchecked ambition. In *Nagamandala*, fear operates within a cyclical and transformative structure. Rather than leading to a tragic end, Rani's fear acts as a catalyst for growth and change. The play is more restorative than tragic in nature, with fear serving as a threshold for personal and social empowerment.

In *Macbeth*, fear is a gendered emotion, particularly in the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. While Macbeth's fear emerges through ambition and guilt, Lady Macbeth's fear is more psychological, linked to her inability to deal with the consequences of her manipulation and the societal expectations of her gender. Her fear is of powerlessness, and this is symbolised in her obsessive hand-washing. In *Nagamandala*, fear is directly tied to gender roles in the context of marriage, duty, and obedience. Rani's fear is born out of her position as a woman within a patriarchal system that limits her autonomy. The play questions how women internalise societal norms, with fear acting as a response to oppression, tradition, and cultural myths surrounding femininity and sexuality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has explored the construction and evolution of bhayanaka rasa within two distinct plays: *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare and *Nagamandala* by Girish Karnad. By utilising the semiotics and emotional mapping frameworks, alongside Freytag's Pyramid, the study has shown how fear functions not only as an emotional response but also as a crucial narrative mechanism that shapes the characters' actions, motivations, and the overall trajectory of both plays.

The comparative analysis has revealed that while both plays utilise fear to drive their respective plots, the emergence and significance of fear differ across cultural and contextual boundaries. In *Macbeth*, fear operates on a psychological and political level, primarily centered on ambition, guilt, and the violation of natural order. The supernatural elements serve as both

symbolic representations of fear and catalysts for Macbeth's tragic downfall. In contrast, *Nagamandala* offers a more culturally specific examination of fear, where it is intertwined with societal norms, gender roles, and the oppressive dynamics within a patriarchal system. Fear in *Nagamandala* is both personal and collective, reflecting the internal struggles of the protagonist, Rani, as she navigates her place in society and within her marriage.

Through the comparative study, the paper has also highlighted the differing narrative functions of fear. While fear in *Macbeth* ultimately leads to tragedy, despair, and destruction, it acts as a transformative force in *Nagamandala*, where Rani confronts and transcends her fears to gain autonomy and self-awareness. The juxtaposition of these outcomes demonstrates how fear can be both a destructive and redemptive force, depending on the context and the cultural dynamics within the text.

This study further emphasises the importance of understanding bhayanaka rasa beyond its traditional interpretation in classical Indian dramaturgy. By applying semiotics and emotional mapping to both Western and Indian texts, this paper underscores the universal applicability of the rasa across cultures, while also recognising the unique ways it is represented and experienced within each cultural framework. The findings suggest that fear, as an emotional and symbolic construct, can cross the boundaries of genre and culture, making it a powerful tool for understanding human emotions and narratives in diverse literary traditions.

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