



Transforming Taboos: Ecofeminism, Menstruation, and Spirituality in Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon*

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Abstract— *This paper delves into Maya Chowdhry's Monsoon through an interdisciplinary lens, examining its exploration of menstruation, ecological renewal, and feminine identity. The analysis situates Monsoon within feminist ecological literature and performative representations of women's experiences, emphasizing its critical engagement with societal taboos and cultural renewal. By integrating concepts from psychoanalysis, ecological feminism, Indian aesthetics, and postcolonial hybridity, the study highlights the play's innovative approach to reframing abjection and celebrating cycles of life and empowerment.*



Keywords— *abjection, body politics, cultural taboos, ecofeminism, feminist theatre*

I. INTRODUCTION

Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon*, first broadcasted as a BBC radio play, is a seminal drama of South Asian diasporic theatre as it seamlessly addresses societal taboos, such as female sexuality, menstruation, and queer love, as sites for political and spiritual transformation. It intertwines the natural and personal, the ecological and the feminine. Her staging of menstruation detangles it from its moralizing cultural stigma as well as reductive biomedical pathologization. In her author notes, she mentions that the genesis of the play occurred with the meditated juxtaposition of the cycles of monsoon and menstruation, how both are associated with the color red and an expectation of transformation.

Maya Chowdhry, an acclaimed British South Asian playwright and poet, is known for her experimental narratives and focus on intersectional identities. *Monsoon* began its creative journey as a poem titled "Menstrual Monsoon," which Chowdhry described as exploring parallels between the monsoon's rejuvenating power and the menstrual cycle's renewal. Initially submitted to the B.B.C. Young Playwrights' Festival, the play evolved through various drafts, including a monologue and a narrative about two sisters, before becoming the intimate love story and spiritual journey it is today. The production

was shaped by producer Frances Ann Solomon, whose workshops and direction helped refine its experimental nature.

First performed and broadcast in the early 1990s, *Monsoon* garnered attention for its bold exploration of taboos surrounding menstruation and lesbian love, sparking both controversy and acclaim. The play's innovative use of sound, particularly the tabla and flute, alongside evocative natural sounds such as thunder and rain, underscores its performative and auditory depth. As a narrative deeply rooted in themes of cultural heritage, love, and natural cycles, *Monsoon* remains a pioneering work that challenges and expands the boundaries of feminist theatre.

By aligning menstrual cycles with the monsoon's regenerative power, Chowdhry creates a layered metaphor for life, fertility, and ecological balance, providing a fertile ground for feminist, psychoanalytic, and aesthetic interpretations. The play reframes abjection associated with menstruation by embedding it within a spiritual and cultural dialogue, where symbols such as the monsoon or Hindu goddesses challenge traditional categorical boundaries of purity and impurity, while fostering a discourse on inclusivity and empowerment. The narrative serves as an ecological meditation, love narrative, trauma testimony, and an embodied re-vision of heteronormative

and patriarchal restrictions placed on women's desires and bodies.

The play is rooted in a historical understanding of menstruation that, as scholar Jyotna Chawla notes, can be traced to ancient Hindu texts. In a legend from the Vedas, the god Indra kills a learned scholar, Brahmin and, to absolve his guilt, he asks women to carry this burden each month through menstruation. This ancient story became the foundation for menstrual restrictions that persist in contemporary South Asia. It converted a bodily process originally understood as connected to cosmic order (*ṛta*) into a vehicle of pollution and sin. *Monsoon* emerges as a deliberate contestation of this history, refusing both Western medical privatization and South Asian patriarchal sacralization of menstrual shame.

The article contends that *Monsoon* enacts ecofeminist queer resistance through four interrelated theoretical registers, each of which requires significant critical attention. First, by foregrounding menstrual abjection, bodily control, and queer intimacy, the play presents abjection as a form of political refusal. Second, by representing diaspora, the impossibility of return, and the condition of ongoing in-betweenness, the play maps what Homi Bhabha describes as the "Third Space." This is a space in which the postcolonial female subject can speak, desire, and resist beyond the limits of both Western liberal frameworks and patriarchal tradition. Third, by repeatedly linking menstruation with the monsoon at both formal and thematic levels, the play develops a distinctly South Asian ecofeminism grounded in goddess-centered spirituality, where women's bodies are understood as part of wider ecological and sacred cycles. Lastly, the article analyses the play through the lens of Indian aesthetic theories, particularly *rasa* and *dhvani*, suggesting that the affective intensity in the play is built on the principles articulated in the *Natyashastra*.

Chowdhry draws on what Sara Ahmed calls the "cultural politics of emotion," which understands bodily processes and emotions as social forces that shape how power is experienced and resisted. By placing menstruation at the centre of the play, through Jalaarava's diary, poetic interludes, and its connection to monsoon cycles, the play makes this politics visible on stage. The stigmatization of menstruation can be further understood through Sara Ahmed's concept of affective economies, which examines how emotions circulate and "stick" to bodies, creating social boundaries. Menstruation is marked by disgust, which Ahmed describes as shaping "the bodies of a community of the disgusted through how it sticks objects together" (Ahmed 82). This framing renders menstruation abject, justifying its exclusion from public spaces and social norms. Shame further reinforces this stigma,

compelling menstruators to conceal their experiences to align with societal ideals of propriety, perpetuating silence and invisibility. Ahmed argues that emotions "produce the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated" (Ahmed 10), explaining how disgust and shame create divisions that marginalize menstruators. Addressing this stigma involves dismantling the emotional frameworks that sustain it and challenging cultural narratives that frame menstruation as impure or disruptive.

The narrative follows Jalaarava, a nineteen-year-old British South Asian woman, as she travels to India in search of cultural belonging and self-understanding. Moving from Chandigarh to Kashmir, where she lives in an all-female household on a houseboat, her journey foregrounds themes of mobility, vulnerability, and negotiation across cultural and linguistic boundaries. As scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (*Under Western Eyes*, 1988) and Mary Louise Pratt (*Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 1992) have shown, women's travel in postcolonial contexts often becomes a site of self-formation shaped by power, gender, and location. Jalaarava's journey similarly stages travel as a process of negotiating insider-outsider positions within a complex socio-political landscape.

II. ABJECTION, TRAUMA, AND QUEER RESISTANCE: PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATIONS

For analytical clarity, this section limits its theoretical framework to three scholars. Julia Kristeva, whose *Powers of Horror* provides a foundational lens for interpreting menstruation as abject, disrupting culturally maintained boundaries between the clean and unclean, self and other. Secondly, Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* extends this analysis by exploring how emotions such as disgust and shame circulate within affective economies to uphold societal hierarchies. And finally, Shalini Shah's theorization of the material history of the female body in South Asian literature.

Shah's analysis of Sanskrit literature shows how patriarchal conceptualization and control render the female body into a colonized terrain. In Sanskrit poetry and law writings, the female body is simultaneously portrayed as a pollutant, a vessel (*yoni*), an arousal of masculine desire, and a need for continual disciplinary monitoring. Shah's examination of the *pativrata* (wifely devotion) concept is extremely significant. Instead of using overt physical force, the *Dharmasastras* created a system of psychological compliance in which women absorbed demands for control and chastity while being watchful of their own sexuality. Menstruating women are prohibited

from washing, eating, touching sacred artifacts, and entering temples or mosques. Shah describes these restrictions as psychological colonization, which results in conformity at the level of subjectivity itself. When Nusrat admits in *Monsoon* that she is unable to cook or visit the mosque on her “unclean days,” it enacts this genealogy in which the bodies of menstruation women are viewed as harmful and need to be segregated.

Yet in *Monsoon*, menstruation operates as more than a mechanism of exclusion; it is reimagined as a site of resistance and creative transformation. Psychoanalytic frameworks, including Lacanian and feminist insights, unravel how the protagonist Jalaarnava's experiences engage with deeper dimensions of trauma, desire, and the unconscious. Kristeva defines abjection as that which “disturbs identity, system, order... what does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva 4). Menstruation epitomizes abjection as it breaches bodily boundaries, making the invisible visible and threatening societal norms of cleanliness and control. Jalaarnava's menstruation is labelled “unclean,” barring her from religious rituals and reinforcing her exclusion. This aligns with Kristeva's assertion that abjection maintains symbolic order by designating certain bodies and processes as impure. *Monsoon's* intervention, however, is to reject the stigma associated with this natural process. The menstruation body is transformed from an object of shame into an archive, a narrative, and an accumulation of knowledge by Jalaarnava's monthly journal, which is marked with the symbols “E” (energy) and “I” (irritability). By asserting that the menstrual body is a knowable and mappable phenomena rather than an abject occurrence that must be hidden, this record represents resistance.

Upon Jalaarnava's initial presentation of her diary to her sister Kavita, the subsequent dialogue, while seemingly humorous, serves to denaturalize shame: Kavita's bewilderment regarding the capacity of menstrual blood to fill a bucket, her astonishment at the sufficiency of a towel, and Jalaarnava's patient elucidations anchor the menstruating body in the ordinary, the tangible, and the comprehensible discourse. This domestication of this taboo subject, its commencement from silence to vocalization, from shame to knowledge, formulates the first step of the play's redemptive picturing of the ‘abject.’ This engagement with the ‘abject’ amplifies during the protagonist's stay in Kashmir, when her menstruation period converges with her spiritual awakening, sexual desire, and environmental catastrophe. The diary entry dated April 4th, wherein Jalaarnava recounts her ritualistic incineration of her menstrual products in a secluded alley, termed “a ceremony of blood to ashes,” is exemplary. The scene shows Jalaarnava taking her used pads and tampons outside, secretly burning them one by one in a small fire,

instead of just throwing them away like rubbish. In doing this, she treats her menstrual blood as something important that deserves a careful, almost ceremonial goodbye, not as dirty waste to be hidden. This kind of action is similar to ecofeminist and goddess-based traditions where menstruation is seen as powerful and sacred, and where the bleeding body is honoured through simple rituals rather than being treated with shame.

The play candidly explores menstruation; a subject often shrouded in cultural taboo. Reminiscing her writing process, Chowdhry recollects, “During the research I spent many days staring at a map of the onset of the South East Monsoon, looking for clues and insights. Some days I don't know where the writing came from. The ghosts of many women touched my pen.” In *Monsoon*, menstruation is reclaimed as a natural and powerful phenomenon, linking the characters' personal experiences to the rhythms of nature. Jalaarnava's menstrual diary becomes a symbolic tool, helping her understand her body's connection to the world. “I feel wet and heavy, bloated and weak,” Jalaarnava writes, capturing the shared physical reality of menstruation. By articulating menstruation as a shared, intimate physical reality, the play dismantles cultural taboos and constructs a sense of unified womanhood grounded in empathy and co-affection.

Ahmed's concept of affective economies further elucidates how emotions like disgust and shame “stick” to menstruating bodies. In *Monsoon*, disgust is not an individual response but a collective affect that sustains exclusionary practices. Ahmed argues, “Emotions work to align some bodies with others and against other bodies” (10). Nusrat's internalized shame about her menstruation, evident when she calls it “my unclean day,” exemplifies how cultural narratives regulate bodily experiences and enforce conformity. By exposing these dynamics, *Monsoon* queers the abjection of menstruation, challenging its stigmatisation.

Chowdhry represents the female body as a contested space shaped by cultural forces. Shah asserts, “...it is not biology per se but the ways in which the social system organises and gives meaning to the biological body that is oppressive to women,” a critique vividly echoed in Jalaarnava's experiences (32). Shah elucidates this idea by asserting how patriarchal ideologies inscribe cultural meanings onto biological realities, perpetuating gender inequalities through socially constructed norms. She critiques the patriarchal conflation of womanhood with biological functions, emphasizing how cultural narratives inscribe meaning onto the female body. This is vividly illustrated in Jalaarnava's lament over her menstrual cycle, described as “a war brewing in my belly” (Chowdhry, Act 3, Scene 6). This metaphor encapsulates the dual pressures of cultural

stigma and personal struggle, positioning her body as a site of both imposed narratives and the potential for reclaiming agency.

More drastically, Chowdhry uses poetic sublimation to produce what one may refer to as the recovery of abjection. Instead of depicting Jalaarnava's heaviest menstrual flow as disease, the drama introduces a poetic intervention:

“The heavens have opened / and my womb has shed her lining / and flows endlessly / for days. / The flesh of Durga / fighting for change / the hungry red earth heaving / and growing” (Chowdhry, 1993, p. 67).

Chowdhry places heavy menstruation in a mythological register that predates the Brahmanical contamination mindset that Chawla traces by calling upon Durga, the Hindu goddess of war, destruction, and regeneration. Menstrual blood represents cosmic strength rather than sin, as Indra's curse would have it, because of Durga's cosmic battles and personification of creative destruction. By portraying the menstrual woman as bearing part in cycles of terrestrial generation and rejuvenation, the phrase “hungry red earth heaving and growing” further ecofeminizes menstruation.

One of the most delicate and politically significant examples of queer South Asian intimacy in postcolonial theater is the romance between Jalaarnava and Nusrat. Chowdhry's narrative also grapples with taboos surrounding love and sexuality. The evolving relationship between Jalaarnava and Nusrat challenges patriarchal expectations and heteronormative constructs. “I want to give myself to you,” Jalaarnava confesses to Nusrat, a moment that encapsulates their shared transformation. Interestingly, *Monsoon* declines to use a false or heteronormative resolution. Rather, the play depicts their interaction as what Bracha Ettinger refers to as a matrixial encounter-event, a place where two partial subjects co-emerge, bordlink, and co-fade without losing their individuality or dissolving into merging. It posits the borderspace as a realm where subjectivity is formed through shared encounters rather than separations. This space operates through what Ettinger calls “metamorphosis,” a process of mutual transformation occurring between entities in relational proximity. *Monsoon* enacts this matrixial logic through multiple strategies. When Jalaarnava and Nusrat make love on the floating garden, the play stages their bodies as permeable and mutually transforming:

“JALAARNAVA: By candle light / I moved on her / through her / into her body / bells on ribbons / of bangles / and janjura / ankles curved like. NUSRAT: Red blood mendhi / on palms soft and / sweet / licking taste of / chilli and masala / touch of silk on / my skin, thighs / arch

of my movement / up and into / earth, water, blood” (Chowdhry, 1993, p. 72).

Matrixial borderlinking is enacted through the interweaving of these two lyrical voices, which are both distinct and poignant. Instead of abstract transcendence, the sensory distinctiveness (bangles, mendhi, masala) bases love in physical experience. “Up and into / earth, water, blood” is the final line, that places their love-making amid broader cycles of elemental transformation.

As Ettinger describes, this borderspace is a realm of mutual transformation where boundaries between self and others dissolve. Jalaarnava's deepening relationship with Nusrat exemplifies this: their bond is both intimate and transformative, reshaping their identities and breaking societal norms. Nusrat's role in Jalaarnava's life reflects Ettinger's idea that relationships are not merely interactions but spaces of shared becoming. As Jalaarnava reflects on her experiences, the monsoon rains serve as a potent metaphor for renewal and interconnectedness, embodying the fluidity of the Matrixial borderspace.

The monsoon itself serves as a central metaphor, encapsulating the themes of renewal and relationality. Just as the rains rejuvenate the parched earth, the shared experiences between Jalaarnava and Nusrat nurture their emotional and psychological growth. Chowdhry writes, “The heavens have opened. A gift from the Goddess to be able to create life,” drawing a direct connection between the natural and the divine, the personal and the universal. This imagery aligns with Ettinger's use of water as a symbol of the Matrixial borderspace, where subjectivities blend and evolve.

III. POSTCOLONIAL DIASPORAS: HYBRIDITY, BELONGING, AND THE POLITICS OF RETURN

The “Third Space” theory developed by Homi K. Bhabha offers crucial theoretical terminology for comprehending *Monsoon's* portrayal of postcolonial identity and diasporic awareness. According to Bhabha, the Third Space is a “contested arena where meanings are negotiated and identities reshaped” rather than an idealized area of cultural synthesis. In this intermediary state, the colonized individual neither fully integrates into the colonizer's culture nor adheres to an essentialist “original” culture. New hybrid identities arise through contingent negotiation, exemplifying what Bhabha refers to as “mimicry,” a process in which the colonized subject adheres to colonial culture while concurrently undermining its authority through deliberate repetition and deviation.

Jalaarnava's journey to Kashmir portrays precisely this Third Space consciousness. As a British-Indian woman, she is neither wholly British nor wholly Indian; she yearns for a homeland she could belong fully to. Her arrival in Chandigarh during the summer heat, her anticipation of the monsoon, her attempt to inhabit an "Indian" identity while remaining culturally alienated—all these characteristics demonstrate her perpetually in-between state. When she attempts to communicate with the warden at the youth hostel during her travels, switching between English and Hindi, she enacts a gendered diaspora experience: the perpetual negotiation between linguistic systems, cultural codes, and modes of belonging that never fully stabilize.

The play reiterates on the impossibility of an authentic homecoming. Jalaarnava searches for something "truly Indian," some ground of legitimacy that might heal her hybrid consciousness. Yet Kashmir extends not homecoming but further estrangement. She is perceived as a tourist, as westernised, as too mobile, too independent, too sexual, all things hinting at her irreducible foreignness. Nusrat's initial suspicion, "You're Indian, aren't you? I didn't think Indians stayed here," accentuates how Jalaarnava's hybrid status makes her legible as outsider even within her presumed homeland. The recurring water imagery underscores this impossible return. Jalaarnava arrives during the dry season and awaits the monsoon; she exists in a liminal temporality of waiting, of not-yet-belonging, of anticipation without resolution. The monsoon itself becomes the figure of what can never be fully possessed or inhabited, it arrives, transforms, and departs, leaving no stable ground of belonging.

The play's staging of Jalaarnava's attempt to inhabit an "Indian" identity further enacts the performativity of postcolonial subjectivity. She switches between English and Hindi, attempts to adopt Indian dress, seeks to understand Indian customs and spirituality. Yet these performances of Indianness remain marked as performance, as strategic adoption rather than as authentic return. The play thus stages what Bhabha identifies as the "slippage" inherent in colonial mimicry, the way that the colonized subject's imitation of the colonizer's (or, in this case, of an imagined "original") culture simultaneously reveals the constructed nature of all identity and destabilizes the authority of the original.

The diasporic experience is significantly influenced by gender, as evidenced by Zerine Alam's analysis of colonial women's journey narratives. Women in diaspora undergo what Alam refers to as the "unsettling of defined identities," where patriarchal family dynamics, religious duties, and gendered mobility constraints exacerbate the

intricate negotiations of hybrid identity. Jalaarnava's expedition to India is facilitated solely by familial duty and her sister's presence; her choice to journey alone to Kashmir elicits Massi's concern ("It's not safe, you cannot go alone"). The constraints on female mobility, validated through appeals to safety, propriety, and religious custom, denotes gendered diaspora as a condition of restricted freedom.

Nusrat's position is considerably more restricted. She is constrained as a Muslim woman in Kashmir by religious rules, familial duties (she has to provide for her mother and siblings), and the assumption that she will eventually wed a "tailor" and have children. Her declaration, "I'm going to marry a tailor, that way I can carry on with my designing and support my Ummi. At least I don't have to get very involved with the man I marry, except to have children," reveals the pragmatic resignation with which she negotiates patriarchal marriage, the way she carves out minimal space for autonomy and creative work within severely constrained circumstances.

In order to enact and examine hybrid postcolonial identity, the theatrical form itself becomes an essential site. *Monsoon's* narrative strategies, the menstrual diary as documentary archive, the interweaving of monologue and dialogue, the insertion of poetic interludes, the use of music and sound design, all embody Bhabha's notion of "hybridity" of postcolonial narrative form itself. Rather than adopting a unified, coherent theatrical language, the play splinters into multiple registers: epistolary (letters to Kavita), confessional (diary entries), poetic (the refrain "The heavens have opened"), and dialogical (scenes between lovers). This formal heterogeneity mirrors the play's thematic preoccupation with hybrid, fragmented, never-quite-coherent postcolonial subjectivity. Evenmore, the play's use of sound design further adds to this subjectivity. Rather than rendering the female voice as unified and transparent, *Monsoon* employs layered sound, tabla rhythms, women's singing, the sounds of water, the monsoon itself, to create what we might call an affective architecture wherein individual subjectivity is situated within larger sonic and environmental landscapes.

IV. ECOFEMINISM, SPIRITUALITY AND THE MENSTRUAL-MONSOON CONNECTION

Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon* interlaces themes of ecofeminism and spirituality, creating a tapestry that critiques patriarchal structures and celebrates the regenerative cycles of nature and femininity. Ecofeminism, as articulated by Vandana Shiva (*Staying Alive*, 1988) and Karen J. Warren (*Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 2000), identifies the interconnected oppression of women and nature under patriarchal systems. Shiva argues that women, particularly

in rural India, function as custodians of biodiversity and sustainable knowledge systems. Traditional practices of women farmers, water-harvesters, and forest-dwellers represent forms of ecological wisdom systematically devalued and displaced by the Green Revolution's substitution of polyculture farming with chemical-intensive monocultures.

Crucially, Shiva refuses to essentialize women's relationship to nature as rooted in biology alone. Rather, she argues that women's historical positioning as reproducers of subsistence and managers of household economies has generated specific forms of ecological knowledge and commitment. The Chipko Movement, wherein women literally embraced trees to prevent deforestation, exemplifies how women's ecological activism constitutes "a non-violent and humanly inclusive alternative to the dominant paradigm of contemporary scientific and development thought." Women's ecological resistance is rooted in material necessity, in the recognition that ecological degradation directly threatens women's survival.

Monsoon enacts this ecofeminist vision through its attention to water scarcity, seasonal precarity, and the labor involved in sustaining life under conditions of ecological instability. Massi's warning against drinking unsafe water in Chandigarh, Nusrat's family's dependence on seasonal monsoon patterns for their houseboat tourism business, the newspaper headline reporting "Floods in Bangladesh," all of these ground the play's vision in material ecological reality. The play insists that the personal and ecological, the menstrual and the meteorological, are not separate registers but expressions of the same planetary disturbance. Even menstruation is symbolically aligned with ecological cycles, positioning women's bodies as intrinsically linked to the rhythms of the environment. This connection critiques patriarchal constructions of impurity and highlights the natural, regenerative power of menstruation.

Unlike Julia Kristeva's horror-centric concept of abjection, *Monsoon* reframes menstruation as a source of renewal and empowerment. The imagery of blood flowing like monsoon rains situates menstruation within a natural cycle, reclaiming it from cultural stigmas. By intertwining the menstrual cycle with the monsoon's arrival, Chowdhry transforms a culturally stigmatized phenomenon into a symbol of resistance and regeneration. Janet Chawla's exploration of menstrual symbolism in Vedic mythology further illuminates the play's spiritual dimensions. In Vedic traditions, menstruation is emblematic of *rta*, the cosmic order, linking women's bodies with lunar rhythms and natural cycles. Chawla explains, "The word *rta* stands for both seasons and the menstrual cycle," underscoring

the intrinsic link between women's bodies and the rhythms of nature. Chowdhry mirrors this association through Jalaarava's menstrual diary, which serves as a narrative device connecting her bodily cycles with the monsoon's arrival. This framing reclaims menstruation from patriarchal narratives that stigmatize it as impure. Instead, the play celebrates menstruation as a natural, regenerative force, aligning it with the monsoon's dual role as life-giver and disruptor. By intertwining these cycles, Chowdhry underscores the sacredness of the feminine body and its inherent link to nature. By reclaiming menstruation as sacred, *Monsoon* critiques the patriarchal commodification of both women and nature, offering a vision rooted in harmony and respect.

Water is central to *Monsoon*'s ecofeminist framework, serving as both a life-giving and disruptive force. Chawla's discussion of well-worship rituals highlights water as a yonic symbol, reflecting ancient reverence for the feminine as a source of life. She notes that "the worship of the well as yonic source of life is congruent with the early Rig Vedic waters-women-mothers cluster of imagery" (Chawla 281). The play's monsoon rains embody this duality, symbolizing both creation and destruction. Scenes such as the market's dry spring and the Youth Hostel's water scarcity emphasize ecological vulnerability, linking environmental degradation with the exploitation of women.

The monsoon's arrival mirrors the menstrual cycle's role in reproduction, with lines like, "The heavens have opened... the roads are awash, rivers cascading and overflowing," likening menstrual blood to rains that sustain life. This alignment critiques systems that devalue natural cycles, reclaiming them as sacred. Through the monsoon, Chowdhry celebrates the feminine as creator and disruptor, echoing ecofeminist calls for reevaluating humanity's relationship with nature. Hindu goddesses play a pivotal role in *Monsoon*'s spiritual narrative, embodying cyclical forces of creation and destruction. Durga and Kali, frequently referenced in the play, disrupt binaries of purity and impurity, symbolizing menstrual blood as a sacred element of renewal. Durga's association with strength and protection and Kali's with transformation and time reflect the duality of the feminine as both nurturing and fearsome. These archetypes resonate through the play's exploration of menstruation and the monsoon, emphasizing their sacred and transformative nature.

The spiritual framing extends beyond Vedic traditions, challenging patriarchal restrictions on menstruation. For example, the scene at the temple where Jalaarava reflects on menstrual taboos critiques cultural norms that label menstrual blood as impure. Her internal monologue, "Maybe men made up the rules, cause they're jealous that

life doesn't abound from deep within the warm flesh of their womb," underscores the patriarchal fear of feminine power. Furthermore, the characters serve as microcosms of larger ecofeminist struggles. Jalaarnava's journey to embrace her body's rhythms symbolizes resistance to patriarchal constructs that stigmatize natural processes. Her menstrual diary functions as both a personal and political act, reclaiming her bodily autonomy. Similarly, Nusrat's navigation of cultural expectations critiques restrictive traditions, reflecting ecofeminist themes of agency and resistance. The characters' relationships with water further illustrate ecofeminist themes. For instance, Jalaarnava's time on the houseboat becomes a space of healing and self-discovery, where water symbolizes both connection and transformation. The intimate moments shared between Jalaarnava and Nusrat underscore the reclamation of agency within patriarchal systems, linking personal liberation with collective resistance.

V. INDIAN AESTHETIC THEORIES: RASA AND DHVANI

Monsoon employs the principles of *rasa* (aesthetic emotion) and *dhvani* (suggestion) from classical Indian aesthetics. These theories, articulated by Abhinavagupta and Anandavardhana, provide a framework for understanding the play's emotional and symbolic depth. In classical Indian aesthetics, the concept of *rasa* refers to the emotional essence that a work of art evokes in its audience. Chowdhry employs this principle to imbue *Monsoon* with a spectrum of emotional experiences. The *shringara rasa* (erotic emotion) manifests through the tender yet clandestine relationship between Jalaarnava and Nusrat. Their shared moments, marked by sensuality, intimacy, and vulnerability, evoke an appreciation of love and sensuality that transcends normative boundaries. The *karuna rasa* (pathos) is most evident in Jalaarnava's reflections on her sense of isolation and the inevitable loss that accompanies her diasporic existence. Her emotional turmoil, amplified by the transient nature of her relationship with Nusrat, invites the audience to empathize with her struggles. Through these emotional tones, the play creates a nuanced portrayal of queer female identity in a diasporic setting, where love and loss are intertwined with cultural displacement.

The concept of *dhvani*, or suggestion, allows a text to evoke meanings beyond the literal. Chowdhry masterfully uses *dhvani* to add layers of symbolic resonance to *Monsoon*. For example, the poetic line, "The flesh of Durga, fighting for change... the hungry red earth heaving and growing," is emblematic of this technique. The imagery suggests resistance and renewal, with the reference to Durga, a warrior goddess, symbolizing

feminine strength and transformation. Meanwhile, the "hungry red earth" evokes the cyclical processes of destruction and renewal, mirroring the emotional and cultural upheavals experienced by the characters. The metaphorical interplay between nature and human emotion reinforces the connection between the physical monsoon and the internal storms of the characters. The use of *dhvani* thus invites the audience to engage with the text on multiple levels, exploring themes of identity, transformation, and resilience.

Chowdhry's meticulous incorporation of sound, both instrumental and natural, heightens the emotional impact of *Monsoon*. The soundscape serves as a vital component of the play's aesthetic and thematic framework. The tabla punctuates moments of emotional intensity, with its rhythmic beats mirroring the monsoon's downpour and the characters' inner turmoil. The flute evokes the gentle flow of water, symbolizing the fluidity of emotions and the transient nature of the characters' experiences. Thunder, rain, and rustling leaves ground the narrative in its ecological setting. These sounds do more than provide a backdrop; they amplify the emotional tones of the scenes, enhancing the *rasa* experience for the audience. The interplay of sound and silence further accentuates the aesthetic depth. Silence punctuates moments of introspection or emotional climax, creating a stark contrast that heightens the impact of subsequent auditory elements.

The monsoon, a recurring motif in the play, operates as a multi-layered metaphor. The rain symbolizes nature's cycles of destruction and renewal, mirroring the broader themes of transformation and resilience. It parallels the characters' inner conflicts and emotional upheavals, symbolizing both cleansing and turmoil. The monsoon evokes a meditative quality, drawing connections to themes of impermanence and the search for belonging. Recent scholarship by Rajendran (2020) underscores the enduring relevance of *dhvani* in contemporary literature, highlighting its ability to connect modern narratives to classical traditions. In *Monsoon*, the monsoon rain exemplifies this connection, blending ecological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions into a cohesive metaphor.

VI. CONCLUSION

Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon* is a powerful exploration of menstruation, ecology, and identity. By integrating the classical Indian aesthetic theories of *rasa* and *dhvani*, Maya Chowdhry's *Monsoon* transcends the boundaries of conventional diasporic and queer narratives. The play's emotional resonance, symbolic depth, and auditory richness create a powerful exploration of identity, love, and belonging. Through its nuanced use of these

principles, Monsoon not only revives the classical traditions of Indian aesthetics but also reimagines them within a contemporary, diasporic context, making it a deeply evocative and timeless work of art. Furthermore, by exploring the feminist, psychoanalytic, and aesthetic perspectives, the play transforms the abject into the sublime, challenging societal norms while celebrating the cycles of life. This study demonstrates how Monsoon transcends cultural and disciplinary boundaries, establishing itself as a seminal work in feminist ecological literature.

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