

January 2017

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Recommended Citation

Chakraborty, Suman (2017). Women, Serpent and Devil: Female Devilry in Hindu and Biblical Myth and its Cultural Representation: A Comparative Study. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 18(2), 156-165. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol18/iss2/11>

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Women, Serpent and Devil: Female Devilry in Hindu and Biblical Myth and its Cultural Representation: A Comparative Study

Suman Chakraborty¹

Abstract

Association of Women with Serpent and Devil or evil is common in today's popular movies and literature. A large number of movies have been made on serpent woman, or *Nagin-Kanya*, both in India and the West in the last century. But the root of this popular trend lies in Genesis of the Bible, and its interpretations by the theologians and the church fathers. In India, this motif came with British literary and cultural products through colonization. Though we get references of figures (Ulupi in the *Mahabharata*, myth of snake-goddess Manasa) similar to the western serpent women in pre-colonial Indian literature and myth, they stand apart from the western serpent women for several reasons. Firstly, the serpent-women in pre-colonial literature are hardly demonized and denigrated like their western counterparts. Secondly, fatal temptation and destructive eroticism lie at the centre of the serpent woman myth in western literature and culture after Christianization. This article aims to trace the origin of serpent-woman myth and its cultural construction as well as representations in India and the West.

Keywords: Women, Serpent, Temptation, Devil, Demonization

Woman, Serpent and Bible

Representation of women as evil, or association of women with the Devil, in literature has its root in Genesis of the Bible. Though pagan mythologies of ancient religions are replete with numerous examples of dangerous and seductive women like Roman goddess Diana, Cybele, Ashtoreth, Inanna, Asherah, Ishtar, and Hathor, Fauna, Medusa, Pandora, Harpies, Sirens and Furies and the like, they are hardly demonized and denigrated in the way the transgressive women are portrayed in the Christian and the Biblical mythologies and their interpretations, as well as in the literature, after Christianization. Often, these fatal women were celebrated and worshipped as a symbol of power, creativity, fertility and sexual pleasure, as well as death and destruction. Carnality and eroticism associated with some of these pagan idols were simply celebrated, instead of being abhorred in pre-Christian pagan mythology. Another significant aspect of these women is that most of them are associated with a serpent figure. Moon goddess and serpents have a long association. Nel Nodding in *Women and Evil* says, "both the moon through its cycles and the snakes through its shedding become periodically new and whole" (Nodding 54). In many cultures, a serpent is a symbol of sexuality and fertility. Sometimes it is also associated with knowledge and wisdom. Barbara G. Walker in her *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbolism* comments, "serpent was one of the oldest symbols of female power. Woman and serpent together were considered holy in preclassic Aegean civilization, since both seemed to embody the power of life" (Walker 387). She continues, "Of course, in the Bible, both Eve and her serpent were much diabolized; but

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Gnostic sects of the early Christian era retained some of the older ideas about their collaboration concerning the fruit of knowledge. Some sects worshiped the snake as a benevolent Female Spiritual Principle, who taught Adam and Eve what they needed to know about God's duplicity" (388). James H. Charlesworth, in his extensive study of the serpent symbol, in his book *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized*, shows that serpent was associated with positive and good traits in pre-Christian ancient religions. But, he concluded, "The serpent ceased to be a dominantly positive symbol in our culture about the fourth century CE." According to him, "...the serpent became a predominantly negative symbol in Western culture (despite the serpents on medical notes and prescriptions) because of the leading minds in the triumphant Church, on the one hand, they were over-influenced by the negative serpent symbolism of 'the final book of the Bible,' Revelation 12. On the other hand, they sought to establish Christianity against some powerful and well-established religions; that is, they developed Christological symbols that would replace Hermes' caduceus and especially Asclepius' and Hygieia's serpent." Thus with the advent of Christianity, both the woman and the serpent were demonized, and, body and sexual pleasure became an object of abhorrence. Women became "the devil's gateway."

The Biblical myth of the Great Fall is very important to figure out the changes in the tradition of representation of the transgressive women in literature. Nell Nodding writes, "We have at least two good reasons for studying and analyzing the myth of Eve and the Fall: its continuing effects on present patterns of thought and social structure and its influence on traditional conceptions of evil" (Nodding 52). The myth of the Great Fall is taken as the starting point of Christian misogyny. Though it tells the story of the first transgression by women, it does not explicitly propagate any misogynistic conception regarding Eve. But its cultural receptions and interpretations by later Biblical scholars and church authorities, down through the ages, strengthen the cultural construction of Eve as the temptress, the destroyer of man and the ally of Satan, the serpent. The Bible scholar Jean M. Higgins opines that the notion of Eve as temptress and Satan being her mentor is the result of "imagination, drawn mainly from each commentator's own presuppositions and cultural expectations" (Faxneld 63). Another contemporary scholar of History of Religion, Per Faxneld comments:

...when looking at the reception history of this passage, as *it pertains to gender relations*, it soon becomes clear that only during the last 150 years or so has it been used to any notable extent for purposes other than legitimating the subjugation of women. Some have alleged that it also functions as a dangerous justification for violence against women, which is in effect in our own time." (61)

Faxneld, in his study of the reception of the Fall myth, shows that it has been interpreted by the Church authorities at different times to subjugate and demonize women. Church Father Tertullian is often quoted to prove this. In his treatise *On the Apparel of Women*, Tertullian considers each woman as Eve and therefore "the devil's gateway." He says:

Are you not aware that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of your lives on in our own time; the guilt must then, of necessity, live on also. You are the devil's gateway. You first plucked the forbidden fruit and first deserted the divine law. You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not brave enough to attack. (Faxneld 67)

Irenaeus, another Church Father, regarded Eve as treacherous and pointed out her role in their downfall. John Chrysostom, another Church Father, commented:

The woman taught once and for all, and upset everything. Therefore he (Paul) says, "Let her not teach." Then does this mean something for the rest of womankind, that Eve suffered this judgment? It certainly does concern other women! For the Female sex is weak and vain, and here this is said of the whole sex. (Faxneld 68)

The most famous Church Father St. Augustine also stressed on Eve's weakness and Adam's strength. According to Augustine, in Eve's mind, there was "a certain love for her own power and a certain proud self-presumption" (Faxneld 68). Here lies, according to him, the weakness of Eve because of which Devil makes her his first target. Unlike the Church Fathers, the Protestant theologians took a lesser misogynistic attitude in their view of Eve. But they never forget to point out her weakness that made her vulnerable to the trap of Satan. Protestant theologian Martin Luther was of the opinion that "if he had tempted Adam first, the victory would have been Adam's, and the man 'would have crushed the serpent with his foot'" (Faxneld 68). Protestant followers believed that Eve's crime lies in the fact that she rejects the supervision and protection of her husband. That's why, Luther said, they should pay the debt of Eve's sin by staying at home and doing domestic work.

Serpent-Woman in Western Literature and Art

Besides this, there was another female transgressor before Eve. In Judeo-Christian myth, Lilith is often seen as Adam's first wife. A contradiction in The Bible also gestures towards this fact. In Genesis 1:27, we read: "So God created man in his [own] image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (The King James Version of the Holy Bible 1). But later in Genesis 2:2, we find that Eve was created after Adam, out of his ribs. But this contradiction can be resolved by the existence of Lilith, as Adam's first wife. The most detailed account of the myth of Lilith can be found in *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, an anonymous Hebrew work written as early as the eighth century. According to this book, Adam and Lilith were not a happy couple. She refused to lie beneath him during intercourse, as she demanded herself as his equal because they were, she claimed, made from the same earth. Then, she deserted him. God sent angels after her but she refused to return. Another important 13th century Kabbalah text, the *Sefer ha-Zohar* ("The Book of Splendour") compiled by the Spaniard Moses de Leon gives a bit different account of Lilith. Janet Howe Gaines says that Lilith's account in this book is largely derived from the rereading of Genesis 1.27 and interpretation of these lines in the Talmud. In Genesis 1.27, a shift of pronouns from "He created him" to the plural "He created them" can be observed. Talmud interprets it in the following manner: God at first created an androgynous figure with two distinct halves. Though he intended to create two creatures, he ended up creating one with two halves. Later, the book *Sefer ha-Zohar* (The book of Splendor) describes that soon the two halves were separated. God put Adam in a deep sleep and cleaved her free off the other part and presented her as his new wife when he woke up. Another passage of this book describes that when Eve is created, Lilith finds her rival, Eve, embracing Adam and deserts him. Twentieth-century feminists often consider Lilith a feminist icon. But in Jewish tradition, both the above books indicate, Lilith is a

notorious, hideous female demon who is often described as Satan's wife. In Jewish tradition, newborn children and the men, who go to sleep alone, are vulnerable to Lilith's mischief. But Lilith never became a part of Christian religious teaching, like Eve. Instead, she was absorbed and adapted in the folklore and the literature of the various European countries. Lilith thus shrouds the imagination of the writers, the poets and the artists, down throughout the ages. One of her most popular portrayals can be found in Goethe's *Faust* (1808). In the play, Faust meets Lilith at the witches' Sabbath at Brocken Mountain. Faust asks his companion Mephistopheles who she is. Mephistopheles replies:

The first wife of Adam
Watch out and shun her captivating tresses:
She likes to use her never-equalled hair
To lure a youth into her luscious lair,
And he won't lightly leave her lewd caresses. (Goethe 379)

Faust dances with her saying:

A pretty dream once came to me;
In which I saw an apple tree;
Two pretty apples gleamed on it,
They lured me, and I climbed a bit. (379)

She then replies:

You find the little apples nice
Since first they grew in Paradise.
And I am happy telling you
That they grow in my garden, too. (381)

Their conversation has erotic connotation. But Goethe represents her as a symbol of fatal temptation that brings about one's destruction. Robert Browning, in his poem *Adam, Lilith and Eve*, delineates a picture of Lilith. Though his portrayal of Lilith appears to throw a positive light on Lilith, close study of the text shows that it aligns itself with old misogynist tradition. Pre-Raphaelite poets and artists were much preoccupied with Lilith. D.G. Rossetti wrote two poems on Lilith: *Eden's Bower* and *Body's Beauty*. The poem, *Body's Beauty*, focuses on her bodily beauties, but there is a strong suggestion of hidden terror and danger associated with her beauty:

Lo! As that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent
And round his heart one strangling golden hair. (Rossetti 162)

In *Eden's Bower*, he presented a more detailed picture of her as a female demon who takes revenge upon Adam with the help of Satan in the form of a serpent: "It was Lilith the wife of Adam/ (Sing Eden Bower!)/ Not a drop of her blood was human" (43). Here Lilith calls the serpent of the garden her lover and asks his help: "Help, sweet Snake, sweet lover of Lilith! / ... Help me once for this one endeavour, / And then my love shall be thine for ever!" (44). She asks him to

lend his shape to her so that she can take revenge upon Adam. Rossetti also produced two pieces of painting on Lilith. But in these paintings, he depicted the exquisite beauty of Lilith giving less emphasis on the fatal aspects of her character. But John Collier, another artist in pre-Raphaelite style, depicted Lilith as nude, wrapped by a serpent that partially hides her private parts. Here, Collier depicts Lilith as an extremely beautiful blonde in the background of a dark forest. But the serpent coiling her body, mysterious and contented expression in her face and the dark forest in the background suggest the terror and danger associated with her beauty. Another artist Kenyan Cox portrays Lilith as dangerous and hideous female demon. The painting is divided into two panels. The top panel resembles Collier's painting, to some extent. Here Lilith is presented as nude coiled by a serpent that seems to kiss her. The bottom panel of the painting depicts the temptation of Adam and Eve by Lilith in the form of a human-serpent creature whose lower part of the body resembles a serpent and the upper part human. Another artist, Hugo van der Goes, depicted Lilith similarly with a serpentine body and a woman's face. She is alluring Adam and Eve under the tree of knowledge. Michelangelo also depicted Lilith as a serpentine-human figure coiling the tree of knowledge and tempting Eve and Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The serpent thus became Lilith's ally and sometimes identical with Lilith herself in folklore, art and literature of different European countries after Christianization.

Thus, the image of serpent woman or association of woman with serpent and evil became the object of misogynist fantasy in English literature throughout the ages. Demonization of the serpent and the woman involves two important things in western culture. First, they symbolize fatal temptation that often suggests forbidden eroticism. Secondly, they also imply dangers and destruction as a possible consequence of the first trait. Besides the earlier mentioned paintings on Lilith, German painter Franz von Stuck's paintings may be ideal examples to illustrate the above points. Franz von Stuck's two paintings, *Die Sunde (The Sins)* (1893) and *Die Sinnlichkeit (Voluptuousness)* (1891), represent both the aspects of temptation and danger embodied by the woman and the serpent. In *Die Sunde (The Sins)*, a seductive nude woman coiled by a hideous serpent stands and directly gazes towards the audience. Her gaze has a mixed expression of danger and temptation. But the demonic and the dangerous predominate over the other. Besides, the serpent coiling her body with its open mouth poses a threat of the impending danger. The other painting, *Die Sinnlichkeit (Voluptuousness)*, portrays the same figure in a different posture. Here, also an alluring nude woman coiled by a black serpent is portrayed with a semi-dark background. But the woman leans back with a lascivious expression on her face. Her body is curvaceous and positioned in an inviting way. Her gaze bears a mysterious look but does not directly show any demonic aspect or danger, like the former one. The serpent coiling her is depicted with more curls to suggest its vivacity and readiness to action. However, both the paintings demonize the serpent and the woman and warn against the danger of lust. English literature is populated with serpent woman and Lamia theme. The Romantic Age produced some classic treatment of the lamia themes. Geraldine, in Coleridge's *Christabel*, is a serpent woman who, in the guise of a helpless royal lady, enters the castle of Sir Leoline to seduce and destroy his humble and innocent daughter Christabel. She hypnotizes Christabel under a spell in a way that she cannot reveal the real nature of Geraldine to anyone. But Barcy gets a premonition in his dream where a young bird, named Christabel, is being strangled by a bright green snake. The poem thus depicts a picture of innocence in the clutches of evil. This picture also recalls the great Fall myth where Eve is beguiled and tempted by Satan in the guise of a serpent. Like the Fall myth, it conveys its implied moral that the women are susceptible to evil and can bring destruction to themselves and to others around them, if there are not watched, guarded and protected properly. The poem also makes a

stereotypical representation of women as either angel or demon. When the angel leaves her safe and protected place, and violates the norms defined by patriarchy, it becomes a demon or a prey to the demon. But Keats' *Lamia* represents another serpent woman, Lamia, in a different manner. Lamia is a woman trapped in the body of a serpent. She gets the form of a beautiful lady with the help of Hermes. She meets Lycius whom she sees and falls in love, in her serpent form. Both of them spend a happy and blissful time until Lycius decides to marry her and announce it in a public ceremony. Appolonius, the philosopher, comes at the marriage ceremony and recognizes the real nature of Lamia and reveals it in public. Lamia then vanishes and Lycius dies of broken heart. But the portrayal of Lamia stands apart from the misogynist fantasy of other romantic poems. The poem is often interpreted as a symbolic statement about imagination and philosophy represented by Lamia and Appolonius, respectively. Lamia is often seen as a creative force as she sheds off her old skin and is reborn as a beautiful woman. In the poem, Keats neither demonizes Lamia nor makes her a subversive figure. Instead, he humanizes her to raise her status from a serpent to an affectionate lady craving for true love. But Lamia stands for another side of the serpent that is deception and elusiveness. She is as deceptive and elusive as imagination.

Human-Serpent or the Nagas in Hindu and Buddhist Myth

In India, this motif came with British literary and cultural products through colonization. Though we get references of figures (Ulupi in the *Mahabharatha*, snake-goddess Manasa) similar to the western serpent women in pre-colonial Indian mythic literature and folklore, they stand apart from the western serpent women for several reasons. Firstly, the serpent women found in pre-colonial Indian myth and literature are actually of Naga origin. Among the major Indian religious and mythical literature, only Brahminical and Buddhist literature gives information about these mythical serpent-human creature or Nagas. In Islamic literature, we can hardly find any evidence of them. J PH Vogel identifies the three major texts from the Brahminical and Buddhist literature as the "chief repositories of serpent lore" in India. They are *Mahabharatha*, *Rajtarangini* and the *Jatak Book*. Besides these, there are some Hindu Puranas and religious literature that deal with the Naga legend. Nagas are not serpent, in a western sense. Nagas are demi-god, with physical features of both serpent and human, residing in a different realm called *nagaloka*. Nagas described in Brahminical and Buddhist literature are basically of three types in appearance. First, they look like a serpent. Sometimes, they appear in human form. Lastly, in rare cases, they appear in a half-human and half-serpent form. The *Adi Parva* of *Mahabharatha* describes the origin of Nagas. They were the descendents of God Brahma. They were born of sage Kashypa, a wish-born son of Lord Brahma and Kadru. Pleased with his wives, Kashyapa granted each of them a boon. While Kadru wanted one thousand valiant Naga sons, Vinata asked for two sons who would be more powerful and brighter than Kadru's children. Then Kadru produced one thousand eggs. The eggs were carefully preserved in a container with hot water, and after five hundred years one thousand Nagas hatched out of the eggs. They are thought to hide in the interiors of the earth and come on the surface during the rainy season. But this *nagaloka*, in the subterranean world, is different from the Biblical hell. It is not a place of darkness and terror.

The *Vishnu Purana* describes the visit of the divine sage and God Vishnu's devotee, Narada to *nagaloka*. Narada describes *nagaloka* as a beautiful place decorated with precious and beautiful jewels, beautiful grove and lakes. Air is fused with sweet fragrance and music. Beautiful maidens inhabit the place. Thus, Narada sums up this place as a place of beauty and pleasure. Nagas are often thought to be the sons of earth in Indian tradition. Kadru, who is the mother of the Nagas, is

often considered to be the personification of earth. In the *Ramayana*, when Sita, Rama's virtuous wife, being disheartened by the injustice upon her, reveals her desire to return to her mother earth, the earth goddess comes to take her, sitting on a majestic throne, carried on their heads by Nagas. Nagas are also described as the possessor of riches. Earth is considered to be the rich repository of precious jewels, and Nagas are its protector. They punish the greedy and reward the virtuous. In a story of *Jataka*, the Nagaraja Champaka rewards the king of Benaras with a treasure of gold, silver and jewels. In *Rajtarangini*, Mahapadma, the great Naga of Vular Lake, promises the king of Kashmir a gold mine on the condition that the king would save him from the Dravidian sorcerer. When the king saves him in an offensive manner, he only shows him a copper mine. Besides possessing wealth, Nagas were known to know magical spells and medicines, which they offer only to their chosen ones. In a *Jataka* story, King Senaka receives a charm from his Naga friend. This charm enables him to understand the language of animals. Nagas were also known for their magical healing powers, especially for knowing the antidote to poison. In *Atharva-veda*, Nagas are mentioned as the animal having the knowledge of medical herbs. Serpent's venom is considered as an antidote to poison.

The episode of Bhima's visit to Naga world testifies to this. Bhima's brother Duryodhana mixes poison in Bhima's food to take revenge. Bhima became unconscious after taking the food, and Duryodhana then threw him into the river. Bhima sank deep into the water and reached the *nagaloka* where numerous venomous Nagas lived. They bit Bhima a number of times. The poison of the Nagas counteracted the poison of the food. They were worshipped in different parts of India. In Brahminical and Buddhist literature, frequent mention of Nagas is made. There are ample examples of virtuous and benevolent Nagas, like Vasuki, Padmanabha, Muchilinda, Sankhapala, Bhuridatta in Brahminical and Buddhist literature. Shesa, or Ananta Naga, is known as the world serpent that holds the entire creation on his hood. God Vishnu reposes on the coils of Shesa, who floats on the ocean of eternity. In Buddhist myth, Naga king Muchilinda protected the meditating Buddha from rain by his hood. There is also fierce and revengeful Naga like Takshaka. The goddess of the snake is Manasa, who was first mentioned in the *Atharva Veda*, as a snake goddess. In Puranas, she is described as the daughter of sage Kashyapa and Kadru. But in *Mansamangala Kavya*, she is represented as the daughter of the god Shiva. At first, she was denied the status of a goddess, but later she acquires it by her own effort. She threatens the famous merchant, Chand, by her destructive power and forces him to worship her. Thus, she gains popularity and the status of a goddess. She is famous for her wrath and revenge in *Mansamangala Kavya*. But she is also merciful to others who worship her. But the nature of the serpent and its symbolization in Ancient India is a problematic one. They sometimes stand for wisdom or knowledge. Sometimes they symbolize fertility and also immortality. Sometimes they symbolize the *Kundalini* or the sleeping life-force in man. They are treated as sacred and worshipped in different parts of India. But Nagas have their dark side too. They are sometimes considered as elusive, dangerous and cruel. Their deceptive nature is revealed in the incident where they coiled the tail of Uchchaisravas, the divine white horse to make it appear black. This incident helped Kadru, mother of Nagas to win the bet and make Vinata, her sister, and her sons her slave. J Ph. Vogel in his book *Indian Serpentlore: Or, The Nāgas in Hindu Legend and Art* has mentioned diverse opinions of the scholars regarding this issue. But finally, he endorses French Scholar Auguste Barth who said, Vogel quotes, "These brief indications are enough to show that the serpent religions of India form a complex whole and such as is not accounted for by viewing it as a simple worship of deprecation. We can distinguish it in (1) the direct adoration of the animal, the most formidable and mysterious of all the enemies of men, (2) a worship of the deities of the waters, springs, and rivers, symbolized

by the waving form of the serpent, (3) conceptions of the same kind as that of the Vedic Ahi, and connected closely with the great myth of storm and the struggle of light and darkness” (Vogel 5-6).

Nagkanyas or Nagins are female of the species with unsurpassable physical charms. In *Vishnupurana*, sage Narada gives description of beautiful Naga maidens when he visits Nagaloka. By these charms, a Nagkanya could easily rouse passions in the hearts of mortal man. There are several evidences in Indian art and literature about the union of a mortal man and Nagin. *Mahabharata* describes the union of Arjuna, the Pandava prince and Ulupi, daughter of Naga king, who urged Arjuna to gratify her desires. When Pandava prince, Arjuna, during his exile period, descended in the Ganges River to perform his ablutions, he was dragged under the river by Ulupi, the daughter of the king of the Nagas. Ulupi, addressing Arjuna directly expressed her desire, “I am, O prince, the daughter of that Kauravya, and my name is Ulupi. O tiger among men, beholding thee descend into the stream to perform thy ablutions, I was deprived of reason by the god of desire. O sinless one, I am still unmarried. Afflicted as I am by the god of desire on account of thee, O thou of Kuru's race, gratify me today by giving thyself up to me” (677). At first, Arjuna did not respond to her call. She then quoting scripture, saying that it is against *Dharma* to reject a woman who comes full of desire to one, willingly. Arjuna then accepted her and gratified her desires. After spending a night with her, Arjuna left Ulupi who gave him a boon that he would be invincible in water. Their union produced a son named Iravan who would play a great role in the war at Kuru-kshetra. *Rajtarangini* describes another story of union between mortal man Bisakha and *nagkanya* Chandralekha. A Brahman traveller named Visakha was travelling a city near Vitasta. There near a lake of sweet water he met two beautiful maidens Iravati and Chanderekha who were the two daughters of Naga Susravas. He fell in love with Chanderekha at first sight. Nagas in that region were cursed to spend their lives by eating leaves and grasses due to a spell cast upon them by an ascetic. Knowing this, Bisakha tried to make an end to their miseries. Having found that ascetic, he ultimately succeeded in removing the spell from the Nagas. Being immensely pleased with this, Naga king offered him a boon. He asked for the hand of Chanderekha. The King fulfilled his wish, though he was not worthy of this alliance. Another instance of such union is described in *Raghuvamsa* written by Sanskrit poet Kalidasa. Here, Kusa, king Rama's son, marries Kumudvati, the youngest sister of Nagraj Kumuda. In Buddhist literature, *Bhuridatta Jataka*, we get a story of how a widow of Naga origin wins the love of exiled prince of Benarasa. In these stories, the Nagas or Nagkanyas sometimes may have a physical semblance to the western serpent woman. But they seldom appear in their serpent or serpent-human form. Instead, they have been described as women with ineffable beauty and charms. They are not demonized and seen as the devil's ally like their western counterparts. Secondly, they hardly function as the agents of temptation. In the Arjun-Ulupi episode in the *Mahabharatha*, Nagkanya Ulupi's physical beauty and sexual desire are described. But she is never depicted like the western *femme fatale*, who destroys her lover after making love. Lastly, in western popular stories of union between a mortal and a serpent usually results in destruction, death or unhappiness of both or either of the couple. But in Indian stories, such unions of lovers usually end in happy conjugal life.

Serpent Women in Indian Films

The Post-colonial Indian films are populated with such *femme fatale* serpent women who seem to have been created under the direct influence of western literature and films. There are numerous Bollywood films, popular of them of being *Nagin* (1976), *Nagin Aur Suhagan* (1979),

Sheshanaga (1990), *Jaani Dushman – Ek Anokhi Kahani* (2002), *Jungle Ki Nagin* (2003), *Hiss* (2010) and *Nagin Ka Inteqaam* (2015). Most of them deal with an unfulfilled love story of a male and a female serpent. The male serpent is killed or separated from the female. Then the female Nagin goes to take revenge. Sometimes the female serpent goes to take revenge of any past humiliation or injustice. The story line is simple and does not seem to demonize the female serpent. But the way she is represented to take revenge, echoes the demonized serpent woman of Christian misogynist fantasy. She is represented as a seductress, who uses her physical charm to tempt and destroy her admirers. In the film *Nagin* (1976), the shape-shifting female serpent takes the revenge of the death of her mate in the guise of different seductive women. These women try to seduce their targets with their physical charm and kill them in most intimate moments. Some of the deaths take place in the bedroom. Another movie, *Nagin Ka Inteqaam* (2015), tells a similar story. At the beginning of the movie, a male and a female shape-shifting serpent are found performing a devotional dance to god Shiva. The male serpent is killed by a gang of three wicked. Then the female avenges his death by killing them one by one. She seduces them with her physical charms and then kills them brutally in her serpent form. Temptation and erotic desire leading to destruction, the two important aspects of Western Lamia myth, can be noticed in these films. But the Nagin's association with god and her deification, which are obviously Indian influences, tend to veil the western Lamia within her.

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