

“SHADES OF ABHISARIKA NAYIKA IN MARY MAGDALENE”

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Shades of Abhisarika nayika in Mary Magdalene” is a Bonafide record of the project (BH6BP02B18) done by Melvi Saji (SB22BHA008) under our guidance towards partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of bachelor of arts in Bharathanatyam of the University of Mahatma Gandhi during the year of 2025.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project report titled “SHADES OF ABHISARIKA NAYIKA IN MARY MAGDALENE” submitted to the Department of Bharathanatyam. ST.TERES’S COLLEGE (Autonomous), Ernakulam, affiliated to MG University, Kottayam is a record of original work done by me under the guidance of Ms. Arunima J.R.

The information and data given in the report is authentic to the best of my knowledge.

This project report is not submitted to any other University or institution for the award of any Degree, Diploma or Fellowship.

24th April 2025

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ERNAKULAM

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1

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the Nayika in classical Indian aesthetics, particularly the Abhisarika Nayika, represents a woman who defies convention and ventures out to meet her beloved—driven by longing, devotion, and courage. This archetype, rich in emotion and symbolism, transcends its cultural roots to find resonance in other traditions and narratives across the world.

This project explores the intriguing parallels between the Abhisarika Nayika and the biblical figure of Mary Magdalene. Often portrayed as a repentant sinner, a devoted follower of Christ, and the first witness to the Resurrection, Mary Magdalene embodies profound emotional and spiritual depth. Her journey, marked by unwavering love, sacrifice, and fearless pursuit, reflects many shades of the Abhisarika—a heroine motivated by a powerful inner call toward union with the divine.

By analyzing Mary Magdalene through this classical Indian lens, the project aims to uncover a unique confluence of spirituality, femininity, and devotion that bridges Eastern and Western traditions, offering a richer, more universal understanding of the divine feminine in sacred narratives.

2

NATYASHASTRA

The Natyashastra is a seminal Sanskrit text on performing arts, traditionally attributed to the sage Bharata. It is considered one of the oldest and most comprehensive works on dramaturgy, dance, music, and theater in the world. Composed between 200 BCE and 200 CE, the text is regarded as the foundational treatise for classical Indian performing arts.

Structure and Content:

The Natyashastra consists of 36 chapters and approximately 6,000 verses in poetic form. It provides a systematic exploration of various aspects of performance, including:

1. ***Origins of drama***: The text describes how drama (Natyā) was created by the Gods as the fifth Vedha to educate and entertain Humanity.
2. ***Rasa Theory***: The concept of Rasa (aesthetic flavor or emotional essence) is central to the Natyashastra text. It identifies nine primary Rasas: Shringara (love), Hasya (humor), Karuna (compassion), Raudra (anger), Veera (heroism), Bhayanaka (fear), Bhībhasta (disgust), Adbhūta (wonder) and shānta (Tranquility).
3. ***Acting and expression***: It elaborates on gestures (mudras), facial expression (bhāvanas), and body movements required to convey emotions and tell stories effectively.
4. ***Music and Dance***: The text provides guidance on musical scales, instruments, rhythms, and choreography, linking music and dance to dramatic performance.
5. ***Stage design and production***: Detailed instructions on constructing theatres, setting up stages, costumes, and makeup are provided.

2.1 INFLUENCE

The Natyashastra has had a profound impact on Indian performing arts traditions, including classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, and Kathakali, as well as music and theater. Its principles continue to shape contemporary art forms and aesthetics in India and beyond.

The text also emphasizes the philosophical and spiritual dimensions of the arts, portraying them as tools for moral and emotional refinement, capable of uplifting both performers and audiences.

ASHTA NAYIKAS ACCORDING TO NATYASHASTRA TEXT

The ashtanayika (eight heroines) are classification of female protagonists described in ancient Indian texts like the Natyashastra and further elaborated in Rasas and Sanskrit literature. These classification depict various emotions through which a heroine is going on, especially in connection with her lover. They are integral to Indian classical dance, literature and art, offering a framework for expressing diverse emotions.

3.1 HISTORY AND CULTURE DEPICTION

The Ashta-Nayika classification (nayika-bheda) first appears in Natya Shastra . The classification is detailed in later works like the Dasarupaka (10th century), Sahityadarpana (14th century) and various other treatises on poetics as well as erotic Kamashastra texts like Kuttanimata (8th-9th century) based on courtesans, Panchasayaka, Anangaranga and Smaradipika. Keshavadasa's Rasikapriya (16th century) in Hindi, also elaborates on the Ashta-nayika

A famous example in Indian literature is Jayadeva's Gita Govinda (12th century) as well as in the Vaishnava poet Banamali's compositions, Radha dons the roles of the various nayikas while with her nayaka is the god Krishna.

The Ashta-Nayika is a central theme in Pahari embroidery used to decorate the Chamba Rumal, especially produced in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh. The Ashta Nayika are usually portrayed in eight panels on the Rumal.

In Indian (Hindustani) classical music, the eternal love between Radha and Krishna is represented through the consciousness of Radha as the leitmotif that dominates the lyrics. Especially the semi-classical genre of Thumri imbibes the myriad moods of Radha as Ashta Nayika consumed by passionate love for Krishna.

The Ashta-Nayika have been illustrated in Indian painting, literature, sculpture as well as Indian classical dance, such as Kathak. Notable medieval paintings that depict the Ashta nayika are the Ragamala paintings, as those from the Bundi school of painting.

ASHTA NAYIKAS

VASAKASAJJA

"uchite vaasake yaa tu rati sambhoga lalasaa mandanam kurute hrishta saa vai vaasakasajjitaa"

‘The lady who embellishes herself with various jewels and adornments and eagerly waits for her beloved’s arrival with happiness is known as a vaasakasajjita nayika.’

Vasakasajja ("one dressed up for union") or Vasakasajjika is waiting for her lover returning from a long journey. She is depicted in her bed-chamber filled with lotus leaves and garlands. She is dressing herself for the union with her lover and "eager with expectation of love's pleasure". Her beauty is compared by Kesavadasa to Rati - the Hindu love goddess, waiting for her husband, the love god Kamadeva. A Vasakasajja sculpture is found in the Lakshmana Temple in Khajuraho and the National Museum, Delhi

VIRAHOTKANTHITA

"aneka kaarya vyaasangaad yasyaa naagachhati priyah tadanaagata dukhaartaa virahotkanthitaa tu saa"

‘A virahotkanthita nayika is at utmost sorrow, lamenting the un-arrival of her beloved who could not come due to being engaged in other activities.’

Virahotkanthita ("One distressed by separation") is the distressed heroine pining for her lover, who, due to his preoccupation, fails to return home. She is depicted waiting for him, sitting or standing on a bed or out in the pavilion

SVADHINABHARTRUKA

"surataatirasair baddho yasyaa parshve tu nayakah saandraa moda guna prapta bhavet swadheena bhartrikaa"

‘Through her love and other characters, she who has attracted her beloved to be by her side at all times is known as swadheena bhartrika nayika.’

Svadinabhartruka ("one having her husband in subjection") or Svadinapatika, is the woman who is loved by her husband and controls him. He is subjugated by her intense love and pleasing qualities. He is devoted and faithful to her. In paintings, this nayika is depicted with a nayaka, who applies mahawar on her feet or a vermilion tilak (mark) on her forehead. In Jayadeva's Gita Govinda as well as in the poem Kuru Yadunandana, Radha is portrayed as a Svadinabhartruka. In the latter, Radha commands her lover, the god Krishna, to rearrange her makeup which is in disarray.

KALAHANTARITA

"irshya kalaha nishkraanto yasyaa naagachhati priyah saamarshavasha sampraaptaa kalahantaarita bhavet"

‘She, whose lover is separated from her due to jealousy and quarrel, is known as kalahantarita nayika. She is sorrowful at her situation.’

Kalahantarita ("one separated by quarrel") is a heroine separated from her lover due to a fight or jealousy or her own arrogance. Her lover is usually depicted leaving her apartment disheartened, while she too becomes heartsick and repentant without him. In other portrayals, she is depicted refusing the advances of her lover or refusing a wine cup from him. In Gita Govinda, Radha is also portrayed as Kalahantarita in an instance.

KHANDITA

"vyaasangaaduchite yasyaa vaasake naagatah priyah tadanaagama dukhaartaa khanditaa saa prakeertitaah"

‘One whose beloved has not come to her and enjoys with another woman is known as a khandita. She is distressful and angry.’

Khandita ("one enraged with her lover") is an enraged heroine. Khandita Nayika can be classified as a Nayika, who is offended by her lover in a playful manner. She can be observed, questioning her beloved, in anger after they meet. She can also be considered as “possessive and insecure” towards her lover.

VIPRALABDHA

"yasyaa doorim priyah preshya dattaa sanketameva vaa naagata kaaraneneha vipralabdhaha tu saa bhavet"

‘Even after sending messages, she whose beloved does not show up is known as vipralabdha. She feels sad and humiliated.’

Vipralabdha ("one deceived by her lover"), is a deceived heroine, who waited for her lover the whole night. She is depicted throwing away her jewellery as her lover did not keep his promise. This happens when a lover meets a Khandita and promises a tryst and breaks his promise.

PROSHITABHARTRUKA

"gurukaaryaantara vashaad yasyaa vai proshita priyah praroodhaalakakeshaantaa bhavet proshita bhartrika"

‘One whose husband has left to another place for an important business is known as proshita bhartrika. She is depicted as a lady who has abandoned her ornaments and left her hair loose.’

Proshitabhartruka ("one with a sojourning husband") is the woman whose husband has gone away from her for some business and does not return on the appointed day. She is depicted seated mourning, surrounded by her maids, but refusing to be consoled

ABHISARIKA

"hitvaa lajjaantu yaa shlishtthaa madena madanena vaa abhisaarayate kaantam saa bhavedabhisarika"

‘Overwhelmed with love, she who leaves behind her family and shame to go and meet her beloved is to be considered as an abhisarika.’

Abhisarika ("one who moves") is a heroine, who sets aside her modesty and moves out of her home to secretly meet her lover. She is depicted at the door of her house and on her way to the tryst, defying all kinds of difficulties like the storm, snakes and dangers of the forest. In art, Abhisarika is portrayed often in hurry towards her destination.

THE CONCEPT OF ABHISARIKA NAYIKA IN NATYASHASTRA

In the ancient Indian text *Natyashastra* (attributed to Bharata Muni), the concept of Abhisarika Nayika refers to a specific type of Heroine (Nayika) Characterized by her boldness and active pursuit of love. The term “Abhisarika” is derived from the Sanskrit root “abhhi” (toward) and “sara”(to go), meaning “one who goes towards” or “one who ventures forth”.

5.1UNVEILING THE ABHISARIKA NAYIKA: THE DETERMINED LOVER

.Abhisarika Nayika: A Heroine Who Dares to Desire

The Abhisarika Nayika is one of the eight heroines (Ashta Nayika) of Indian aesthetics, particularly prominent in literature, dance, and visual arts. Unlike the other heroines who passively wait for their love, the Abhisarika actively seeks out her lover, often defying societal norms and expectations.

Abhisarika Nayika, a character archetype from the Indian classical tradition, embodies the essence of a woman consumed by love's fire. Belonging to the Ashta Nayika, the eight types of heroines in Natya Shastra, she is the one who defies societal norms and ventures out to meet her beloved in secret. Her journey is a testament to unwavering passion and unwavering determination. The Abhisarika Nayika is often depicted in Indian art and literature, her image captivating artists for centuries. Paintings portray her in a state of hurried anticipation, traversing a perilous path. The darkness of the night, the menacing presence of wild beasts, and the fear of societal disapproval – none can deter her resolve. This imagery evokes a sense of "viraha," the pangs of separation, and the intensity of her yearning. The Abhisarika Nayika, with her daring venture to meet her lover, is further divided into two distinct types: Abhisarathi and Tamasi. Let's delve deeper into the characteristics and motivations that set them apart.

Abhisarathi: The cautious trailblazer

Planning and Preparation: The Abhisarathi isn't reckless. She understands the risks involved in her clandestine mission. She meticulously plans her journey, often seeking the help of a trusted confidante, the "sakhi." This confidante assists her in choosing the most opportune time, selecting a safe route, and ensuring secrecy. **Resourcefulness and Adaptability:** The Abhisarathi is not just cautious, she's resourceful. She anticipates potential obstacles and prepares for them. This could involve carrying items like a torch for navigating the darkness, disguising herself to avoid detection, or having a backup plan in case of unforeseen circumstances. **Emotional Control:** While her love is intense, the Abhisarathi maintains a degree of emotional control. She prioritizes reaching her lover safely and doesn't let her emotions cloud her judgment. This focus allows her to make rational decisions and navigate the challenges of the journey.

Tamasi: the consumed lover

Impulsive Passion: The Tamasi epitomizes the all-consuming nature of love. Driven by raw passion, she acts impulsively and may not plan as meticulously as the Abhisarathi. The desire to reunite with her beloved overpowers any fear of societal disapproval or the dangers of the night. **Oblivious to Danger:** Blinded by love's intensity, the Tamasi may disregard the potential risks involved. She might venture out alone, during particularly dangerous times, or take a less safe route, solely focused on reaching her lover as quickly as possible. **Emotional Frenzy:** The Tamasi's emotions are on full display. She might be consumed by anxiety, excitement, or even a touch of fear. However, these emotions don't hinder her journey; rather, they fuel her determination to reach her lover.

The Spectrum of Love The Abhisarathi and Tamasi represent the two ends of a spectrum within the Abhisarika Nayika archetype. The Abhisarathi embodies a more balanced approach, where love and reason coexist. The Tamasi, on the other hand, exemplifies the overwhelming power of love that can disregard societal norms and rational thinking. Understanding these nuances enriches our appreciation for the Abhisarika Nayika.

She is not a monolithic character, but rather an embodiment of the multifaceted nature of love. Both the Abhisarathi and the Tamasi, in their unique ways, showcase the lengths a woman driven by love is willing to go to in pursuit of her heart's desire

Features of Abhisarika Nayika:

1. *Determined and Fearless*:- She is undeterred by Challenges like Nightfall, rain, or dangerous on her way.
2. *Secretive*:- She often disguises herself or sneaks out stealthily to avoid being noticed.
3. *Lovesick and Impatient*:- Her desire to meet her beloved drives her actions.
4. *Expressive and Appearance*:- Her emotions reflect in her gestures, anxious yet eager.
5. *Brave and Odds*:- She may face natural elements like Thunderstorms or social restrictions but remain resolute.

Relevance in literature and Art:

Literary Depictions: Many poems and stories feature the Abhisarika Nayika. Her journey and emotional turmoil are vividly portrayed, often using metaphors and imagery.

Visual Representations: Paintings and sculptures depict the Abhisarika, posture, and facial expressions convey her emotional state.

When the nayika does indeed meet her beloved, her hero or nayaka, this conversation occurs:

- Nayaka: “You have enslaved me, dear, by coming here even though not called.”
- Nayika: “But, Ghanasyama, clouds came and brought me here.”
- Nayaka: “I can’t even see your body in this darkness. I wonder how you found the way.”
Nayika: “Lightning showed me the path.”
- Nayaka: “But your feet must have been hurt on the uneven path covered with mud and thorns.”
- Nayika: “The elephant of courage which I was riding was very comfortable indeed.”
- Nayaka: “How did you dare come absolutely alone in this dark and horrible night?”
- Nayika: “Your love was my companion.”

(Taken from “Kangra Paintings on Love”, M.S.Randhawa)

RASAMANJARI

Rasamanjari, written by the 11th-century scholar and king **Bhoja Raja**, is a significant Sanskrit treatise on **poetics and classical aesthetics**. The title translates to “A Bouquet of Aesthetics” or “Garland of Emotions,” reflecting its focus on the **rasa theory**—the emotional flavors that literature and art aim to evoke. The work is especially known for its detailed classification and poetic descriptions of different types of **Nayikas** (heroines), who represent various emotional states and situations in love. Bhoja composed this text to guide poets, dramatists, and artists in portraying emotions more effectively in their works, blending theory with artistic imagination.

One of the most celebrated sections of *Rasamanjari* is its classification of the **Ashta Nayika**, or the eight types of heroines, based on their emotional states in love. These Nayikas represent different moments and moods in a romantic relationship—ranging from anticipation and separation to anger and fulfillment. The text vividly describes each type with poetic elegance and emotional depth, making it a valuable guide for writers and artists seeking to depict human emotions in an artistic and sensitive manner. Each Nayika is not just a character type but a symbol of a particular human experience, making the work rich in emotional insight.

The *Rasamanjari* is significant not only for its literary merit but also for its lasting influence on Indian classical dance, drama, and painting. The portrayal of Nayikas inspired numerous artworks, miniature paintings, and performances in dance forms like Bharatanatyam and Kathak. Bhoja’s blend of poetic vision and scholarly structure makes the *Rasamanjari* a cornerstone of **Indian literary aesthetics**, reflecting the cultural sophistication of his time. Even today, the text is studied for its artistic beauty and its deep understanding of human emotions in the context of love and relationships.

6.1 ABHISARIKA NAYIKA DESCRIBED IN RASAMANJARI

In *Rasamanjari*, King Bhoja provides a poetic and insightful classification of heroines (Nayikas) based on their emotional states in love, known as the **Ashta Nayika** (eight types of heroines). Among these, the **Abhisarika Nayika** holds a unique place as a symbol of **courageous and passionate love**. Unlike

other Nayikas who may wait, sulk, or express longing from a distance, the Abhisarika is bold and determined—she takes initiative and sets out on her own to meet her lover, regardless of the obstacles that stand in her way.

Bhoja describes the Abhisarika Nayika as a woman deeply consumed by love and longing, who **ventures out at night**, braving dangers such as thunderstorms, snakes, forests, or societal judgment. Her physical appearance reflects her urgency—her dress may be disheveled, ornaments loosely worn, and her movements filled with anxiety and anticipation. Yet, none of this deters her from her mission. She represents love that is not passive or timid, but **active, intense, and fearless**. Her actions break the expectations of modesty and societal norms traditionally placed on women, showcasing her emotional strength and personal agency.

Through the character of the Abhisarika, Bhoja not only portrays a deeply emotional moment but also elevates the heroine's **emotional and moral courage**. Her love is not just physical desire—it is a profound expression of devotion and emotional honesty.

In *Rasamanjari*, the Abhisarika Nayika is admired rather than judged, highlighting Bhoja's progressive view of feminine emotion and action. Her portrayal has had a lasting impact on Indian art, inspiring countless paintings, poems, and classical dance performances that depict her dramatic journey through the night in pursuit of love.

AESTHETIC AND DRAMATIC FUNCTION:

The Abhisarika Nayika contributes to the emotional complexity of Indian drama. Her boldness adds a dynamic aspects to the narrative, often stirring tension and anticipation in the storyline. This type of heroine also symbolizes the themes of love that transcends traditional barriers or norms.

Thus, the Abhisarika Nayika plays a significant role in the Natyasastra as a symbol of active, courageous, and passionate love, embodying an ideal of the confident and determined woman in classical Indian aesthetics.

8

THE HOLY BIBLE

The **Holy Bible** is the sacred text of Christianity, regarded by believers as the divinely inspired word of God. It is a collection of books and letters written over centuries by various authors, chronicling the history, teachings, laws, prophecies, and wisdom of the Jewish and early Christian faiths. The Bible is divided into two main sections: the **Old Testament** and the **New Testament**.

The **Old Testament** is shared by both Christianity and Judaism, containing foundational texts that include historical narratives, religious laws, poetry, and prophecies. It begins with the **Torah**, the first five books that detail the creation of the world, the history of the patriarchs, and the laws given to the Israelites. It also includes historical books that narrate the rise and fall of the Israelite kingdom, as well as the **Wisdom Literature**, which offers poetic reflections on life, suffering, and the human condition. Prophetic writings are also part of the Old Testament, where prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah convey God's messages to the people of Israel, calling them to repentance and foretelling future events.

The **New Testament** focuses on the life and teachings of **Jesus Christ**, who Christians believe is the Son of God and the Messiah. The first four books of the New Testament, known as the **Gospels**, provide distinct accounts of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. These texts are foundational for Christian doctrine, emphasizing themes of love, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. Following the Gospels, the **Acts of the Apostles** details the spread of Christianity after Jesus' ascension to heaven, highlighting the missionary work of the apostles, particularly Paul. The **Epistles**, or letters, written by apostles like Paul, offer guidance and teachings on Christian living, faith, and ethics. The **Book of Revelation** concludes the Bible with a prophetic vision of the end times, symbolizing the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Overall, the Bible has had an immense influence on Western civilization, shaping its moral framework, legal systems, and culture. For Christians, it serves as the ultimate guide for faith and practice, offering spiritual wisdom, ethical teachings, and insight into God's relationship with humanity. Its rich literary and theological depth continues to be a source of study, reflection, and inspiration for millions around the world.

9

MARY MAGDALENE

Mary Magdalene is a significant figure in the New Testament, often portrayed as a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Her story is spread across the four gospels, though the details differ slightly between them.

9.1 EARLY LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Mary Magdalene, also known as "Mary of Magdala," is often thought to have been from the town of Magdala, located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. While her early life remains somewhat obscure, it is widely believed that she came from a modest background. The town of Magdala was known for its fishing industry, and it was a center for trade.

Some scholars speculate that Mary Magdalene was a woman of independent means, especially since she was able to travel and support Jesus' ministry alongside other women.

The Gospels don't provide a detailed biography, so much of what is known about her is derived from her encounters with Jesus and her presence in various Gospel accounts.

9.2 HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION

One of the most significant events in Mary Magdalene's life, as described in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 8:2), is her healing by Jesus. She is introduced as a woman "from whom seven demons had gone out." This detail is significant because the number seven was often used to indicate completeness or totality, suggesting that Mary had been severely afflicted before encountering Jesus.

The fact that she was healed of demon possession may have had a profound impact on her life, leading her to become a devoted follower of Jesus. In the ancient world, possession by demons was often understood as a form of illness or suffering. **For Mary Magdalene, this healing experience would have been life-changing and likely the reason for her deep attachment to Jesus.**

9.3 MARY MAGDALENE'S ROLE IN JESUS' MINISTRY

Mary Magdalene's relationship with Jesus is portrayed as one of deep faith and support. She is one of the women who traveled with Jesus and the twelve disciples, providing for them out of her own resources (Luke 8:1-3). This underscores her significant role in sustaining Jesus' ministry, not just as a passive follower but as someone actively involved in supporting the group's needs. Women like Mary Magdalene were essential to the ministry of Jesus, though their contributions were often overlooked in patriarchal societies.

The Gospels also mention other women who followed Jesus, such as Joanna, Susanna, and Salome, but Mary Magdalene is the most prominent. She is often mentioned first when lists of women who accompanied Jesus are given, indicating her central role among the female followers.

9.4 MARY MAGDALENE'S ROLE IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

In early Christianity, Mary Magdalene was revered as a key figure, particularly in Gnostic texts that often depict her as a prominent disciple of Jesus. In the *Gospel of Mary*, a Gnostic text that was discovered in the late 19th century, Mary Magdalene is portrayed as a spiritual leader and the one who understood Jesus' teachings more deeply than the male disciples. This text portrays her as a figure of wisdom and authority, which contrasts with traditional biblical portrayals of women at the time.

However, as the canon of the New Testament was formed, much of the more alternative views of Mary Magdalene were marginalized. The church eventually adopted a more simplified, less elevated view of her, focusing on her role as a witness to the resurrection and a symbol of repentance and redemption.

9.5 THE STORY

The story of Mary Magdalene encounter with Jesus, particularly after his resurrection, is one of the most intimate moments in the New Testament. According to the Gospel of St. John (20:11-18), after Jesus crucifixion and burial, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early on the third day, only to find that the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty.

Distraught, she stood outside the tomb, weeping, and saw two angels inside who asked her why she was crying. She replied, "they have taken my lord away, and I don't know where they put him." Turning around, she saw Jesus standing nearby but did not recognize him immediately.

Jesus asked her, "Women, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she asked if he had taken Jesus's body. It was only when Jesus called her by her name, "Mary," that she recognized him. Overcome with joy, she called out, "Rabboni" (which means Teacher).

Jesus then told her not to hold onto him, as he had not yet ascended to the father. He instructed her to go and tell the disciples that he was ascending. He told her to go and tell the disciples that he was ascending to his father and their father, to his God and their God. Mary Magdalene became the first ever person to witness and proclaim the resurrection of Jesus.

This encounter highlights Mary's deep devotion to Jesus and her unique role in the early Christian community as the first to carry the news of the risen Christ.

9.6 Apostle of the Apostles

"Apostle of the Apostles" is the title given Mary Magdalene by St. Thomas Aquinas. Her name comes from her home town of Magdala, a fishing village on the western shore of Lake Tiberias.

St Luke the Evangelist tells us, in Chapter 8 of his Gospel, how Jesus went from town to town announcing the Good News of the Kingdom of God, and how the Twelve Apostles were with Him together with some women who had been healed of evil spirits or infirmities, and were serving them. Among these was a certain "Mary, called the Magdalene, from whom seven demons came out."

9.7 Misconceptions about her identity: she was not a prostitute

As Biblical exegesis teaches, the expression 'seven demons' could indicate a serious physical or moral malady that had struck the woman and from which Jesus had freed her. But, until now, tradition has claimed that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. This is only because in Chapter 7 of Luke's Gospel we read of the conversion of an anonymous "known sinner in that city" who, when Jesus was a guest in the house of a notable Pharisee, bathed His feet with perfume and her tears and dried them with her hair." Without any real textual connection, Mary of Magdala was identified with that unnamed

prostitute. But, according to Cardinal Ravasi, there is a further misunderstanding: anointing with perfumed oil is a gesture that was also performed by Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, on a different occasion, as reported by the Evangelist, St John. And so, in some popular traditions, Mary Magdalene has come to be identified with this Mary of Bethany, after being confused with the prostitute of Galilee.

9.8 At the foot of the cross

Mary Magdalene appears in the Gospels in the most dramatic moment of Jesus' life, when she accompanies Him to Calvary and, along with other women, observes Him from afar. She is still there when Joseph of Arimathea places the body of Jesus in the sepulcher, which is closed with a stone. And on the morning of the first day of the week, she returns to the tomb, finds the stone rolled away, and runs to warn Peter and John. They in turn hurry to the empty tomb and discover that the body of the Lord is missing.

9.9 Meeting with the Risen Lord

The two disciples return home but Mary Magdalene remains at the tomb in tears. Her initial disbelief gradually turns to faith when she sees two angels and asks them if they know where Jesus' body has been taken. Then she sees Jesus Himself, but fails to recognize Him.

She thinks He is the gardener, and when He asks why she is crying and who she is looking for, she replies: "Sir, if you have taken Him away, tell me where you have put Him and I will go and remove Him." But Jesus says her name, "Mary" – and she recognizes Him at once: "Rabbuni!", She says, which in Hebrew means "Master!".

Jesus then tells her: "Do not cling to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go and find the brothers and to tell them I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." So Mary Magdalene goes to the disciples and tells them she has seen the Lord and that He said these things to her. (cf. John 20).

9.10 She announces Jesus' Resurrection from the dead.

Mary Magdalene is the first among the women following Jesus to proclaim Him as having overcome death. She is the first to announce the joyful message of Easter.

But she also proved she was among those who loved Him most when she stood at the foot of the Cross on Mount Calvary together with Mary, His Mother, and the disciple, St. John. She did not deny him or run away in fear as the other disciples did, but remained close to Him every moment, up to and including the tomb.

9.11 Lesser -known or often overlooked facts

1. She Wasn't a Prostitute in the Bible

Contrary to popular belief, **nowhere in the Bible is Mary Magdalene described as a prostitute**. This misconception started around the 6th century when Pope Gregory I conflated her with an unnamed sinful woman in Luke 7. Modern scholars and the Catholic Church have since clarified that this association was incorrect.

2. She Was a Prominent Disciple — Possibly the Closest Female Follower of Jesus

Mary Magdalene is mentioned in all four Gospels as one of the women who followed Jesus, supported his ministry, and was present at the Crucifixion and Resurrection. She is often referred to as the **“Apostle to the Apostles”** because she was the first to witness the resurrected Christ and carry the news to the male disciples.

3. She May Have Been of High Social Status

The term “Magdalene” likely refers to her hometown, **Magdala**, a wealthy fishing town. Some scholars suggest that Mary may have come from a well-off background, especially since she helped financially support Jesus’ ministry (Luke 8:2–3).

4. There Are Gnostic Texts That Show Her as a Spiritual Leader

In early Christian **Gnostic writings** like the *Gospel of Mary* (discovered in the late 19th century), Mary Magdalene appears as a wise and spiritually advanced disciple. These texts suggest she had a deep, mystical understanding of Jesus' teachings — even more so than some of the male apostles — and show tension between her and Peter, reflecting early debates about women in leadership roles.

5. Some Traditions Say She Traveled After the Resurrection

Legendary traditions — especially in France — claim that Mary Magdalene traveled to southern Europe after Jesus' death, possibly settling in **Provence**. There's even a cave in southern France, La Sainte-Baume, where she is said to have lived in prayer for decades. This is part of Catholic folklore but remains deeply embedded in European Christian history.

SHADES OF ABHISARIKA NAYIKA IN MARY MAGDALENE

After reading the Holy Bible, the character of Mary Magdalene emerges as an Abhisarika Nāyikā—a woman who seeks out her beloved despite obstacles. The Bible offers limited details about her, and historically, she was often misrepresented. For a long time, Mary Magdalene was mistakenly identified as a prostitute. However, several saints and scholars later clarified that this was a misconception. In reality, she was a woman who suffered from an illness that could not be cured by anyone until she encountered Jesus, who healed her.

In Luke 8:1-3, where it states:

> "And also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out..

Mary Magdalene first encountered Jesus at a time when she had lost all hope of finding healing elsewhere. Deep within, she knew that no one else could help her but Him. With that conviction, she approached Jesus—and He, with compassion and willingness, healed her.

In that moment, the Abhisarika Nayika's essence is reflected in Mary's unwavering determination and surrender. Drawn by an intense inner calling, she seeks out her beloved—here, a divine healer—despite any barriers or shame. Her recognition that only Jesus could heal her mirrors the Nayika's readiness to face all odds for union with her beloved, driven by love, faith, and inner transformation.

THEIR CONVERSATION GOES LIKE:-

Mary Magdalene (trembling, weary):

"Teacher... I have sought healing everywhere. The voices torment me. I am not myself... Can you help me?"

Jesus (with compassion):

"Mary, you are seen. You are known. You are loved. Be free."

(He lays His hand upon her. A moment of silence as peace washes over her.)

Mary (tears in her eyes):

"It's gone... the darkness... it's gone."

Jesus (gently):

"Your faith has made you well. Go in peace. There is purpose for you yet."

Luke 8:1–3 — MARY JOINS JESUS' MINISTRY

> "After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means."

This was the first clearest mention of Mary following Jesus during his public ministry.

At that moment in her life, Mary Magdalene did not hesitate to leave her home and follow the one who had restored her—lifting her from the depths of suffering and giving her a new purpose. Grateful for the transformation she experienced through Jesus, she committed herself wholeheartedly to His path.

Despite being harshly judged for her past, Mary Magdalene did not allow the opinions of others to deter her. With unwavering determination and a courageous heart, she left her home and chose to follow Jesus—without hesitation or concern for how society would perceive her decision.

Matthew 27:55–56 — PRESENT AT THE CRUCIFIXION

> "Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons."

Although Mary Magdalene knew there was nothing she could do to alleviate Jesus' suffering during the crucifixion, she remained by His side. Standing near the cross with His mother and one of His relatives,

she chose to be present in His moment of pain—not to intervene, but to offer her unwavering support and love during His final hours.

At the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene embodies the *Abhisarika Nayika* in her most steadfast and sorrowful form—one who remains devoted even in the face of immense suffering and loss. She does not turn away, despite the pain and danger, showing a love that transcends physical union and embraces spiritual loyalty. This is the Nayika who endures separation, not with despair, but with unwavering presence, standing witness to her beloved's final moments with courage, grief, and deep spiritual connection.

Mark 15:47 — AT THE BURIAL

> "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where He was laid."

Though it was a perilous and tense moment when Jesus was being buried—under the watch of Roman soldiers and in the aftermath of an earthquake that followed His death—Mary Magdalene remained steadfast. While fear kept many at a distance, only she and Mother Mary stayed near the tomb. Despite knowing that Jesus would not return to this world as they knew it, Mary refused to leave His side, driven by unwavering devotion and love.

At the burial, Mary Magdalene reveals the *Abhisarika Nayika* as a mourner guided by love beyond death. She follows her beloved to his final resting place, not deterred by darkness, sorrow, or societal expectations. This is the Nayika who continues her journey even when the union seems lost—her presence at the tomb a testament to a love that seeks communion beyond the physical realm. Her longing is not for herself, but for honoring and remaining close to the beloved, embodying deep devotion and spiritual yearning.

Matthew 28:1 / Mark 16:1 / Luke 24:10 / John 20:11–16 — AT THE RESURRECTION

In all four Gospels, Mary Magdalene is present at the tomb, and in John 20:11–18, *she is the first person to see the risen Jesus.*

BIBLE VERSE (JOHN 20:11-18):-

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."

At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

When Mary Magdalene could not find Jesus at the tomb, she was overwhelmed with sorrow. Her grief was so profound that she lamented not even being able to see His body, believing that the soldiers had taken it away.

In her despair, she wept repeatedly, feeling as though she could not endure the loss. At that moment, an angel appeared and saw her crying. The angel asked her why she was weeping, and as she responded, Jesus Himself was standing behind her, though she did not yet recognize Him.

This moment highlights the depth of Mary Magdalene's devotion to Jesus—while others had left, she remained near the tomb after His burial, seeking Him even in death. As a result, *she was the first person to witness His resurrection, a powerful testament to her unwavering faith and love.*

At the resurrection, Mary Magdalene embodies the *Abhisarika Nayika* in her moment of divine fulfillment. She seeks her beloved even when all hope seems gone, arriving at the tomb early, driven by longing and love. Her weeping reflects the pain of separation, but her persistence leads to a miraculous reunion. In recognizing the risen Christ, she becomes the *Nayika* who moves from sorrow to spiritual ecstasy—the one whose faith, devotion, and unwavering search are rewarded with the beloved's revelation. This marks the culmination of her journey: from seeker to the first witness of resurrection, her love transcending even death.

BIBLE VERSE (John 20:17-18)

Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and Your God.’”

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

At the moment Mary Magdalene first saw Jesus after His resurrection, she was emotionally overwhelmed—filled with both immense joy and excitement. Seeing the One she loved risen from the dead brought her indescribable happiness.

However, when Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me,” she was taken aback. Though overjoyed to be in His presence again, she was deeply saddened by the realization that she would have to let Him go, as He was preparing to ascend to heaven. This moment reflects the profound emotional complexity of her encounter—joy intertwined with sorrow, as she faced the reality of His divine mission.

SUMMARY OF KEY MENTIONS:

	EVENT	REFERENCE’S
1.	Healing and following Jesus	Luke 8:1-3
2.	Crucifixion	Mathew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; John 19:25
3.	Burial	Mark 15:47; Mathew 27:61
4.	Resurrection	Mathew 28:1; Mark 16:1-9, Luke 24:10; John 20:11-18

Though Mary Magdalene disappears from the biblical narrative after the resurrection, early Christian writings portray her as a key spiritual figure, possibly a leader among the disciples, and someone who had deep understanding of Jesus' teachings. Over time, her image evolved—sometimes revered, sometimes misrepresented—but always central to early Christian imagination.

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FINDINGS**1. JEEVATHMAAV AND PARAMATHMAAV OF KRISHNA AND RADHA IS SOMEHOW CONNECTED TO MARY MAGDALENE AND CHRIST.**

- Radha and Krishna: Jeevathmaav and Paramathmaav
- In Bhakti traditions—especially within Gaudiya Vaishnavism—Radha symbolizes the Jeevathmaav (individual soul), and Krishna the Paramathmaav (Supreme Soul). Their love is not merely romantic; it reflects the soul’s intense longing to reunite with the Divine. Their separation and union are metaphors for the spiritual journey of the human soul.
- This Nayika doesn’t wait for the lover to come; she seeks him. In Radha, this archetype reaches divine heights—she is the soul that runs, against all worldly constraints, to merge with the Divine Krishna.
- So, Radha as Abhisarika Nayika is not just a lover—she is the embodiment of Bhakti, of unconditional surrender, of bold longing that transcends fear and shame.

Radha as Abhisarika Nayika and Mary Magdalene both embody the feminine seeker, the soul braving worldly limitations to find divine truth. Both stories reflect not only devotion but also the soul's mystical longing for union with the Eternal.

2. IMPORTANCE OF NAYIKA

- Viewing Mary Magdalene through the lens of the Nayika archetype from Indian aesthetics deepens our understanding of her as not just a historical or religious figure, but as a symbol of the soul’s journey to the Divine.

3. COMPARATIVE CHARACTER ANALYSIS

- Mary Magdalene exhibits traits of an Abhisarika Nayika in her spiritual journey — particularly her devotion to Christ.
- Her decision to follow Jesus despite societal judgment parallels the Abhisarika Nayika's bold pursuit of love.
- Instances like visiting Jesus' tomb alone or seeking him after crucifixion align with Abhisarika qualities of urgency, longing, and emotional intensity.

4. CULTURAL AND TEXTUAL JUXTAPOSITION

- A juxtaposition of Indian classical motifs with Western biblical texts creates new interpretive space.
- Abhisarika Nayika, traditionally in a romantic context, is reimagined in a spiritual devotion lens through Mary Magdalene.

5. FEMININE DEVOTION AS A BRIDGE

- Both figures ultimately show that love transcends physical desire — transforming into devotion, longing, and union.
- Love (for a mortal lover or divine one) becomes the vehicle of personal transformation.

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CONCLUSION

In reimagining Mary Magdalene as an Abhisarika Nayika, we gain a fresh perspective on her character—one that transcends traditional religious portrayals and embraces the poetic and emotional dimensions of her story. The Abhisarika Nayika, known in classical Indian aesthetics as the heroine who ventures out to meet her beloved, reflects passion, courage, longing, and devotion. These qualities resonate deeply with the journey of Mary Magdalene, particularly in her unwavering pursuit of Christ's presence, both during his life and after his resurrection.

Through this lens, Mary is not merely a follower but a symbolic seeker—embodying love that defies boundaries, shame, and fear. Her journey becomes not just one of faith but also of emotional and spiritual intensity, much like the Abhisarika who braves darkness and obstacles to unite with her beloved. This interpretation bridges Eastern and Western cultural narratives and allows for a nuanced appreciation of devotion, agency, and spiritual longing embodied by women across traditions.

The exploration of Abhisarika Nayika—the bold, determined woman who ventures out to meet her beloved—through the figure of Mary Magdalene reveals a fascinating cross-cultural and symbolic convergence. Both embody agency, emotion, and spiritual longing, challenging patriarchal norms of their respective eras.

The portrayal of Mary Magdalene through the archetype of the Abhisarika Nayika opens up a profound dimension of divine love—one that transcends the boundaries of the physical and enters the realm of spiritual longing and union. The Abhisarika Nayika is not just a woman in love; she is a seeker, a devotee, a soul in pursuit of her beloved with unwavering intensity. In Mary Magdalene, we find a similar essence—a woman drawn irresistibly toward Jesus, not merely as a historical or religious figure, but as the embodiment of divine love and truth.

Their bond, often shrouded in mystery and theological debate, can be understood as a spiritual love story—deeply human, yet elevated by faith, transformation, and resurrection. Mary’s devotion at the tomb, her recognition of the risen Christ, and her role as the apostle to the apostles, all echo the journey of the Abhisarika, who braves the darkness to reach her beloved. This love is not confined to romance; it is the soul's passionate call for divine presence and connection.

Through this lens, Mary Magdalene becomes a symbol of sacred feminine strength and longing—her love for Christ echoing the Nayika's timeless journey toward union with the divine. In recognizing these shades of the Abhisarika within her, we honor a love that is bold, redemptive, and eternal.

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS



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