

## **“Fikr me Harkat”:** Women, Religion and Censorship in Shahid Nadeem’s *Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* (1992)

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Urdu literature is considered to be limited because it restricts itself to the Urdu-speaking population found primarily in Pakistan, Northern India and partially in Bangladesh. Nonetheless, Urdu writers from all these countries have added substance and vigor with their profound literary works. Stalwarts like Sa’adat Hasan Manto, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, Bano Qudsia, Khadija Mastoor, Kishwar Naheed, Fahmeeda Riaz, Ashfaq Ahmed, Hashim Nadeem, Quadratullah Shahab, Hajra Mansoor, Ibne Insha, Jon Elia, Ehsan Danish, Fatima Surayya Bajia, Mirza Adeeb have contributed towards making Pakistani Urdu literature quite formidable and vibrant with their sensitive works.

The genre of poetry and novel always find acceptance in a society because both the genres are considered more of a closet activity and do not require men and women to step out and participate in it. Islamic ideology may have something to do with this. Pakistani society has always had a dearth of good drama, primarily because Islamic ideology is suspicious of dramatic presentation. The Islamic literary movement and the Pakistani literature movement intended to preserve the cultural identity for national self-definition. Drama as a representational art that emanated from "Hindu elements of Indian art"(Sengupta 16) was out rightly rejected in Pakistan. The mullahs deplored this representational art because replicating the God-created world and the human beings was a "sin"(Sengupta 16). All representational arts and performance art-forms were labelled as un-Islamic. Apart from this, the genre of Drama was also side-lined by Anglophone Pakistani writers. Apart from Hanief Kureishi, no other well-known Anglophone Pakistani writer has championed the

genre of Drama. The onus of developing theatre and drama fell mainly on the Urdu writers of the country. Urdu playwrights like Mirza Adeb, Ali Ahmed, Zafar Mairaj, Fatima Surayya Bajia, Anwer Jafri, and Shahid Nadeem have taken Urdu drama and theatre to the next level. Muneeza Shamsie, in her book, *Hybrid Tapestries*, comments:

...theatre did not develop in Pakistan until the coming of television and the Urdu TV dramas in the late sixties. After 1947, several amateur theatre groups started performing in Pakistan....These theatre groups have mostly produced Urdu plays, and in the nineteen sixties...it appeared to him (Anwar Enayatullah) that they had infused the Pakistani theatre with new vigor. This vigor was transferred by dramatists writing in Urdu to the production of plays for the TV, but even these plays are didactic, full of middle-class values of sexual prudery.....As for the English plays, they were hardly ever written or performed even in the universities and colleges after the rise of middleclass Puritanism in the seventies.... (234)

Post-1977 theatre in Pakistan had only two visible categories in public theatre: slapstick comedy and the elite theatre for the upper-middle-class audience. Moving away from these two categories, a new type of theatre came up to suit the changing political climate of Pakistan. This new type of Political theatre was initiated by sensitive intellectuals who fought against the dictatorial policies that Gen Zia-ul Haq's government implemented that wanted Pakistan to run based on *shariah* or Islamic law. At the behest of clerics, all the new laws were anti-women and regressive. The Hudood Ordinance and other anti-women activities led to the formation of the Women's Action Forum. All the other organizations and NGO'S supported the WAF, and this movement was further braced by activists like Sheema Kermani and Ajoka's founder Madeeha Gauhar. This politically charged phase witnessed the outburst of theatre groups like *Tehrik-e- Niswan*, NATAK, DASTAK, *Punjabi Lok Rehas*, and AJOKA.

Ajoka Theatre is one of the most prominent theatre companies founded by Madeeha Gauhar in 1984. As the name Ajoka ('contemporary' in Urdu) suggests, the objective of this theatre group was to create social awareness through excellence in modern theatre. Ajoka calls itself "theatre for social change," and its mission, as stated on the Ajoka website, is to work for a democratic and egalitarian society through arts-based initiatives. It is working to create young trained theatre activists, writers, media professionals, and social activists who can strengthen the forces of social change and progress. It is ready to fight gender and minority discrimination and environmental degradation and

promotes cultural awareness and heritage preservation. It works in collaboration with like-minded cultural and human rights organizations for the cause of freedom of artistic and cultural expression. (Ajoka website)

Ajoka is a platform that brings together like-minded intellectuals and activists who wish to articulate their views about society and country freely. Initially seen as an alternate theatre showing resistance to Gen Zia-ul Haq's dictatorial policies, Ajoka is now a theatre that "has shown commitment to the ideals of peace and tolerance." Ajoka is now an apolitical cultural movement that is very democratic and secular. It has no particular vendetta against any government, and the considerable corpus of plays and the thematic range further corroborates that it believes in raising the people's consciousness against the raging evils of society. Shahid Nadeem and Madeeha Gauhar articulate their philosophy of theatre:

The main purpose of our theatre workshop is to raise the cultural consciousness of people in order that it might lead to the creation of a more just society. Although we realize that such change cannot be brought about through progressive theatre alone, we do believe that "the change in consciousness" (*Fikr men harkat*) that our type of theatrical activity aims to create is surely an important step in that direction (Khan 44).

The revolutionary nature of Ajoka can be gauged by its fascination for playwrights like Bertolt Brecht. The company is famous for its creative adaptations of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and extensive use of Brechtian techniques to set the audience thinking. Ajoka has forty-four theatrical productions to its credit, with plays written by stalwarts like Intizar Hussain, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Fehmida Riaz, Kishwar Naheed, and Shahid Nadeem. Pioneering and establishing a socially relevant quality theatre that is educational and entertaining is not an easy task. In order to cater to the masses, Ajoka theatre prefers to use languages which are easily understandable. It, therefore, uses Urdu and Punjabi languages primarily and sometimes a mixture of idiomatic Urdu and Punjabi.

Shahid Nadeem is an activist, journalist, screenwriter, television director and an accomplished playwright. He began his career as a human rights and social activist and was imprisoned thrice for resisting Zia-ul Haq's repressive policies in 1969-1970 and 1979. He is the Executive Director and in-house writer at Ajoka Theatre. The revolutionary content of his plays comes from his preoccupation with cultural and political activism. He worked for Amnesty International as its Campaign Coordinator and Communications Officer during his exile in London. He was also associated with Pakistan Television Academy as a writer and

director and successfully produced *Zard Dopehar*, *Uraan*, and *Janjaalpura* for the PTV. He has to his credit plays like *Charing Cross*, *Kaun Hai Yeh Gustakh*, *Bullah*, *Aik Thi Naani* (A Granny for all Seasons), *Dukh Darya*, *Burqavaganza*, *Teesri Dastak* (The Third Knock), *Kala Meda Bhes* (Black is my Robe), *Dara* and *Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* (Watch the Show and Move on). As a writer committed to social change, Shahid Nadeem has written and directed plays on a wide range of human rights issues, including political corruption, gender-violence, minority sufferings and resistance to terrorism. His plays have been translated into various languages, and a collection of his translated English plays has been published by Oxford University Press, Pakistan in 2008. He received the President of Pakistan's Pride of Performance in 2009.

Shahid Nadeem's play *Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban*, was first staged in Lahore's Alhamra Hall in 1992, and it coincided with the judgement of the death penalty made mandatory for blasphemy in Pakistan. Ajoka Theatre, in collaboration with Women's Action Forum, commemorated the tenth anniversary of the police action against women demonstrators and presented the play again in 2011 as a fitting reply to a rally organized the day before by *Tahaffuz Namoos-i- Risalat Mahaz*, a conglomerate of eight Sunni, Barelvi parties, to praise Mumtaz Qadri, the self-confessed murderer of Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer. The play was not written in an empty space but it has real-life parallels in the cases of Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan and a Faisalabad teacher.

*Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* is a sensitive and fascinating play with an, even more fascinating, array of characters. Eschewing conventional nomenclature, the play's characters do not have individual names but are staged as types symbolic of their traits like the Black-clad men (BM) and White-clad men (WM), the Narrator, Oppressed men, women, spectators, and Audience. The play opens with a poem posing a series of questions and instructions for the audience. It advocates indifference and inhumanity. The Narrator makes his first appearance, advocates detached objectivity and discourages the audience from finding any semblance of reality. The black-clad men appear on stage, installing a wooden cross and preparing a noose for hanging. The Black Men usher in White Men who are white from head to toe. Speaking in the manner of Buddhist chants, they claim to be the "chosen ones who have left the worldly ways" (Abidi 322). They have to purify filthy people. The Narrator introduces the BM and the WM and says that the White Men symbolize goodness and the BM stand for evil. The WM address the audience and instil a sense of pride in them for being God's supreme creations. The privilege of being a supreme creation is coupled with challenges and responsibilities. They enthruse the audience to combat the evil forces and inspire them for

positive actions which will grant them better life after death (referring to *jannah*). The BM imitate the WM and indulge in dancing, jumping, and praising. The WM constantly comment on preserving religious and communitarian identity and prioritizing collective interest over individual ones, whereas the BM try to lure people with the noose and ask them for a neck for their noose. The Hawker appears on stage, reading out newspaper headlines juxtaposed with a poetic rendition of the same content. The BM manages to get, one after the other in quick succession, four oppressed people from the Audience who are ruthlessly hanged. The views of BM and WM converge when both advocate the elimination of disbelievers. Hawker steps in again and reads the headlines highlighting the heinous atrocities on minorities and how fear and violence are looming over society. The BM deviates and tries to entertain the audience by wearing black goggles and using *lotas* (jugs) as mobile phones. A woman appears on stage, walking across, and the BM teases her and dissects her physical appearance. Unlike submissive women, she angrily retorts, "don't you have mothers and sisters at home" and summons the WM to stop them. Instead of helping her, the WM shirk their duty by calling her a *na mehram* (stranger). The woman is dragged away from the stage, and another oppressed person is brought in and hanged after being showered with strange questions. The BM manages to drag in another oppressed person accused of misleading children, teaching them science, and defiling the mosque by placing a cross in it. The WM wishes to teach him a lesson and take him to the noose. The Oppressed addresses the audience, pleads innocence and tells them about her positive intentions to lead her country on the path to progress. He is hanged after the poet's justification. The play's setting shifts to a bizarre market where the BM sells human organs and the WM eagerly buy them. Not finding an iota of aversion in doing so, the BM describes the qualities of the human organs and body parts. The scene shifts when Big Foot comes and disperses the market. The BM show false concerns for peace and security of the country, and the WM accuse artists of writing poetry and painting portraits. The BM gets an excuse to grab another person from the audience who happens to be a poet. He addresses the audience and justifies writing poetry as a pious act of rendering emotions into words, whereas the WM proclaims it as a sin. They (WM) announce that questioning, dreaming, thinking, and speaking are sinful. After the poet is hanged, the Narrator reappears and elaborates how the Narrator is a must for the success of a play like this. Commenting on the tragic killing of the Oppressed people in the play, he shows his preference for indifference for ascertaining peace and security in his life. At this point, the Audience steps into the play's script and tells the Narrator that his indifferent attitude is wrong and that one cannot

remain quiet when such atrocities occur in society. The Narrator feels that only the oppressed and affected communities should speak, whereas the Audience considers it his duty to react, speak and protest. The Audience makes a very pertinent point, “when a fire spread all around you, how long can your house remain safe? If not today, then certainly tomorrow will your house be engulfed by that fire” (Abidi 336). The BM overpower the Audience member and bring him to the arena. The WM announce that deviation from the verdict would not be allowed, and the BM hang the Audience member. Another woman looks for her son, who got separated from her Mother in a public meeting. Since then, the Mother always comes looking for her son in such public meetings. The WM prohibit the Mother from coming because women are not allowed to move outside. The Hawker steps in for one last time and reads out the headlines. Chaos prevails, and the characters run among the audience. The spectator protests against the prevailing conditions and warns the BM and WM not to cross their limits. The moment the BM and WM see the masses react, they change their stance and become judicious. They make the Narrator a scapegoat. The Narrator begs for his life and wants to be spared, for he “sees everything but does not do anything,” but no one takes pity on him. He is murdered, and the play ends with the warning “Just watch the play and move on or remember the fate of the narrator.”(Abidi 344)

*Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* is a subversive and revolutionary play with a universal appeal. Shahid Nadeem wrote this play to criticize General Zia-ul Haq’s blasphemy laws in 1992; this play can be re-invoked in any century in any country where the oppressor/oppressed binaries exist. The play examines the issue of the Blasphemy laws and censorship, which holds relevance even today as it did in 1992. Blasphemy becomes “a site for political contestation” (Al Jazeera) when religious identity and authenticity is linked to the government. It becomes even more crucial in Pakistan, where Islam is the dominant source of sovereignty. Defilement of religious tradition is unacceptable to any religion in any country. However, blasphemy has managed to get such “heightened political significance” because Blasphemy law is not sincerely against an offender of religion but an offender of the government. This draconian law “target(s) social workers, teachers, rights activists for voicing concerns over false charges levelled against the minorities- ethnic, religious or political – and, thus, aim at eliminating any difference of opinion or opposition.”(Sengupta 34) Blasphemy laws existed during the British colonial period but they have become very stringent due to the pressure from the ‘religious right wing.’ An Al Jazeera article entitled ‘Explained: Pakistan’s Emotive Blasphemy Laws’ reported that around 80 convicts were on ‘death row or serving life imprisonment in Pakistan for

blasphemy. Blasphemy Laws were abused by the government and will continue to victimize the innocent public. In 1998, Bishop John Joseph, popular human rights activist, led a procession on the court steps against Ayub Masih's death-sentence for blasphemy. Masih was not a serious offender but was accused of a minor mistake, despite being illiterate, of quoting from Rushdie's controversial book *Satanic Verses* in an argument with a Muslim man. Corroborating this, Prof Ashis Sengupta says in the preface to his book *Islam in Performance*: "Initially the blasphemy laws were not so widely abused as in recent times, as evidenced by the 2011 assassination of Salman Taseer and former Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti" (Sengupta 34).

*Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* dramatizes the killing of innocent people by WM and BM in a provocative manner. The BM randomly catch anyone from the audience, accusing them wrongly, forcefully dragging them to the noose, and hanging them. Five innocent people with the generic name Oppressed Persons are tried and killed. The first oppressed person pleads innocence, for he is being falsely accused in a petty land dispute. The third Oppressed person is hanged for ridiculous reasons like having a short beard, moustache under the lips, and hair growth in his armpits. The fourth OP is an innocent school teacher who "was taught to live in fright and caution" as a third-class citizen and an untouchable and was falsely accused of placing a cross in the mosque. He is called an enemy of religion, faith, and honesty for teaching children about good conduct and instilling in them a scientific attitude. He reveals the evil intentions of his enemies:

It was my fault that I used to think, I used to feel, and I used to love. All this was most intolerable to them. Especially to him who wanted my job for himself and to him who used to leave his cattle on school grounds to graze. To those whose careers thrived on hatred and communalism. They spread so much hatred for me that all the flowers around withered away. All the trees went up in flame. All the colors faded. Only the colors of hatred and death remained. (Abidi 331)

The hanging of the fifth oppressed person raises the critical issue of literary censorship and the killings of artists in Pakistan. Artists, poets, and writers face problems when they take up controversial issues, question official narratives, dare to speak the truth, and attempt to destabilize the government. The BM catches a person from the audience, questions whether he writes poetry, plays with words, and tells stories of love and lust. The poet is dragged to the noose, and before he is hanged, he addresses the audience: "I am not a warrior, I am not a revolutionary, I am not a rebel, Neither am I on any mission. I am simply a poet. A poet who renders emotions into words. One who gives expression to

love.”(Abidi 334) The poet reacts to being called a sinner. He questions them, "is it a sin to express, through the God-gifted tongue, beauty and melody in the smallest ions of the universe created by God?"(Abidi 334) This episode finds resonance in numerous such atrocities perpetrated by the state. In 1977 activist and painter Ijazul Hasan was arrested and kept in captivity in Lahore fort for his resistance movement against Haq's repressive regime. (Independent)

On account of its pro-women attitude Ajoka Theatre Group, , came to be identified just as a feminist theatre group. This was not entirely correct because Madeeha Gauhar and Shahid Nadeem wished it to be recognized as a "theatre of conscience". Ajoka theatre espoused the cause of all oppressed and marginalized sections of society and acted as a Consciousness-Raising platform. However, it cannot be denied that the repertoire of Ajoka Theatre and Shahid Nadeem comprise plays that are feminist and champion the causes of women and militate against their subjugation. *Khasmanu Khanian (Husband Eaters)*, a collection of six plays, *Barri(Acquittal)*, *Ek thi Nani (A Granny for all Seasons)*, *Dhee Rani*, and *Jhalli Kitthe Jaavay* are all feminist plays dealing with a realistic depiction of women's rights abuses. *Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* is more feminist than the other plays because it was written to commemorate the tenth anniversary of police action against female demonstrators in Lahore, in collaboration with the Women's Action Forum. The play is a trenchant attack on the anti-woman rhetoric of Gen. Zia-ul Haq's regime. Regulation and definition of women's legal status were his prime objective under the premise of Islamisation. All measures were taken to control female sexuality and preserve women's modesty and marking a 'shift towards Conservative Nationalism,' Haq's govt promised to restore the sanctity of 'Chadar' and 'Char-diwari'(Times of India). The play has only two female characters, one woman makes an appearance as a mother, and the other female character is the woman who walks across the stage and is teased by the BM. They dissect her physical appearance and tease her by singing songs. Enraged by this lewd behavior, the woman objects to it by saying, "Shame on you, don't you have mothers and sisters at home" and the BM replies, "They are at home. They don't loiter in public places and markets" (Abidi 339). The BM make it clear that they are teasing the woman just because she appears in public. This episode was written in the background of banning the "publication of women's photographs in the press and introduced a series of measures for eliminating the use of the fair sex for commercial purposes" (Mumtaz &Shaheed 149). The government wanted zero visibility of women in all spheres and could only tolerate the cosmetic presence of women in a few spheres. BM 2 emphatically says to the Mother, "Go, go, women are not



permitted to come here” (Abidi 339). BM 3 adds, “Women are not allowed to go anywhere” (Abidi 339). This episode becomes much more satirical when the woman asks the WM to help her, and they refuse to talk to her as she is a *namehram* (improper) for them. They can witness the modesty of a woman being outraged but they will not talk to a *namehram*. The playwright doesn’t just portray women as victims but also vests in them the agency to transform society. The spectator who interjects and objects to the chaos in the play is a woman. In fact, all the spectators who become a part of the script are women. Nadeem presents women as the harbingers of social change.

Shahid Nadeem places theatre on a high pedestal because through it, one can control the reality one wishes to depict, and it allows creating characters in such a way that the audience gets emotionally involved. However, he makes it clear that he does not wish for catharsis. Instead, he wants to disturb his audience. Nadeem’s ideology clearly shows his fascination for Bertolt Brecht, who believed that theatre should be an intellectual arena where the audience should be forced to think and thereby bring change in society. Shahid Nadeem has not only been a Brechtian in his thematic concerns but also in his dramatic techniques (Khan 44). In the play *Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban*, he not only borrows from Brecht but also from Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed and his concept of ‘Spect-actor’. (Theatre of the Oppressed) Boal’s theatre of the oppressed uses theatre to promote social and political change in alignment with radical left politics. The term Spect-actor, by Boal to describe those involved in Forum theatre, is used for dual roles performed by spectator and actor of observing and creating dramatic meaning. Boal believes in humanizing them and giving them the capacity for action. In Brechtian poetics, “the spectator delegates power to the character(to act) in his place, but the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character” (Boal,122), whereas in Boal’s Theatre of the oppressed “spectator delegates no power to the character( or actor) either to act or think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change- in short, trains himself for real action”(Boal,122). Shahid Nadeem borrows a few things from both the poetics where his “spect-actor” does not just think but acts and participates in the play. They (spectators) do not bring about a major change but at least scare the evil doers and change the script's trajectory. In the last part of the play, the spectators have to step into the play and become part of the script. BM and WM badly require a character from the audience willing to be hanged. The Narrator tries his level best to dissuade the audience from interfering and spoiling the play, and it is then that the audience/spectator has no

option but to speak up “I’ve seen enough of this show. I can’t be a silent spectator any longer” (Abidi 336). Spectator 2 is in the confrontation mode and rudely replies to BM and asks them not to cross their limits. Spectators 3 and 4 refuse to tolerate the melodrama any longer and order them to go back to the arena and push them away by saying, “Get out, get lost” (Abidi 342). This violent reaction of the spectators frightens them and forces them to think of a new plan. This experiment with the Brechtian and Boalian technique forces the readers/audience to recognize their alienation and passivity and entices them to react against injustice and chase away the sinners and wrongdoers from society. The audience reacts:

Audience: How long can your house remain safe when a fire spreads around you? If not today then certainly tomorrow will your house be engulfed by that fire! (Abidi 337)

Audience (to the people): Do you think whatever is happening is right? Is it appropriate to kill in the name of faith? Is it right to burn down the houses of people who follow some other prophet? Is it right to ban speaking, writing, and thinking – all in the name of religion? Speak. Why are you quiet? Why have you shut your mouth? (Abidi 337)

Brecht's V-effect was used to alienate the audience, create a distance, and motivate them to think and act. Chorus, songs, and Narrator were used to create this alienation. Shahid Nadeem has used the Narrator in *Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* for multiple reasons. The Narrator introduces the characters and creates a delicate balance in the play. Enunciating his significance, he says: “The Narrator's presence is significant; otherwise, the story breaks down. Just as alcohol needs a new label, and cheap gifts require nice wrappers, a simple or ordinary play needs the glib tongue of the Narrator to be a success” (Abidi 335). Aware of the heinousness of the play, he warns the readers, right at the outset, from finding any semblance of reality in it. Endowed with stark clarity about the roles, he says, “my job is to narrate the story and connect the scenes, and your job is just to watch it all” (Abidi 321). Narrator makes recurrent appearances at very crucial junctures. He functions like a safety valve to allay the tension and serious provocation in the play. Every time an audience is persecuted, the Narrator enters to fizzle out the grave provocation by telling them that “it was just a drama. The characters and incidents are all fictitious” (Abidi 326). The Narrator in *Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* has a crucial role in the play; in him rests the central thesis of the play that 'indifference towards the goings-on in society does not guarantee anyone immunity against injustice and sectarian violence' (Sengupta 35). The neutral, indifferent and balanced Narrator is victimized, accused of provoking the audience,

and finally murdered by the BM. Deeply shocked and anguished by this development, Narrator pleads innocence and says:

I am your Narrator, only a narrator. I've nothing else to do with this Drama. I have not played any role ever. I was never fond of acting. I am a peace-loving, law-abiding and pious citizen. I have never tried to interfere in others' matters. I keep to my work only. I am a coward and opportunist, who sees everything, but doesn't say anything. A citizen who doesn't do anything. I should not be subjected to this cruelty. Should this be my end? For God's sake, please save me. For the sake of God and the Prophet. For the sake of community and society. (Abidi 343)

*Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* was written in 1992 and what Nadeem highlights in this play holds even good today. Confessing this, he says that "it was almost twenty years ago. The fire of intolerance was not so widespread, but we could judge which direction we were headed. Unfortunately, over the years, things have aggravated. The play proved to be quite prophetic" (Tribune). This play addresses pertinent issues ravaging the Pakistani society then and now. Religious discrimination and persecution of minorities is a serious issue that continues to threaten the very fabric of Pakistan. The WM become an object of satire right from the beginning of the play when they contradict their statements where they considered human beings to be Allah's most incredible creation, yet they were discriminatory in addressing only 'the brothers from their faith'. So-called custodians of community and religion, the WM, do not feel petty in openly asking to "ignore the interests of the minority for the majority" and "suppress the minority's creed for the enforcement of the majority's" (Abidi 324), Going against the quintessence of religion which is tolerance, love, and peace, the WM 3 & 4 order to eliminate the real enemies of our society and crush the ones who don't respect the Quran, their curriculum and their beliefs. The WM have evil intentions and wish "to smear their face with the ink of death" and want to "get into their minds and terrify them" (Abidi 332). They sing a song which shows how evil and vicious they are from within: 'If there's a check on thought, if people are deaf and dumb,.... If hanging is done in public, everyone will be afraid of God' (Abidi 338). The BM and WM remain separate, but after hearing the news of communal clashes, the WM and BM join hands, and the boundary between the two gets blurred. They join hands in threatening the audience and, later on murdering the Narrator. The WM address the audience with blood-smearred knives in their hands and invite the audience to watch the play but move on without paying heed to it. By portraying the White Clad men in such an ironic manner, Shahid Nadeem satirizes the Mullah community and the opinion leaders who pose as pure and innocent people but are just the opposite of it.

*Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* was written to wage a war against religious persecution, religious extremism, abuse of blasphemy laws, female objectification, and indifference and passivity. The play's primary purpose was to shake people out of their slumber and force them to act in the interest of society—Shahid Nadeem experiments with numerous techniques in the play to vitalize his themes. Nadeem makes his characters speak on the same issue to hammer out the idea into the audience's minds. All the Black Clad men and the White Clad men repeat sentences and topics that seem monotonous and irritating but are only done so that the idea sticks to the audience. The play is a black comedy, but Nadeem makes it macabre by delineating the scene of a market where human organs and limbs are being sold in hawkers' baskets. This cannibalistic imagery points to growing violence in society and the human tendency to kill each other for their selfish interests. Borrowing from the Brechtian Verfremdungs-effect, Nadeem makes artistic use of farcical song and dance in the play to disrupt the smooth flow of the play. The playwright also uses the poems of Iqbal and Bulley Shah and Bollywood songs to downplay the seriousness of the script, BM sing, "*Chaudhvin ka chaand ho, ya aftaab ho, jo bhi ho tum khuda ki kasam, lajawaab ho*" (The full moon, or the sun, who are you? Whatever you are, by God, you are incomparable) (Abidi 329), to tease the lady in the play. The popular Romantic song which Guru Dutt sings for Waheeda Rehman is used in the lewd context of eve-teasing. Nadeem introduces a new technique of a Hawker coming on the stage and objectively reading the news. This drab reading is juxtaposed with a poetic rendition of the same topics, producing two kinds of results, ironical and emotional. Driven by the anti-elitist and anti-imperialist ideology, Shahid Nadeem left the English language and used Urdu to write *Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* so that it reaches the maximum number of people. Avoiding high flown, difficult Urdu, the playwright has used colloquial Urdu which also adds to the play's simplicity. The play is written on serious issues, employing complicated techniques but one gets an immediate grip on meaning.

*Dekh Tamasha Chalta Ban* is a subversive and revolutionary Urdu play written to effect a change in consciousness. It is definitely a consciousness-raising play. In keeping with the spirit of Parallel Resistance theatre and as Ajoka's sensitive black comedy, this play dismantles the oppressor/oppressed paradigm and satirizes the mullah community, the abuse of Blasphemy laws in Pakistan and the senseless religious persecution of innocent minorities. The play critiques the anti-woman stance discouraging women from stepping outside the *Chardivari* and presents women to be sensitive, dynamic and intellectual beings capable not only of thinking but also enabling themselves for positive

transformation. Brechtian and Boalian in ideology, Shahid Nadeem has not written this play to just critique a few discriminatory policies of an autocratic government but to bring a cataclysmic change in the attitude of the readers/audience so that they may not just watch the show and move on but they should realize that indifference doesn't guarantee them immunity to injustice and violence. In presenting a bleak and dystopian society, Nadeem wants to indirectly suggest the kind of a society we should live in, and it can only be achieved if we don't just watch the show and move on but act positively instead. Such an absorbing ironical commentary is written in the Urdu language which further adds not only to the play but also to the entire corpus of Urdu drama as such.

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