

# VIOLENCE IN MANJULA PADMANABHANS SELECTED PLAYS *HARVEST AND LIGHT'S OUT*

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**Abstract:** The paper entitled "Violence in Manjula Padmanabhan's selected plays *Harvest and Light's out*" aims to explore the playwright's projection of violence in her selected plays. In Padmanabhan's plays, the different types of violence the characters come across in the selected plays are projected. And the dramatists projects the clear impression on gender inequality and a dominant appeal for realizing the emotions of human in the world where both men and women hardly finds themselves to be free, independent and resistant thought out. The paper also projects the type of violence's male come across to make their survival. And it also shows, how the bonds which used to link one human being with another are gradually weakening. Man, especially belonging to the middle class, though aware of his duty as a social being, avoids it, living contentedly in his self-imposed bondages. Even the pitiable cries of a woman become a matter of discussion rather than action. The drama, based on a real life incident, as it has been mentioned at the end, further affects audience's sensibility positively and they really understand the dangerous position of the growing social apathy in modern man's life.

**Keywords:** Inequality, Resistant, Audience's Sensibility, Social Apathy.

In the context of Indians writing in English, the native sensibility was certainly been a large and complex historical process, which has progressed through a variety of phases. The four major phases considered in the sequence, that is also largely accepted are: the first phase, the one with complete subordination and intellectual slavery, the second one is total insolence, a falling back on extreme nativity and national identity, the third is a sort of internationalism and universalisation (Sadharanikarana), and the last, that is almost coincidental with the third is the one with creative integration.

K. R. S. Iyengar, in *Indian Writing in English* states that, there are three types of Indian writers in English, First, those who have acquired their complete education in English schools and universities. Secondly, the Indians who have settled abroad but are constantly in touch with the changing surrounding and traditions of their country. And finally, Indians who have acquired English as a second language. Their writings consisted of Indian themes and attitudes but still their way of writing and storytelling was largely western. They had no hesitation to use native words, however, to signify the context. This group consisted of Rudyard Kipling, Jim Corbett and George Orwell and many others.

However, the new generations of Indian writers in English have handled a wider range of themes and the subject matters. Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Kiran Desai, Arvind Adiga and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have written on variety of themes. For these writers English is a medium of expression through which they can reach the international readers with their creative urge. One can notice a common thing among the works of these writers that is 'Indianness' in Indian Writing in English.

Drama in various languages has exposed a marked development; it has not done so even in Indian English. A study of Vijay Tendulkar, BadalSircar and Girish Karnad clearly shows that they are the symbols of rebirth in their own areas and have made bold innovations, fruitful experiments and given new directions, which is shown in the history of Indian drama as a significant mark of achievement.

Contemporary Indian drama in English translation is gradually turning to history, legend, myth and folklore, vocal cords of popularity and tapping their springs of liveliness with splendid results. BadalSircar, Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad and Vijay Tendulkar have remained the great representative of contemporary Indian dramatists not only in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and Kannada respectively but also at the pan-Indian level. There are several experiments that are made by the play orders such as stress on the psychoanalysis of the character than to present the sequence. Another noteworthy experiment in this phase is the use of realistic language suited to the level and status of a character. The other themes, the playwrights have attempted to bring out the contemporary social problems like inter- caste marriage, untouchability, sex, power and wealth along with the presentation of the usual conflict

between old and new trends and other prevailing problems like, child abuse, economical violence and other issues faced by the three sexes.

Many Indian dramatists who tire of projecting the rebellious image of women and breaking the rampart of old image which seems to be slowly blurring and gradually started to cast a new image. Manjula Padmanabhan is one of those women dramatists who present the ugly picture of the society and various types of indifference towards the sufferings of women. And she is among the fewest contemporary dramatists who have made an effective contribution for the theatrical development in the country.

Manjula Padmanabhan was born in 1953; she grew up in Sweden, Pakistan and Thailand, returning to India as a teenager in the late '60s. She earned her degrees from Bombay University. After passing out from Bombay University, with her courage and self-confidence made her own life, which accompanied her notable ventures in publishing and media-related fields. In her later years, she made her place as a playwright, a cartoonist, journalist, novelist and a children's book author.

In 1997, her play *Harvest* won first prize in the Onassis Prize for Theatre, in Greece. She has published a number of books including *Hot Death, Cold Soup* (1996, Kali for Women) and *Three Virgins and Other Stories* (2014, Zubaan). She has also authored a number of books for children as author-illustrator, including *Mouse Attack and Mouse Invaders* (2003, 2005, Macmillan Childrens Books) and a series of picture puzzle books for Tulika, including *We Are Different!* (2013, Tulika). Her most recent book is a science fiction novel entitled *The Island of Lost Girls* (Hachette India). She is among the recent playwrights who have not produced a large number of works but with the minimum collection of excellent works, she has filled a respectable place in the world of Indian English literature. Her writings give us space to ponder over the issues and to change our idea and develop a general consensus over such issues.

The paper attempts to explore about the different types of violence the characters come across in the selected plays *Harvest* and *Light's Out* by Manjula Padmanabhan. And the dramatist projects the clear impression on gender inequality and a dominant appeal for realizing the emotions of human in the world where both men and women hardly find themselves to be free, independent and resistant thought out.

*Harvest* is the most famous play of Manjula Padmanabhan's. It deals with one of the most unusual themes i.e. organ selling. The play mainly highlights this social apathy, especially amongst the members of middle class society. She has written her play for the first International Onassis Competition knowing that it would almost certainly suffer the unseen, in her files if it didn't win anything in the competition. The play is also later made into film "*Deham*" by Govind Nehalani.

The play *Harvest* deals with the first and the third world countries. It is a futuristic play that throws light on the anxiety and the survival of a man and how he put his whole family trouble to sell organs via an agency to someone in the first world for a paltry amount of money. The story, centers on Om, who agrees and signs up to be an organ donor for an American woman named Ginni because there are no other jobs available for him in Mumbai. Ginni pays him to lead a "clean" and "healthy" life so she can harvest healthy organs whenever she needs them. Ginni begins to control every attribute of Om's life, from when and what he has to eat, to whom he should speak and meet and how he has to use the bathroom even. In fact, Ginni comes to control the entire family until the end of the play, when Om's diseased brother, Jeetu, is taken to give organs instead of Om, and the recipient, Ginni, turns out not to be what she initially seemed. In the final act of defiance, Om's wife, Jaya was cornered and trapped like the seeds of rebellion flower in a "checkmate" ploy.

The play *Lights Out* is based on a real life incident which took place in Mumbai suburb in 1982. Padmanabhan portrays a world in which women is deprived of her identity, her own voice, her freedom, her rights; she has to implore unto men to hear to her concerns, this further leads to gender discrimination in every sphere of life. *Lights Out* opens at a point where a critical decision has to be taken. Leela and Bhaskar, a higher middle class married couple, have been hearing to strange sounds of sexual harassment of a woman from their neighbouring building very often. Leela is terrified and traumatised because of these sounds. These sounds make Leela hysterical, she is able to hear to the voice of the victim and her cries in her subconscious mind. Leela implores to Bhaskar to take an action against the perpetrators but all her pleas fall on the deaf ears. Bhaskar is least disturbed by all these actions and sounds. It is because for a woman the very thought of purity of her body and soul, and right over her own body is intensely embedded in her mind and conscious but for a man a woman is an object of play and to have pleasure with her body. This is the main reason why the men in the play never try to see the matters associated with woman's honour and respect from a female perspective. Leela begs her husband Bhaskar to call for police but he brushes away her request by saying that the sounds merely cannot hurt her.

Most Indian playwrights have made a concerted effort to voice the various indices of violence experienced by men and women both in their private and public lives. In this context, the plays written by Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta, Mahasweta Devi and Usha Ganguli are some few to speak on this in a wider contemporary importance. Their dramatic writings tend to represent the various social evils along with the issue of violence against women. As the primary focus of this chapter is on various forms of violence experienced by men and women in Indian society

and this chapter particularly discusses the violence against the selected characters in the conscious plays *Harvest* and *Lights Out* written by ManjulaPadmanabhan.

Violence and abuse can happen to anyone and happens with everyone, yet the problem is often overlooked, excused, or denied. This is exceptionally true when the abuse is psychological, rather than physical. Emotional abuse is often underestimated, yet it can leave a deep and lasting scars. Women are not the only victims of domestic violence. Men also suffer from domestic abuse especially verbal and emotional abuse and may be ashamed to seek out for help. There are various kinds of violence like domestic abuse. Domestic abuse takes many forms, including psychological or emotional, sexual abuse and economical and financial abuse. These types of abuse are less obvious than physical abuse, but that doesn't mean they're not hurtful. But these types of domestic abuse can be even more harmful because they are so often overlooked even by the person being abused.

The aim of emotional or psychological abuse is to ruin away the feelings of one's self-worth and individuality. The victim of emotional abuse will feel that there is no other way to come out of the relationship or that away from their insulting partner. Emotional abuse includes verbal abusesuch as yelling, name-calling, blaming, and shaming. Isolation, bullying, mistreating and dominating behavior also falls under emotional abuse. Additionally, abusers who use emotional or psychological abuse often throw in hazards of physical violence.

Sexual abuse is the other picture of abusive relationships. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, between one-third and one-half of all assaulted women are raped by their partners at least once during their relationship. Any situation in which the victim is forced to take part in unwanted, unsafe or humiliating sexual activity is sexual abuse. Forced sex, even by a spouse or close partner with whom the victim also have consensual sex, is an act of aggression and violence. Moreover, women whose partners abuse them physically and sexually are at a higher risk of being seriously injured or killed.

Another form of abuse is economic and financial abuse. An abuser's goal in this case is to control, and he/she will use verbal violence to get the victim hurt commonly. Economic or financial abuse includes: Rigorously controlling the abuses finances, withholding money or credit cards, withholding basic necessities (food, clothes, medications, shelter), restricting to all the allowance, Preventing from working or choosing the career and disturbing the job (making you miss work, calling constantly).

The psychological or emotional abuse is most portrayed in the plays of Manjula in the form of gender discrimination, women subjugation etc.

Leela, the protagonist of the play *Lights Out* is the victim of Emotional violence. The play *Lights Out* presents a world where the females have no identity, no voice and no status of their own; they have to implore before men for consideration of their anxieties, for their rightful being, and this leads to discrimination against them in all walks of life. The play is based on a real life incident of rape of a woman in open during a night in 80's at Mumbai. The playwright divides all her characters into two different sections on the basis of their gender and their insight of the rape incident, and shows how they response to the horrific crime. Man represents power, authority and sense of safety in society as well as for home, someone who can give or provide while woman is the receptor of all these. On account of her continuous subjugation and subordination to man in every walk of life, woman has been so habituated socially as well as psychologically that she cannot do anything or take any independent decision.

The play *Lights Out* opens at a point where a critical decision has to be taken. Leela and Bhaskar, a higher middle class married couple, have been hearing to strange sounds of harassment of a woman from their neighbouring building frequently. Leela is terrified and distressed because of these sounds. These sounds make Leela hysterical; she is able to hear to the voice of the victim and it dehydrates her subconscious mind. Leela implores to Bhaskar to take an action against the committers but all her appeals falls on the deaf ears. Bhaskar is least bothered by all these action and sounds.

LEELA: But I can hear them.....

BHASKAR: (As if to a child.) But sounds can't hurt you....

LEELA: Oh, but they do those dirty, ugly sounds....

BHASKAR: So shut your ears, see? Like this- (Places his hands over hers.) There! Is that better? (8).

In the play, *Harvest* Jaya is the victim of Emotional violence. The women's role appears to be limited to propagation only, at the same time while overlooking the creativity and sacrifice associated with the same. In the play, Jaya is always relegated by her husband Om, and referred to as a 'slut'. And she is also ill-treated and abused by her mother- in - law, when she comes to know about Jaya's relationship with Jeetu, Ma's younger son. At the same time, When Jaya towards the end of the play refuses to offer her services for procreation to the superpower; she reliefs herself from the stereotyping of her gender role, and engraves her identity in terms of their own. Jaya being a housewife is involved in non-salaried household tasks which have no exchange value in the production of consumer market and this condition leads her to the renunciation of Ma's affection and love in the family.

The play also brings out the sensitive attitude of women towards the prevailing problem. It is only Jaya who realizes the severity of the decision of Om. She is not happy with the choice of Organ selling and tries her best of make him understand and convenes him. She also tries to make Ma understand who sees the benefit only. But everything fails and she expresses her sorrow in heart rendering manner:

JAYA: I'll tell you! He's sold the rights to his organs! His skin! His eyes! His arse (sobs again) sold them! (holds her head). Oh god, oh god! What's the meaning of this nightmare! (sobs, to Om). How can I hold your hand, touch your face, knowing that any moment it might be snatched away from me and flung across the globe (sobs). If you were dead I could share my head and break my bangles but, this? To be a widow by slow degrees? To mourn you piece? (sobs) should I shave half my head? Break my bangles one at a time? (21)

Even at the end of the play she is pushed to a state where Om has uninhibited her, having fully chosen to seek out Ginni and give up his body to her. Ma plugged into her Video Couch, unaware to her surroundings. Only Jaya holds out; she does not want to live in a world of apparitions, "electronic shadows, night- visions and virtual touch". She refuses to traverse with the Virgil as long as he attempts to pull the strings from his safe. Jaya is the last and the potential victim whom Virgil attempts to seduce and permeate without human contact, making her believe that his is actually living in Jeetu (her lover)'s body, and she would give birth to his child. On the contrary, Jaya, not only refuses to be a baby producing machine/device, but also dares to question Virgil directly when he discloses his intentions:

VIRGIL: We look for young men's bodies to live in and young women's bodies in which to sow their children—

JAYA: What about your own?

VIRGIL: We lost the art of having children. (246)

But soon Jaya observes the harsh reality when she tries to touch Virgil's body (now in Jeetu's image) but to her utter incredulity, her hand passes through the apparition with a crackle and she retreats horrified. Jaya strikes back on the module: "Then you are a phantom after all. An illusion come to mock me-- again!" (247) Amongst all the characters, the only one who is able to eventually stand up and repel the inhuman situation, is Jaya. She realizes that she has lost every member of her family- Om Prakash, her husband; Ma, her mother- in- law; and Jeetu, her brother- in- law. Jaya is the only character who remains rebellious till the very end, as she rejects all the agreements that later prove to be hallucinatory and unsubstantial.

Jaya and Leela, both suffer in their own ways but their sufferings are not given any note by their husbands. Neither Bhaskar calls the police on the request of Leela nor does Om change his decision for Jaya. It shows the status of women in their own families and society that their words and desires have no value for man in the society. A woman does not hold the reputed position like a man.

Having this similarity between Jaya and Leela, both are different from each other. In the play *Lights Out*, Leela fails to take any sensible action. Her request remains unheard and she gradually turns hysterical but the male present in the play remain unaffected by it. They suggest some unworkable solutions to the problem like to have a face fight with the persons involved in the act of crime. But nobody cares about the scrape of Leela.

Naina is another character, in Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out*, who is also a victim of male subjugation. She was the one who first raise her voice against that was happening with the victim. But later she was even forced to shut up at the end. Naina begins in high spirit though as she goes about counteracting Bhaskar and Mohan's casual attitude to a woman's rape. In fact, it is she who calls the violence a rape act for the first time in the play and it is determined to do something about it:

NAINA: We must do something about it, get it stopped, call the police! (35).

However, Naina gets silenced by her own husband Surinder when she calls his manly overtures 'nonsense':

SURINDER: (turns on her suddenly and says with quiet malevolence): Shut up-or I'll kick your teeth in...(49)

All these instances suggest that Leela and Naina are, almost, as subjugated as Frieda is in the domestic set up. To their credit, however, it must be said that Leela and Naina, at times, do raise their voice.

In the play *Harvest*, the two male characters Om and Jeetu are seen as the victims of economical or financial abuse. Om is the central character in the play which is set in 2010 Mumbai. The play *Harvest*, with very apt title portrays, how a family fall victim to the flesh- market controlled by the Western world and how the financial crisis and computerization at the global level have turned the inexperienced employees jobless. And it shows how poverty can compel a man to go to any extent to earn his livelihood.

Om Prakesh, the only earning member of the family is thrown in to an economical disorder because of loss of job. In this economic chaos, he signs a contract for the sake of his family. He never reveals it before his family members. It is only in the later stages of the play the members of his family become conscious about it. The financial crisis has forced Om sign the contract. Now the body of Om is not governed by him but by someone else. The Multi- National Company buys the body organs for transplantation. The Inter Planta Services offers all the gadgets to the family in a swap of the organs. The commercial attitude of the company brings an over turn in their relationship. In other words, the Inter Planta Services hijacks them.

Jeetu, another victim of economic and financial abuse is the younger brother of Om. Jeetu, who always considered life as a joke, a rebel, disobeys all norms of moral behaviour. He tried out many job but he wouldn't find anything apt to him after a long search when he found a job for him he turned out to be a male prostitute. He is shown as a visiting prostitute and has sexual relationship with his sister-in-law. For him, the eventual truth is the ability to gratify his physical needs without bothering about the feelings of others. He never wanted to be a prostitute but to fulfill his needs he didn't have any option. He is heard digressing and cursing his fate and his words revealing his bitterness about the sorry state of his life and society. He appears to be very close to an absurdist character who takes refuge in escapism for reality which would be painful to him.

Thus, the plays of Padmanabhan not only expose the evils of society but also make the people perceive its evil significances. The plays have long discussions which deepen step by step and consequently make the audience understand its gravity. In the modern world, where on one side, there is so much of progress in every field, on the other; people are losing basic values and morals. The lives are losing its importance and money is becoming more important. The growing indifference in the society in the name of civilization has given way to the crimes and violence. The plays of Padmanabhan, she conveys important messages and achieve successfully its aim as it certainly inspires audience not to follow the path adopted by the characters of the plays.

*Harvest* can be characterized as a feminist play as it reinforces the idea of strong womanhood through the character of Jaya who defines marks of resistance under all circumstances. Om's mother, on the other hand, represents the smug and traditional attitude of the women of older generation who submit to circumstances without showing toughness, and also, all those downtrodden women who find comfort in rely on world to abolish the painful memories of their existence. As regards the techniques employed, the play unfolds and ends in the same claustrophobic room which look like a prison, and the whole family lives like inmates under panopticon gaze of their employers. The play is structured into three acts and follows a linear pattern, defining exposition in the first act, the consequences of their unusually different choice in the second and the climax and finale in the third. The use of science fiction and futuristic elements lends the play a dystopian character as well, with a bleak view of the future world, especially for the citizens of the third world countries with their limited resources, and economic constraints.

In the play *Lights Out*, Manjula Padamnabhan not only exposes growing apathy amongst the so called civilized people but also wants to make audience distinguish its evil consequences. The play makes the reader understand the hidden purpose of sensitizing them towards this unconcern. In the world of growing technology when distances gradually shrink and modern means of communication have tapering the distances amongst the people, one thing is disheartening that people are drifting away from one another at the level of humanity.

Nowadays, the bonds which used to link one human being with another are gradually weakening. Man, especially belonging to the middle class, though aware of his duty as a social being, avoids it, living contentedly in his self-imposed bondages. Even the pitiable cries of a woman become a matter of discussion rather than action. The drama, based on a real life incident, as it has been mentioned at the end, further affects audience's sensibility positively and they really understand the dangerous position of the growing social apathy in modern man's life. The drama successfully achieves its aim and certainly motivates audience not to follow the path, adopted by the characters of the drama.

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