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IMAGES OF WOMEN IN MANJULA PADMANABHANS LIGHTS OUT

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Abstract:

This article analyses the sensitive issue of rape of a poor and helpless woman by a group of four grown up boys. She screamed for help but remained unheard deliberately by the residents of the apartment. She was raped in the compound of a deserted building close to the apartment. The playwright Manjula Padmanabhan has taken the serious problem of cultural erosion displayed by the denizens of the civilized society living in the big apartment in the Lights out. Though Lights out was written back in 1984, and the story of the drama is based on the real incidents that took place in Santa Cruze, Bombay, 1982 but the play became more relevant after the post —

NIRBHAYA, 2012. Lights out is a problem play with anti-romantic spirit. Women writers have also played an important role in the development of Indian writing in English and captivating it to the respectable position. The credit for the progress of Indian English literature goes to a good number of women writers. This article analyses the images of women.

Keywords: society, gender, sexuality, abuse.

Manjula Padmanabhan is an emerging playwright of contemporary modern theatre. She was born on 23rd June, in the year 1953. Her birth place is Delhi and she belongs to an diplomatic family. She is a fertile writer, novelist short story writer and versatile writer. She has given a new orientation to Indian theatre through her dramas. Her famous plays includes Lights out (1982) The Artist Model (1995) Harvest (1997). In the last decades of the twentieth century some women playwrights, though were very less in number, became popular. The names of those are Mrs. J. M. Billimoria, Dina Mehta, Kamala Subramaniam, Shree Devi Singh,

AratiNagarwalla, PoileSengupta, Manjula Padmanabhan, Uma Parameshwaran, Tripurari Sharma, are worthy to be mentioned. These playwrights belonging to different regions, ages and cultures have perceived evaluated, learnt and understood their own respective society and culture and have come out with social, serious, sensitive and most often disturbing plays. The women playwrights have hardly been seen or heard till the mid twentieth century. Lights out (1984) is the milestone in the journey of English drama.

In this play the playwright has challenged the rotten ideas of male centric world. She exhibits the cruel, indifferent, male dominated world in which woman suffers from identity crisis. The marginalization and isolation of woman in the society is the main theme of the drama. Indian writing in English, drama, the portrayal of women in the context of Indian drama, and then introduced to the playwright's life, works and achievements. It is also showed how women in Indian Drama were presented from a male stereotyped perspective. Women characters were portrayed at two extremes either as the one who fights with the situation or be the leader of her own life or as the one who adjusts with the problem and make herself accommodated. The story of the drama Lights out deals with the issue of rape of a poor and helpless woman in a nearly compound of a deserted big building by four grownup boys. The building was watched by the chowkidars. It was close to the apartment. Bhaskar and Leela, occupied the residents of the building. Bhaskar was middle aged government officer. He loved his family and children. The play has been written in three scenes. This play is an one act play. The helpless woman was raped before the public. It puts a big question mark on the existence of human values and erosion of cultural heritage. The culture devoid of humanity did not survive for a long period. They living their life so happily. But just single incident disturbed their family life of Bhaskar and Leela. The rape was done on the previous night. The culprits threatened the residents of the apartment to remain inside their home. Leela was too much disturbed by this gruesome incident.

She requested her husband to call the police but he refuse to call. He was a good husband to Leela but according to this incident he keep calm for the throughout the act.

The scene two informs the arrival of Mohan friend of Bhaskar. He was from Delhi. He noticed that Leela was emotionally and psychologically disturbed. Later he own perspective behind the rape of a girl .Bhaskar and Mohan behaved were anti- feminist. Mohan as like Bhaskar he never showed off any interest regarding this issue .Leela opposed both Bhaskar and Mohan but she failed to convince them. There were so many discussions arguments regarding this rape of a girl there is no effort taken by them. Leela worried about not taken up any step.

The scene three is important because for the first time both Bhaskar and Mohan were vehemently by Naina. She was the school friend of Leela. Her husband name Suriender. Unexpectedly she visited to Leela house. They welcomed warmly. She noticed that Leela was uncomfortable after her visit. Initially, she did not understand anything. Suddenly she had the screaming of human sound, Leela she tried to hide but Naina failed to resist her curiosity. She came near the window and looked outside the lights were put off. A woman was brutally beaten by a gang of four grownup boys. The blood was flowing from the mouth. Earlier, she had thought that Leela and the invited guest were taking dinner in candle light but now she came to know the real reason behind the light. The residents of the apartments were afraid because of the goons. They put off their lights. Leela keep on insisting to call the police but Bhaskar and Mohan not at all. Mohan tried to twist the issue but it failed by Naina. When Naina opposed him then Mohan called this incident like act of an exorcism. In the meantime, Surinder husband of Naina came. He was an aggressive man. He saw the criminals. He became so angry that he wants to beat the culprits with his bare hands. He was stopped by his wife, other members in the room. They discussed too much things inside the room but the culprits left the place unhurt and unpunished.

The play with clear stamp of gender- division makes a very powerful plea for understanding the feminine sensibility in a world which hardly allows women to be independent, strong, organized and focused. In that respect, each of her works is shocking more than pleasing. Her works attempts to present the harsh face of reality and demand action from the readers and onlookers. The reality depicted in her works is simple, and is lacking of all embellishment. It is a kind of art that stuns through its morbidity, startles through its grimness. Padmanabhan does not adhere to the conventional dramatic structure of five acts but takes up the form and acts which suit to the theme of the plays. The early years of the 20th century witnessed a rapid growth in breaking down injustices against women. As a result of it many number of women's societies leaped up. The Women' Indian Association was started by Mrs. Annie Besant in 1917, with the primary aim of encouraging women's education. The National Council of Women was founded in 1925 to federate the Provincial Women's Council and other women's organizations. The first All-India Women's Educational and Congress was held in 1926. They gradually became conscious of their rights. Lights out, the play evokes the mental action not by the physical action.

Generally, not only in Lights out happening this issue all over the world still gang rape, sexuality, abuse, child marriage occurs. An outline of the Images of women in the society in general. And also about how Manjula

Padmanabhan's portrays the image of women in her selected plays *Lights Out*. Napoleon was once asked in a public gathering, what the great need of

France was. He answered, "Nation's progress is impossible without trained and educated mothers. If the women of my country are not educated, about half of the people will be ignorant. " Men and Women are considered as the two wheels of a chariot as they are equal in importance and should work together in life. The one is not superior or inferior to other.

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. In the context of Indian culture the statues of women has been a paradox. Women, worshiped as goddess and exalted as mother is in most practical aspects of life, overworked and undervalued, systematically subordinated. They had four fold status-role sequences. Those were her role as a daughter, wife, mother and housewife. The woman in modern times is entering into certain new fields that were unknown to the woman's sphere of role-sets. They are actively participating in social, economic, and political activities. But in the present scenario, women have generally received higher education than the women of their preceding generation. There have been far reaching consequences in the economic status of women.

The principal point of the women writers is largely about the prevailing conditions and the problems of women. They aim at bringing out the sufferings of women. Thus, feminism was the major concern of them. The word feminism refers to social, political, cultural and economic movements, which intend to protect women's rights, and intends to provide legal protection to women. The aim of feminist is to understand women's oppression keeping in mind harassment, gender, class and sexual preference.

Mostly, the women characters in many plays are portrayed weak, dependent, pure, meek, and sacrificial etc. And the female characters in the plays of Manjula are categorized into three types - the traditional woman, the rebellious woman and the new woman — who adopt the situations and act according. In Manjula's plays, we see a gradual change in the female character. In other words, the character does not remain the same as she appears in the beginning. She is a middle class woman who values her status as a respectable woman. She believes in the sanctity of the domestic sphere and cherishes the values of conjugality. She is shocked to see what is being done to a woman outside her home under the street light. She is unable to bear the painful cry for help that she regularly hears from a neighboring compound.

Manjula Padmanabhan, however, was seen to present women characters as individuals possessing both positive and negative traits. The salient characteristics of her plays such as patriarchy, gender discrimination,

unequal treatment of women, organ sale and rape - were also discussed. The situation in the play throws light on one of the most disturbing trends in the late capitalist society all over the globe, which is to "exploit the bodies of the poor and disenfranchised, where paupers frequently emerge as being of greater worth dead than alive." Padmanabhan's writings generally address issues related to woman: of gender, class, and exploitation within the family and culture.

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. The play primarily focuses on the abuse of organ transplant but its subtext focuses gaze on women who are treated as possessions by men who harvest future generations from their bodies but refuse some women even a modicum of autonomy in life. Through the character of Leela, the dramatist throws light on the sensitive nature of female section of the society. Woman is soft hearted, emotional and very sensitive by nature. Anything appeals to her heart first; she expresses her emotions with higher intensity. And, Naina in Lights Out is another character who falls in second category. Naina, Leela's friend is the one who raises her voice against the strange sounds that she hears are the sounds of locale slum religious ceremony. But Naina grows inquisitive and looks out of the window to know what kind of religious ceremony is taking place exactly and finds to her horror four men assaulting a woman sexually. She is shaken to see three men holding a woman as the fourth attacks her brutally. Manjula's women are not extraordinary women. She does not portray them as good or evil, they have their strengths and weaknesses, and they have their good days and bad days. They are constantly trying to prove themselves in a man's world in Manjula's image of women. Manjula is quite different from other writers in her viewing of women in the sense that her perception is neither stereotyped nor voyeuristic which is typical of patriarchal society.

Men usually pretend that they care for woman but they really do not. Urban society has its well defined ethos that's why men are silent when crimes like rape are committed. Men in cities are governed by a policy of non-interference. Similarly, Padmanabhan does not adhere to the conventional dramatic structure of five acts but takes up the form and acts which suit to the theme of the plays. Padmanabhan's plays have different structures. She does not follow any set pattern of writing plays. It is the theme on the basis of which the pattern is chosen. Her perception of women is also different from female writing as she views women objectively from a male's perspective and also with a female consciousness that makes his observations sympathetic towards women. Manjula particularly excels in portraying of women characters as how sensitive they are in handling the

situation and how they as a subject occupies a pivotal role in all of her plays. Her women characters are not portrayed as extraordinary women, but they are ordinary women with strength and weakness, trying to overcome the "challenging situations in their everyday lives. The researcher hereby sum up all that has so far been attempted to study. This play aims an awareness and also attempts to evoke certain emotions within the audience.

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