



Feminist Discourse In Poile Sengupta's Play 'Mangalam'

REKHA¹, Dr. BEENA AGARWAL²

Ph.D. Research Scholar¹, Associate Professor²

Head of the Deptt.of English²,

D.S. College, Aligarh, Dr. BhimraoAmbedkar University, Agra

Abstract:-

In the present paper a study is made on feminist discourse portrayed in Poile Sengupta's play 'Mangalam'. Poile Sengupta is an eminent Indian playwright who gives a new direction for female to establish their position in the patriarchal society. Her plays are based on the sensitive social issues that deal with the themes of feminism, patriarchy, exploitation, subjugation, oppression, gender discrimination and violence. In her plays, she tries to reveal several types of violence that usually is inflicted on female body.

The present research paper's aim is to study the status of women's predicament and sufferings under the hegemony of men. Main purpose of this paper is to expose the real position of women who are suppressed and exploited by male authority. Through this paper, the playwright raises her voice to highlight the social issues related to women. In this paper, I will try to explore that feminism flourishes under the play Mangalam by Poile Sengupta. I have tried to study how the male authority is secretly working to dominate the fate of women. I have tried to explore the realistic picture of women's struggle in male dominated society where violence is prevalent everywhere. The current research paper is a comprehensive study of social and mental sufferings.

Keywords:- Feminism, Women, Sufferings, Resistance, Patriarchy, Violence, Exploitation

Introduction:-

The concept of feminism suggests the way to women for gaining equality to men in different form. It is a belief in social, political and economic equality of the sexes. In other context, it is beneficial to men, women and their families to gain their path in the discriminated society. It is a set of movements which provides the equal opportunities for women. In Indian patriarchal system there is no gender equality. Women are always deprived of their rights. There are several feminist critics seek gender equality such as the right to work for equal wages, the right to obtain equal education, and the right to get equal political rights. Indian feminist thinkers also have fought against the social issues related to women. According to Gail Omvedt,-

'Feminism' is not a form of social science, not is it a single consistent ideology. It can be best understood as the developing self-consciousness of women as an oppressed section struggling for liberation. (Omvedt : 177-178)

In social framework, women are exploited, oppressed, and subordinated through their male counterparts. Feminist writers help to gain their freedom from the male dominated practices. There are several women playwrights in modern Indian theatre who have played an important role to provide the space and equality for women in male dominated society.

Poile Sengupta is one of them who tries to give a direction for female to establish their position in society. She writes about oppressed and subjugated woman who are suffering under the hegemony of men. Her plays deal with burning social issues of contemporary Indian society. In her career, she has written several popular plays such as *Mangalam*, *Inner Laws*, *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha*, *So Said Shakuni*, *Alipha*, *Keats was a Tuber*, and *Samara's Song* that are related to the issues of the society. Her popular play 'Mangalam' is based on the Tamil culture of India. It dramatizes the women's suffering and exploitation that is prevalent everywhere in the society. It is a powerful play to expose the realistic picture of various forms of violence inflicted on female boy. In this play, playwright adopts the social realist form to present the harsh realities of life. It is one of the earliest play written by Poile Sengupta in 1993. It won a special prize for its social relevance theme in the Hindu Madras Players Playscripts Competition in 1993. Her female centric plays were published under the title '*Women Centre Stage: the Dramatist and the Play*' by Routledge Publishers in 2010. The play, *Mangalam* is a two act play in which, Poile Sengupta depicts a realistic picture of India where women are oppressed and exploited under the dominance of patriarchy. They are treated as

the inferior citizens of the society. In 'Mangalam' dramatist has used 'Play within a play' technique to highlight the real condition of women in patriarchal system of the society. The play 'Mangalam' is divided in two acts. Each act consists of several scenes such as first act has three scenes and second act consists four scenes. In these acts, Poile Sengupta presents glimpses of theatre and reality. Both acts of the play are full of exploitation of women. Both acts are presented as a mirror of life as a lot of the first act transformed into reality for the characters of the second act.

First act of the play 'Mangalam' was set up in a village town in Tamil Brahmin family. This act begins about a mourning of the death of 'Mangalam' who is not present physically. This act revolves around the unsuccessful and devastating marriage of a couple- Mangalam and Dorai. Dorai, husband of Mangalam is a symbol of patriarchy.

He harasses his wife Mangalam who is dead character in the play. She is considered as an object of hatred and violence. She is a victim of violence because she is not able to express herself. She has to suffer in silence. She is raped by sister's husband. This incident destroys her life. Perhaps, she blames herself for whatever happened with her. In reality she suffers day by day all through her life for a sin that she never committed. She is humiliated everyday in her life. Here Poile Sengupta shows the fate of an innocent woman who was physically tortured and raped by her brother-in-law as well as her husband. Despite all this, she does not express the heinous crime committed against her because she will be treated with disgusting eyes in the society. In this context by presenting the Chorus, Poile Sengupta shows a visible picture of women's miserable condition-

*Women die many kinds of deaths;
Men don't know this.
For them, when a woman cooks
and arranges flowers in her hair
and makes place in the bed
she is alive.
But a woman can smile,
she can pin flowers in her hair
and arrange a red dot on her forehead
and make place in the bed
because her husband is alive.
She may be dead. (WCS:11)*

In this statement Poile Sengupta reveals the inner pathetic condition of the woman who is suppressed by male power. Another woman character Usha, mangalam's daughter who is also a victim of patriarchal system. Violence inflicted on Usha in various forms. She is neglected by in laws' family. She has no freedom to express her will in the society. She is tortured mentally by in laws. She finally has to leave her in-laws' house return to her maternal home. Here Poile Sengupta has successfully picturized various forms of violence inflicted on female body in male dominated society.

Next character Revathy, Mangalam's daughter-in-law is the strong character who doesn't have to undergo any types of violence. When Thangam treats Revathy as an outsider and constantly criticizes her inner frustration to Thangam by saying that, – “And what about you? How do you treat me? As if I don't exist. As if I am poison. An untouchable. You sent away the cook because you wanted to rule over me in the Kitchen.” (WCS: 29)

In this statement, Poile Sengupta tries to expose the resistance against patriarchal norms that is the root of exploitation and oppression of women. She depicts a picture of violence and discrimination which are most articulate and typical issues gender based society.

In the second act of the play 'Mangalam' Poile Sengupta has used the technique the 'Play within the Play' to reveal the same characters take up different role. The dramatist presents how a soul dwelling in a female body suffers a lot just because of the gender. She tries to draw a picture of the suffering of women's victimization where as the culprit moves around freely. Through the technique of play within play, the dramatist tries to focus on contrast between the traditional setting with a orthodox Brahmin family in a rural area. This act presents a modern sophisticated urban family but the problems remain the same. This act revolves around a modern woman, Sumati who is Usha in Act I. Despite being educated and empowered, she faces several problems in her life.

Beginning of this act, the discussion between Sumati and Suresh, who is Mani in first act, is shown to expose the miserable condition of women in patriarchal system of the society. Suresh comments on women but in reply Sumati scolds him. Sumati admits-

The way you talk about girls, about women. You don't seem to have a speck of respect for them. So that means that the moment a woman doesn't fit into the category of being a mother or a sister, she's baggage.....sexual baggage. (WCS. 44)

Second part of the play 'Mangalam' reveals a situation of a modern woman Sumati who is a victim of exploitation by a close family friend, Nari, Vikram's father. Despite being exploited, she raises her voice against the oppression being done on her and she screams-

*No! Uncle! No! (SUMATI rushes in through the garden door)
Appa! Appa! (WCS. 69)*

After going through this heinous incident, she becomes quite awakening with the society. She does not allow any unknown person to go near her. Despite being exploited, she is too bold to face circumstances. Sumati is not helpless like Mangalam. She is educated, intelligent and independent to take any decision. Her inner pain and bitterness towards patriarchy is well exposed. Sumati remarks-

A woman who allows herself to be soft, who relinquishes her weapons....well she gets chewed up, doesn't she?.....I know it's a terrible expression but then it's a terrible state to be in.....(WCS.66)

It shows that a woman is not always a sufferer because she can collect her strength to take revenge upon her oppression. In this respect, Poile Sengupta in her feminist discourse gives strength to her women characters to make expression of their resistance without fear and shame.

Poile Sengupta exposes here a realistic picture of the society where women are not secure in the patriarchal system of the society. Even woman is modern or traditional; she has to be a victim of molestation. In modern time, male power shows a certain duplicity in attitude that is painful to women to live a comfortable life. Women are deprived of living a normal life because of the patriarchal authority of society that always values the male higher. In reality, male authority is always held at a higher level than that of females.

In this act Thangam, Mangalam's sister is also a victim of betrayal in her conjugal relationship with her husband, Sreeni who is Dorai in Act I. He is carrying a secret relationship with another woman. In same way Vaidehi, Kamala in act I is also molested by her husband. It justifies that any circumstances women are exploited and oppressed in comparison of men. In this act Thangam comes to know of her husband's illegitimate affairs. Finally she finds some letters in his diary. These relevant facts make her too bold to fight

against betrayed relationship with her husband. Sumati is also able to give her voice to expose her silent suffering. At the end, these two characters are the good example to raise the voice of women in the society. They try to stand as strong as trees. Through the voice-over, Poile Sengupta highlights the glimpses of women empowerment in the society.

*As for women, the gods said
let them be strong rooted, like trees.
For it is they who shall hold
the ends of the world together.
And there will be storms
and the wind will blow very strong
but the women will stay, like trees,
they will hold the world together. (WCS. 69-70)*

Through the female voice-over in the play, Poile Sengupta reveals that in patriarchal system woman may be oppressed and subjugated but she is not weak to accept the subjugation as the ultimate fate in patriarchy. She exposes women's suppression, feelings, thoughts, silence, sufferings and struggle in society. Voice over is a great technique to impact on the readers' mind for a long time.

Conclusion:-

Poile Sengupta's plays are giving a voice to those women who are exploited, oppressed and marginalized in the society. In her play 'Mangalam' she exposes the violence, exploitation and extra marital relationship. She has used silence as a mechanism to expose the real position of women. In 'Mangalam' resistance is used as a tool of expression of men-conformity to male designs. Affirmation of identity is well exposed in 'Mangalam'. In this play, Poile Sengupta has tried to explore how woman is bound to make consistently struggle to maintain her identity in this male dominated society. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the customs and traditions that are responsible for the suffering of women in the society. However, this play 'Mangalam' portrays a realistic picture of the Indian society where women are not secure in the patriarchal system of the society.

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