

Dehumanization and Physical Violence in Manjula

Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*

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Abstract: *The present paper is an attempt to analyze dehumanization, physical violence and marginalization of women in Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out. The play Lights Out presents a tragic scene of the daily rape of women watched at a distance by the middle class characters. The play also proposes a complete negligence towards a woman's fight and sensitivity by her husband. It depicts the harassment of women in patriarchic society. It also deals with many issues such as rape, gender discrimination, complexity of human relationship and many more. The play highlights the woeful plight of women. It portrays that the females have no identity in the society. It also deals with the various problems of women. When a woman marries and comes to her husband's house, she always suffers there and loses her freedom and identity which she gets in her father's house.*

Keywords: Dehumanization, Marginalization, Exploitation, Physical Violence

I. INTRODUCTION

Manjula Padmanabhan was born in Delhi in 1953. She is a playwright, a cartoonist, a novelist and artist. She has written six plays; but three of them are not published. Her published plays are *Lights Out* (1986), *Harvest* (1998) and *Hidden Fires* (2003). *Lights Out* is based on an incident of a gang rape that occurred in the middle class community in Santa Cruz Bombay in 1982. She is a free-lance illustrator. The interesting aspect of her work is the handling of the feminist issues. She has problematic relation with feminism in the sense that she consciously explores feminist perspectives, but claims that she is not a feminist. Her plays are a true reflection of socio-economic background that has many challenges to face politically, socially, artistically and culturally. Her *Lights Out* is a realistic play. The cast of the play consists of three male characters - Bhaskar, Mohan, Surinder and three women characters- Leela, Naina, and Frieda. All represents middle class family.

In the play *Lights Out*, women suffer from various types of subjugation based on class and gender. Women face many types of discrimination in their day-to-day life. They are not having power in the family as well as society. They are victims of gender based exploitation. They are not having equal rights and active participation in the democratic society.

The term 'Dehumanization' and 'Physical Violence':

Dehumanization is an act of regarding, representing, or treating a person or group as less than human. It is a psychological process, where one can deny others, their individuality and self-esteem. According to Cambridge dictionary, Dehumanize means to remove from a person the special human qualities of independent thought, feeling for other people, etc. According to Oxford Learners Dictionary, Dehumanization means the act of making somebody lose their human qualities such as kindness, pity, etc.

Physical violence means that a person is exerting control over another person through the use of physical force. It includes hitting, punching, slapping, kicking or using any object as a weapon.

Dehumanization and Physical Violence in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*:

Manjula Padmanabhan dramatizes the indifferent attitude of the people in the society. She depicts man-woman relationship and male dominance that rule the society. The violence in a woman's life often has outward signs, it can seem bloodless. It can enter one's life as a newspaper item or destroyed body of another woman. She depicts family violence. It is the most dangerous secrete killer. It is kept secret because we are ashamed and lose our voices when it is around us.

In the first scene of the play, Leela is worried about ongoing crime in neighboring compound. It is seen clearly in her expression, "When you were away on tour, I couldn't sleep at night! And with all the windows shut with all the curtains drawn, cotton in my ears- the sound still came through! Even in the children's room on the other side of the house, I could hear it!"(5-6). Leela requests to call the police to her husband but the police generally ignore the complaint. Being a woman, Leela doesn't want to be a passive observer of a woman being molested just outside her house. The rude and loud voice dreads her continuously. Her husband, Bhaskar informs Leela about a guest, Mohan who is coming that night for dinner. Bhaskar told Mohan about the screaming in a neighboring compound.

Mohan is curious to know about the horrible incident rather than to help the victim. His selfish nature can be seen clearly in his expression. Bhaskar and Mohan's attitude intimates the typical urban middle class mentality. Bhaskar tells Mohan about the assailants and their naked appearance. The shamelessness of these assailants becomes the subject of their discussion.

In panic, Leela listens to their discussion. Mohan considers the incident as a 'religious ceremony'. He says: "It's some sort of religious ceremony you see, the local slum dwellers putting on a programme. (33). Bhaskar concedes with Mohan and they take the incident as a ritual. They successfully turn the seriousness of the subject to triviality. The bizarre sounds of women open the third and the last scene in the play. The sound is truly ragged and unpleasant. The sound begins with distinct words – "Let me go! Help me! and it ends into a general screaming, sobbing, with a jagged tired edge to it". (29). The screaming makes no difference to Bhaskar and Mohan. Another woman character, Naina, appears on the stage, she is Leela's schoolmate. Like Leela, she is also tormented by the sounds while the men, Bhaskar and Mohan are fascinated. Their attitude signifies escapism, while the willingness of Leela and Naina to help the victim shows their womanly compassion and concern.

Surinder, Naina's husband, appears on the scene with his violent passion. He plans to kill them all. His aggravation is seen clearly in his expression: "Let's go and wipe them out!" (45). His compassion for the victimized women is in vain. Though, he reacts differently than Bhaskar and Mohan, he fails to instigate any decisive action. He embarks on the journey of passionate expressions only. No one goes to the aid to the victims, meanwhile the screaming stops as the rapists run away from the place.

The reaction of Bhaskar to this act of gang rape is noteworthy, as he does not come forward to extend any help to the victim. Manjula Padmanabhan's intention is to portray not individual characters but stereotypes that represent the society. Since the beginning of the play, Leela is insisting Bhaskar to call the police and tell them about the gang rape. But Bhaskar tries to convince her to avoid paying attention to that incident. He says, "You never know the police these days, they may say it's none of our business, what goes on in the next door compound. After all, there is the chowkider.... (9).

Bhaskar thinks, now-a-days the police don't concentrate on such incidents, because every day such things happen. According to Bhaskar, It is not his responsibility to call the police. It is the responsibility of the owner of the building. Being human, he is neglecting his responsibility. When Bhaskar tells about the incident to the Mohan, he feels that if he will help the victim, he will interfere in the life of other people.

When Naina, the childhood friend of Leela, comes, all the members with Bhaskar try to hide the screaming of the woman. When Surinder comes, he decides to kill that bastard. Bhaskar is very selfish; he doesn't care about anything. Screaming of the victim doesn't have any effect on him. When Surinder suggests to him to go and offend those vulgar, who are raping woman in front of their eyes but Bhaskar is not interested in helping the woman.

Bhaskar and Leela witness the incident; but Leela takes it seriously. The difference in the approach of the male and the female characters in given situation can be observed in the play that has its root in human psychology. The social conditioning in the process of socialization of individual is responsible for the individual's behavior. In the Indian middle class society, the difference between the male and the female psyche depends mainly on social expectation and

upbringing. The way the feminine role is emphasized in the society surely has an everlasting impact on woman's personality and identity formation. Quite early in their lives, women are taught the need for flexibility, adjustment, and submissiveness. Perhaps, this is the reason why women hesitate in forming any strong opinion or taking initiatives. Women are mentally conditioned to obey their husbands and not to take initiative in any case.

Male characters in the play are expected to take initiative throughout the play. Leela immortalizes her husband to call the police. She is a very sensitive woman. She is shocked to watch the rape incident. She does everything possible to prevent the voice of screaming woman entering her house by keeping the window shut, curtains drawn and plugging her ears. She is so much afraid that she cannot dare to go near the window to find out what is happening outside. She has little idea about the problem outside the window of her house; but she feels awkward to reveal these things to others. She is very much disturbed by the screaming that can be heard in her house; she is more worried about her own life than about the victim. She wants her life to remain undisturbed. Leela says, "I don't care what they do or who they are – I just want them far away out of my hearing.... Out of my life.....Their sounds come inside my nice clean house and I can't put them out. If only they didn't make such a racket I wouldn't mind so much. Why do they have to do it here? Why can't they go somewhere else?" (8)

It shows that she is sensitive towards the incident; but in reality she wants to protect the harmony and peace in her own house which is disturbed by the screaming of the woman. Bhaskar and Mohan both have the same opinion and attitude regarding women violence. Mohan doesn't have any sympathy towards victim; he just wanted to enjoy the incident by watching it.

Naina also represents typical Indian woman, who wants to help the victim, but doesn't want to take risk. She insists her too much excited husband to take decision after thinking over. Surinder is Naina's husband. When he heard about the violent act, he was ready to kill the rapists. Mohan and Bhaskar plan to make money by selling authentic pictures of the gang-rape whereas Surinder sticks to his idea of beating the victimizers. Surinder is sensitive to the situation, but he too couldn't take decisions on time. He wastes a lot of time in resolving conflict regarding his time of action. Surinder is an honest to himself. His intention is to help the victim. Manjula Padmanabhan's purpose to portray these characters is to project the inner fear that leads a person in a negative way.

To conclude, Manjula Padmanabhan focuses on various kinds of violence and abuse that women are facing today. The play, *Lights Out* portrays the present crimes in the society, where the acts of sexual violence occur frequently but no one comes forward to take the initiative and to help the victim due to fear. The play *Lights Out* is isolated from society. No one knows what is happening in their next apartment. Sometimes, they don't know who is living in their next apartment. They are following the western culture. If someone is facing tragic situation, no one goes to help him/her. The same thing happens in *Lights Out*. Some vulgar people are raping a woman and Bhaskar and Mohan are enjoying that scene. It is pathetic that the rules of morality are so openly violated. Nevertheless, some good people like Surinder also exist in society, but he lacks the proper skill of planning and decision making. Women are sensitive to such issues; but they are also too much selfish and think about the safety of their own family. Male characters are lonely and selfish as compared to the females.

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