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Rape, Body and cognition: Tackling violence in Manjula Padmanabhan's light out

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Abstract

Manjula Padmanabhan is one of the fewest Indian contemporary dramatists who had made a prolific contributor to the theatrical development of the country. She is one such a few female playwrights who reveal the unpleasant side of society and its indifference towards the suffering of women. She focuses more on the female characters rather than on male characters in her work. Her work is mainly dedicated to women. They deal with women's lives, their status in society, their family, and their mentality. Her work even reveals the sad situation of women from all walks of their life. The main focus of her work is on social issues but mainly where the patriarchal society oppresses women and their behavior. She even claims realistic issues like rape, domestic violence, dowry marriage, etc. Manjula Padmanabhan's Light Out highlights the dilemma of a woman becoming a male manipulator. This is the attempt of men to demean and dethrone women and later show indifference towards them. This paper deals with the study of Manjula Padmanabhan's Light Out which specializes in violence and apathy towards the rape victim. The paper additionally researches gang rape and the way intentional excuses are put forward by the characters.

Keywords: Gang rape, apathy, violence against women, patriarchy

Introduction

Violence is the act that is meant to cause harm through the act of physical force. The damage caused by this could be physical, psychological, or both. It could be noticed that violence may be from aggression, or a general vicious act with the intent of physical, verbal, or passive. This is a relatively frequent kind of human behavior that happens all over the world. People of any age are terrorizing, most commonly older adolescents and young adults are likely to engage in such action. In another way, violence has various negative effects on the ones who experience or witnessed it and youngsters are especially vulnerable to its harm. Such an act can be classified in several ways. It is often divided into four main categories, based on the nature of the gestures: Homicide (The killing of one human by another human); Assault (A violent physical or verbal attack); Robbery (The act of forcefully taking things from a victim, and Rape (Forcibly sexual intercourse with another person). Other forms of violence include child sexual abuse (engaging in a sexual act with a child) and domestic violence (violent behavior between relatives, usually spouses). Rape is the most common type of violence to happen these days in society. While the correct definition of rape itself is controversial. It is generally accepted that rape involves the sexual penetration of a person by force or without the consent of the person. Although there are several myths concerning rape- to have sex without one's will, based on stereotypes about sexual behavior for men and women. Sexual oppression was defined by Heise *et al.*, as "the act of coercing another individual through violence, threats, verbal insistence, deception, cultural expectation or economic circumstances to engage sexual behavior against their will. For example, most people associate rape with a violent physical attack by a stranger but rape is more often carried out by someone known to the victim. It is also presumed that rape leaves clear evidence of injury which is often not taken into consideration. Only about one-third of the rape victims undergo physical injury. Many kinds of physical violence or pressure in the form of blackmails or threats occur simultaneously with rape or even take place while the woman is asleep or under the domination of alcohol or any other drug where she is unable to defend herself and protect herself from such kind of violence.

In contemporary times, following the patriarchal system women are even obliged not to think

of themselves without men believing that women are inferior to men and restricting their importance only to protecting their family, upbringing their children, and fulfilling the requirements of the husband. Even in today's modern times, many professional women are subjected to immense pleasure to shoulder the dual responsibility of a housewife and working woman at the same time, with little or no help from the spouse. This is the same mentality that men saw women as an element of sexual pleasure a few years ago and was a servant of the husband who was even considered as 'Parveshwar', literally interpreted as 'Supreme God'. But are women safe following the man? The answer would be a big No. They have been in danger from the time they are born. The part of the women in the world has been assigned by the man since history has been evolved. A woman is constantly seen playing a subvariant role to a man. The situation with the woman and her flight of her enduring between two persuasive beings first and foremost the man, who with his deep-rooted predominant power has control on the woman, and secondly the female herself who transforms into an instrument under his position. Strengthening this opinion about women is that 'many women and girls have been socialized to become victims of male violence.' Stereotypes arise early in children's lives; boys are taught to be strong and difficult and girls are taught to be soft. As children develop up, they are often steered in the direction of sports and careers that suit the traditional roles. The society performs a significant role in organizing and perceiving this cliché. The media through T.V shows, advertisements, songs and videos display men being powerful, strong and sexually competitive towards women.

As a result, many rape cases occur in society and often go unreported to the police keeping the victim unknown. But after the 2012 gang rape case of Nirbhaya, the rape epidemic came into the highlight in the public discourse. Before that, the people of India were unaware of the pain caused to the victim. India has documented 77 rape cases and 80 murder cases till 2020 on average every day as per NCRB reports, in which the maximum number of registered cases were from Rajasthan. Total 3,71,503 cases of violence against women were filed nationwide last year, showing a decline of 8.3% from 4,05,326 cases in the year 2019. Apart from this, in the present year rape case in the capital increased by 63.3% in the first six months as compared to 2020. The facts show that rape cases have increased 43% from 580 as of June last year to 833 this year.

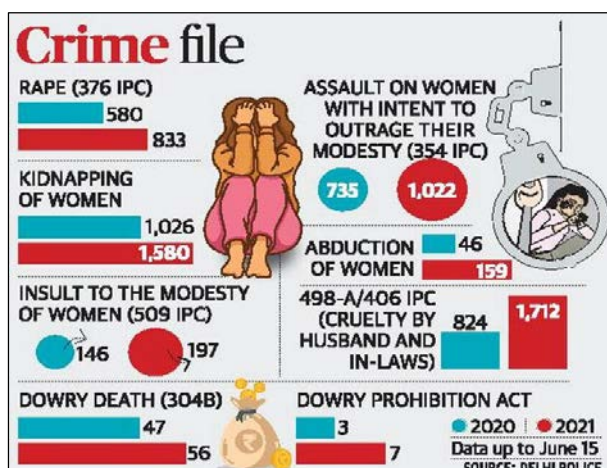


Fig 1: Showing the criminal record against women

Although rape harms the victim as well as the one who witnessed it and leaves some psychological disorders including post-traumatic stress disorder, multiple personality disorder, and emotionally unstable personality disorder on the one who is the viewer and the sufferer. This results in depression, anxiety, and mood swings in the victim as well as the spectator. Manjula Padmanabhan and her play Light Out realistically represent the indifference and social apathy that are widespread in today's world and also the horrible picture of society and its inequality towards the suffering of women.

The play Light Out deals with the gang rape that took place in Santa Cruz, Mumbai 1982. Although the characters are fictitious, the play is based on an eye-witnessed account. It also emphasizes people's indifference and intolerance towards the crime of gang rape. As respected middle-class family citizens, they are more willing to stay away from cruel crimes against women, or even interfere with the police case rather they are more willing to watch women being abused in a nearby neighborhood. People always observe that in real life just like in the play, no one is willing to help the victim.

At the beginning of the play, Leela is deeply concerned about the gang rape that occurs every night in the building opposite their house. But Leela's husband Bhasker is indifferent to the incident because he is not related to this matter directly. He doesn't want to involve himself in any sort of problem. However, Leela is seen continuously insisting on calling the police because she is afraid of the incident happening around as incident and the noise is affecting her peace of mind. On one hand, Leela is seen as vulnerable to the incident while on other hand Bhasker gets out of this by saying it "minor little offense" and needs no action. He just wants to watch the incident from the comfort of his house and enjoys the scene of the rape. Sadly, the cry for help of the rape victim and her painful and choking screams are just dirty and uncomfortable sounds for Leela and she hopes to silence these voices as soon as possible. Being a woman herself she is rude and insensitive towards the other women who require help. The only thing Leela is worried about is herself, her family, and her children. When Bhasker's friend Mohan comes for dinner, he comes to know about the incident in the neighborhood, he watches with a treat as if he is watching a cricket match.

Mohan: Oh-but I insisted!

Bhasker: He wanted to see it-

Leela: You wanted to see it!

Mohan: (Unrepentant) Sure! Why not?

Leela: (She is not amused) But why! Why see such awful things, unless you must!

Mohan: Well, I was-curious.

Leela: About such things! (BB94).

The third scene in the play starts with the same discussion about the victim screaming helplessly for help in the pain. Male characters in the play wish to see the crime out of curiosity and enjoy it which is another way of taking advantage of the adverse situation of others. Mohan, a friend of Bhasker discloses his interest in watching the live crime not due to his social responsibilities but out of curiosity and is determined to observe the crime because these crimes show that he is a real and practical observer of life. While not having any intention of serving the women or checking the crime he makes a lot of discussions to find truly the

nature of the crime. When Leela quotes her friend's remarks about man's role as a social being by saying, "If you can stop a crime, you must or else you are helping it to happen" (16). Whereas Mohan expressed painful comments on the ruthlessness of intellectuals that, "These intellectuals always react in this way which they always confuse simple things. After all, what's the harm in simply watching something? Even when there is a Floaccident in the streets, don't we turn our heads to looks?" (Padmanabhan, Manjula 2020).

Rape has always been an urgent issue that representatives from all walks of life are talking about. This is the fourth most common crime against women in India. After every 3-4 days later, we hear that a young girl, born baby girl, or any age woman is been raped. When we tried to find out the reason, we are surprised by the news that another girl is raped. For the male gaze, the rape scene is the sight seen in a movie or TV series. In *Light Out*, the male gaze not only enjoys the voyeuristic pleasure of the rape scene but also indulges in the cruel objectification of the female body. Mohan in the play only comes to look at gang-rape of the women.

Leela doesn't want to solve the problem on her own. She hoped that the police would solve the crime because it was a law-and-order issue. The entire conversation revolves around an event in which Bhasker, Leela, and Mohan analyzed the nature of the noise.

Bhasker and Mohan had no choice but to agree that the woman next door is raped. But later they came up with a new excuse that the raped woman must be a prostitute. She has no sexual or physical rights so she can't lose what she doesn't have.

Naina: (uncertainly) Rape is... when a woman is forced...to have sex-

Mohan: (confidently) and what is a whore?

Naina: (unhappily) a whore...

Mohan: (triumphantly) a whore is a woman whose livelihood is sex!

Leela: (with distaste) a whore is a woman without shame.

Naina: But-does that mean only a decent woman can be raped?

Mohan: Of course!

Bhasker: After all, what does a whore have to lose?

Naina: Why-I mean-

Mohan: Come on! A whore is not decent, so a whore cannot be raped!

For Bhasker and Mohan, a whore is not a woman but a category for her own.

Naina: By losing their vulnerability to rape, whores lose their rights to be women? Is that what you mean?

Mohan: Right. After all, finally, the difference between men and women is that women are vulnerable to rape...

Bhasker: and men are not. (LO)

Trying to define rape, Tim Edward wrote, "Violence and violent penetrating sex are clearly and usually regarded as rape, in fact as a form of violence". In the play, characters talk in a dualistic way. Bhasker and Mohan describe a woman decent enough to be raped or a whore who is not raped. Naina had a difficult discussion with Bhasker, Mohan and Leela about the definition of rape and what a decent woman or whore is. She also added;

Naina: Why? A whore can't be raped? Is that the Law?

To the reply to Naina's question Mohan and Bhasker had a reply that whore cannot be raped because whore are indecent, there is no shame, and they make their money through sexual acts. Usually, because of the patriarchal dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad', women rape victims are more likely to be victimized. A good woman is a wife, daughter, mother or sister who lives in the protection of their husband, father or brother and a woman who deviates from these norms is a bad woman who is considered to be engaged in sexual actives and is unprotective. A whore is decreased to her frame and sexuality as Kathleen Barry, a sociologist, and feminist defines, "a whore is a woman reduced to her sexual utility." (Papa, Regina 2013) A whore is taken as an intercourse slave who has no freedom of desire and right to make any decisions. Even though the whore may be of any gender, a woman is determined to be crafted within the photo of a whore.

Conclusion

Padmanabhan speaks for the whores who have been abused by society and gives rise to the question that does being a whore doesn't make her worthy of being a human? Society is deprived them of their basic human rights and deprived them of their basic needs. The play conveys concern about a rape victim and a whore who has suffered the same trauma during forced sex and even emphasizes the patriarchal concept of society. The women in the play, Leela and Naina are the people who were touched by the rape. They 'warned' the men and forced them to take action. The men especially the Bhasker and Mohan made excuses not to do anything. Mohan expressed his desire to see and enjoy crime out of curiosity, which is another way to take advantage of others. In other words, being oppressed by an oppressor. Some of the arguments for not calling the police, are ugly noise will not cause harm; the police will not come even if notified; if it is a domestic struggle; it is unnecessary interference; maybe it is religious and should be intervened; if it is a whore who doesn't need protection; if we have not suffered ourselves, why should we interfere? Rapists are human beings, so we have to understand that they also have problems and then an endless discussion about what to do. By which time the rape is over and the rapists have gone away. Through the careless behavior of Bhasker and other male characters in the play, Padmanabhan tries to project the mindset of males, usually where men try to control women. It is men who decide what women should do and what they should sense. The appearance of Bhasker, Mohan, and Surinder is mainly to instill fear in Leela and Naina. By doing so, they can maintain constant patriarchal authority both inside and outside the family. The dominance of men over women in patriarchal families and marriage forces women to fight for social equality. As Lindsay pointed out, "No one walks down the aisle in a white dress thinking they are doing this for the benefit of capital or to reproduce the next generation of the workers". In a society, where girls and women have the same rights as men still are deprived of gender quality. Nelson Mandela once said, "Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all kinds of oppression" Padmanabhan depicts the world where women are destitute of their identity, their voice, their rights, their freedom, etc. She needs men to explore her inner feelings, her concern and her point of view.

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