



The Marxist analysis of Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*

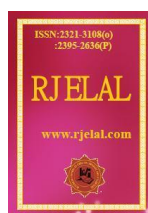
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Abstract

The societal norms have predominantly been influenced by male-dominated lawmakers and institutions, resulting in a restricted recognition of women's rights to exist. Regardless of whether a woman is married, single, or a prostitute, society's perception of her remains unchanged, notwithstanding globalization. Indian women have made significant progress in certain aspects. A vast number of women have entered the labor force. Leaders such as Prathibha Singh Patel, Sushma Swaraj, and Anandiben serve as exemplary figures, demonstrating that women have the ability to achieve significant accomplishments. However, a significant lamentable occurrence in our nation is the lack of support for women in terms of their personal security. Multiple studies indicate that a significant number of rape incidents go unreported due to the social stigma associated with gang rape. Within the broad context outlined, this article examines the susceptibility of Indian women using a Marxist perspective. I have utilized the Marxist methodology to scrutinize the literary composition, "Lights Out" by Manjula Padmanabhan in the context of Indian English Theatre. The author argues for the immediate necessity to confront the marginalized status of women, who are subjected to many forms of discrimination. This article addresses various topics, including gender discrimination, unfairness, and the dread of law enforcement and court indifference. In conclusion, I provide proposals to enhance the status of women in India.

Keywords: English literature, Manjula Padmanabhan, Indian literature, Lights Out, Marxism.

Introduction

Since the dawn of human civilization, literature has been associated with the public domain. Hence, a literary artist must possess an obligatory sense of social obligation. Undoubtedly, it is essential to acknowledge that social dedication alone is insufficient to create a valuable work of writing; instead, exceptional literary talents are required to make it really exceptional. Indeed, an artist conceals their societal dedication under the intricate tapestry of literary prowess, transforming it into a practical work of aesthetic allure. O.P. Bhatnagar, a distinguished Indian poet, asserts that the aesthetics of art are inseparable from the aesthetics of society and its contemporary era. An artist should strive to unite the aesthetic qualities of art with its humanistic principles, since the true beauty of any artwork rests in the emotional depth of its human themes. An artist who is socially committed gives a significant and purposeful role to art. He highly esteems it as a dedication to the substance of existence and its inherent worth in the current moment. He passionately urges people to speak out against injustice and the mistreatment of humanity, and to increase awareness among the general public about the widespread societal problems. The authors who represent a certain period depict the society of that time in their literary works, aiming to explore the reasons, relationships, and consequences of injustice, and to advocate for fairness and justice for all individuals. According to them, art is not isolating, but rather connecting. They reveal the concealed realities of human life as a social entity, allowing even those with less sensitivity to comprehend the expectations placed upon them by society.

In the postmodern period, the traditional, cultural, and geographical constraints are being dismantled due to the combined impact of science, technology, current political and social ideas, and other factors. The prevailing attribute of the current era is individualism. "While individualism has the potential to free us from established social

structures, it ultimately isolates us within our own thoughts and diminishes the noble aspects of life, such as having a meaningful purpose worth sacrificing one's life for." The text "(Lyon 40)" remains unchanged. It restricts individuals to their self-created cocoon from which they are unwilling to emerge. The social aspects of a person are often overlooked, leading to the development of social indifference over time. He is so absorbed in his own desires and interests that he neglects the obligations and expectations imposed by society. The occurrences happening in his vicinity do not affect him in any kind as they are not directly connected to his daily existence. Widespread indifference towards social issues has become a prevalent trait, particularly among the recently affluent middle-class individuals. They are so absorbed in their own lives that they have little time for contemplation of their surroundings. Despite their thoughts, they have no desire to intervene in the events occurring in their vicinity. They have a heightened sensitivity that causes them to progressively lose interest in the events happening around them. However, this worldview certainly impacts the sensitivity of an individual who is dedicated to social causes. He is determined to act to rouse the awareness of these folks from their dormant state of dreaming and confront the truth. The situation gets more severe when considering the victimization of a lady in the next building.

Literature Review

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was essentially an intellectual who specialized in theory and historical analysis. Through a scientific analysis of social organization, namely in the field of political science, he concluded that human history is characterized by a sequence of conflicts. That lies amidst classes, specifically between the downtrodden and the oppressive. According to Freud, a psychoanalyst, he believed that "sexual energy" was the driving force behind human actions and efforts. Nabokov posited that the artistic drive was the essential catalyst, but Marx contended that

'historical materialism' served as the ultimate propelling factor, including resource allocation, acquisition, production, and associated matters¹.

The term "Marxist literary criticism" refers to a broad spectrum of literary analysis that is founded on socialist and dialectic ideas of literature. Specifically, it considers literary works to be reflections of the social systems that they arise from. They argue that literature is a social institution that serves a certain ideological agenda, which is influenced by the author's personal past and ideals. Marxists are of the opinion that literature acts as a social institution. Terry Eagleton, an English literary critic and cultural theorist, provides a concise exposition of Marxist criticism in his work from 1976. Rather than just being a "sociology of literature" that investigates the creation and depiction of the working class in novels, Eagleton contends that Marxist critique goes beyond its traditional function. By conducting a meticulous analysis of the literary work's structures, tactics, and interpretations, the objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the literary work. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to have a grasp of the forms, styles, and meanings that are the outcome of a particular historical set of circumstances².

This statement posits that literature not only mirrors societal circumstances, but also functions as a distinct entity with its own ideological purpose. Literature is an active participant in the ongoing conflicts between the oppressed and the oppressive classes that form the fabric of human history. By analyzing these works, we can explore how some of them reinforce a repressive social structure or romanticize the absence of social strife, while

others present an alternative communal existence or promote a utopian vision as a remedy.

The matter of the literary textbook and its historical significance is a subject of great importance in Marxist discussions. Marx (1845) himself articulates significant reservations regarding the inclination towards historicism. He contends that individuals are shaped by their surroundings and the social environment in which they are raised. Hence, individuals who have undergone transformation are the result of altered conditions and modified upbringing. However, it is important to remember that it is individuals who bring about changes in circumstances, and the educator must also undergo their own process of education. Therefore, this ideology is destined to create a division within society, resulting in one part that is superior to the rest of society. The play *Lights Out* effectively depicts the reaction of individuals who are in close proximity to a gang rape incident involving a lady. The readers see the screaming solely through the talks of the surviving characters³.

Manjula Padmanabhan, a multitalented lady who resides in New Delhi, India, has been honored with the prestigious Alexander S. Onassis Award for Theatre for her play *Harvest*. Padmanabhan is held in high esteem for her significant accomplishments in the fields of playwriting, cartooning, book writing, and artistic creation. She is the author of around six different theatrical performances. His father was a diplomat, and Manjula spent her formative years in Sweden, Pakistan, and Thailand. She is a product of her father's diplomatic career. *Kleptomania* is the title of a collection of short tales that she has written. "Escape" is the title of

¹ Vyas, M.N.A., *Echoes of Phallocentrism in Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out*. In *Modern Narratives in Literature, Cinema, Culture and Society Select Conference Papers of LUMOS, English Conference-2021* (p. 21).

² Khanna, A. and Singh, R., *Attitude Towards Women In The Selected Plays Of Manjula Padmanabhan*, Poile Sengupta And Kishwar Desai.

³ Biswas, P., 2022. *A Tale of Two Cities: Showcasing the façade of the Indian metropolis in Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out and Harvest*. In *The City Speaks* (pp. 217-228). Routledge India.

the author's most recent work, which emerged in the year 2008. Moreover, in addition to her employment as a journalist for a newspaper, she also participated in the production of comic strips. She came up with the creation of Suki, an Indian comedic character who appeared in the Sunday Observer in a serialized form. Prior to the year 1997, she accomplished the most of her success as a cartoonist, delivering a comic strip on a consistent basis to The Pioneer newspaper. In that year, she made her debut with her drama Harvest.

There have been a great number of Manjula Padmanabhan plays that have been adapted into films and television series. The play that is now being performed is called Lights Out, and it was written and performed by Manjula in the year 1986. It is a commemoration of Manjula's beginnings as a writer. "Body Blows: Women, Violence, and Survival: Three Plays" was the title of the collection that contained the play in the year 2002. Lights Out is a dramatic portrayal of an actual instance of sexual assault on women that took place in Santa Cruz, Bombay (now Mumbai), Maharashtra, India in 1982. The emphasis of this dissertation is on the play Lights Out, which is a theatrical representation of the true story. Kanin (1957), Kanin and Parcell (1977), Kirkpatrick and Kanin (1957), and Russell (1982) were the two primary sources that were utilized in order to determine the frequency of rapes committed against women in the early 1980s. The National Crime Survey (NCS), which was a nationwide survey of crime victims, and the "official" statistics from the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) were the two primary sources that were utilized. Despite this, academics were of the opinion that these data sources significantly underestimated the actual frequency of rape around the world. One example is the United Crime Report (UCR), which relies on documented crimes; nonetheless, a considerable proportion of rape

incidents are still not reported to the police. This play does an excellent job of depicting the collective inability of people to intervene, report, or file a complaint in reaction to a gang rape. On top of that, it brings to light the worries that are experienced by those who are witnesses to the wrongdoers.

Findings

The play does an excellent job of depicting the genuine hesitation to take part, the unwillingness to act, or the inability to make a decision that is final. As a married couple from the upper middle class, Leela and Bhasker have been experiencing the terrible noises of sexual harassment originating from a neighboring building on a daily basis. As a result of these noises, Leela is experiencing very high levels of worry as well as psychological suffering. Leela has a profound emotional response to these noises, which ultimately leads to her breaking down into fits of hysteria. In her subconscious, she is able to hear the victim's screams and have the ability to recognize the voice of the victim. No matter how many times Leela begs Bhasker to take decisive action against the perpetrators of the wrongdoing, he ignores her every request. Bhasker remains unfazed by all of these sounds and acts that are taking place⁴.

The first scene introduces Bhasker, a resident of an apartment located across from a freshly erected building. Although the building is ready for occupancy, it lacks a livable environment and is plagued by eerie sounds at night. His wife, Leela, who is fearful of the noises, expresses her concerns and asks him to discover a potential solution. Bhasker proposes several strategies to resolve the situation, including the practice of meditation and advising Leela to cultivate the ability to disregard the matter. He consistently evaluates the advantages and disadvantages without involving law enforcement. This is how the

⁴ Khanna, A. and Singh, R., 2024. Women and Violence In Selected Works Of Manjula Padmanabhan, Poile Sengupta And Kishwar Desai.

Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30(4), pp.6491-6498

average person's confusion and fear of the police system and investigation are portrayed. Indeed, they lack the capability to address the situation or participate in it. They find it difficult to decide whether or not to reveal this information to their friends or relatives.

"Leela: When you were away on tour, I couldn't sleep at night! And with all the windows shut, with all the curtains drawn, with cotton in my ears-the sound still came though! Even in the children's room, on the other side of the house, I could hear it!" (p.112).

Meanwhile, Naina, one of Leela's female acquaintances, together with her husband Surinder, unexpectedly arrive at their home. They also participate in the discussion and start interpreting things based on the evidence at hand. This clearly demonstrates the male perspective on the pain and hardship experienced by women. Leela informed Nainais that the peculiar sounds she is hearing are actually emanating from a local slum religious event. However, Naina becomes curious and gazes out of the window to ascertain the nature of the religious ceremony occurring. To her dismay, she discovers four males engaging in sexual assault against a woman. The audience/reader witnesses a terrible assault as they watch three guys holding a woman as the fourth attacks her, leaving her shaken⁵.

The male and female characters in the play engage in a discussion about a gang rape that occurs during the night, although none of them demonstrate a willingness to take any proactive measures. They possess a keen awareness of situations where a woman is experiencing injustice or being forced into participating in sexual activities. The location is a residence in Bombay, India. For over 50 years, there has been no specific legislation concerning women. The drama thoroughly explores the

societal dynamics described by Marx, focusing on the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressors. It also delves into the dominant male class who exert control over women, either by ownership or other means.

Leela and Naina, the female protagonists of the play, are profoundly impacted by the occurrence of rape and consistently implore the male characters to take resolute measures. The male characters in the play, specifically Bhasker and his associate Mohan, exhibit apathy towards the act of rape and actively strive to find rationalizations to evade any form of intervention. Mohan confesses his inclination to see the crime driven by curiosity and derive gratification from it, so exploiting the unfortunate circumstances of others. Some of the reasons against reporting the incident to the police included: the belief that unpleasant noises cannot cause harm; skepticism that the police would respond even if notified; reluctance to involve authorities in a domestic dispute; the possibility that the situation had religious significance and should not be interfered with; the assumption that a victim involved in sex work does not require protection; the question of why one should intervene if personally unaffected; the recognition that the perpetrators are human beings with their own issues; and the prospect of endless debates on the appropriate course of action. At that point, the sexual assault is concluded and the perpetrators have departed. The play's conclusion elicits a spine-chilling sensation⁶.

Padmanabhan uses the nonchalant demeanor of Bhasker and other male characters to depict the prevailing mentality of men, wherein they typically want to exert control over women, determining their thoughts, actions, and perceptions. The primary objective of Bhasker, along with his two companions

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Datta, A. and Deb, C., 2021. Politics of dark rooms and neurotic urbanity through Padmanabhan's

Lights Out. In *Beyond Consumption* (pp. 113-127). Routledge India

Mohan and Surinder, is to instill a sense of internal fear in the minds of Leela, her friend Naina, and Leela's domestic helper Frieda. By doing so, individuals can maintain and perpetuate the enduring dominance of the patriarchal system both within and beyond the household. The exhibition of male hegemony and female subjugation is clearly obvious in the film 'Lights Out'.

"The subjugation, the torture or the way our women suffer may be different but the age-old system of dominance over women by men will never end and they are and will always be victim in our male chauvinistic society" (p.88)

This clearly illustrates the societal attitudes and behaviors towards individuals who are considered 'others'. 'Other' refers to any distinction between the male and female genders that is not considered superior. Marxism posits that a classless society is an ideal that has not yet been realized, just as gender equality remains a distant aspiration.

Due to the middle-class perspective on prostitutes and the poor, there is a tolerance for situations where the poor are attacking one other or when local slum dwellers engage in religious ceremonies. Similarly, there is a tendency to dismiss the beliefs of illiterate individuals when it comes to demonic possession in women⁷.

In the second scenario, Mohan, a visitor, arrives at their home during dinner time. They participate in thorough deliberation over the issue. He has the belief that it is atypical to refrain from intervening when someone experiences an accident in our immediate vicinity.

"Mohan: It's unnatural not to look. It's unnatural not to get involved." (p.120)

Manjula attempted to get insight into the human psyche, particularly among the middle-class individuals in Indian society who tend to distance themselves from such matters. When unforeseen events occur, we are reminded of concepts such as humanity, values, society shifts, and inequality.

As we continue reading the play, we become engaged and anticipate that the characters will cease their discussions and take action. However, the outcome is highly disappointing, revealing that our culture, in which we want recognition, is to blame. Despite our own discomfort, we must not overlook the multitude of individuals in our vicinity whose lives deserve our attention.⁸

In the final scene, the characters are having dinner and contemplating various strategies to resolve the violent situation unfolding in the adjacent flat, although they ultimately refrain from taking any action. Ultimately, they contemplate capturing photographs and profiting by selling genuine images of the rape incident to news outlets and the media. One might witness the rapid transformation of thoughts within a short period of time. In India, these instances continue to recur persistently, despite the play's focus on crimes that occurred in 1986. A woman in Uttar Pradesh was subjected to a gang rape, and she reported that the perpetrators had recorded the assault using a cell phone (Reuters Africa, 2016). Perpetrators are increasingly using mobile phones to record their crimes, with the intention of using the recordings as a means of blackmail and to discourage victims from reporting to the authorities. An investigation conducted by The Independent (2016) has shown that there is evidence of graphic recordings showing gang rapes being sold in stores in Uttar Pradesh, which is a state located in the northern region of India. As a result of the recent increase in the

⁷ Basu, A. and Tripathi, P., Beyond Reproduction: An Epistemological Search for a "Woman" in Manjula Padmanabhan's and. Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, 15(1), pp.37-53

⁸ Ray, D., 2022. Postcolonial Indian city-literature: Policy, politics and evolution. Routledge

number of rape cases that have occurred in one of the most dangerous districts of the country, there has been considerable outrage and demands for the resignation of the chief minister. The video snippets, which range in length from thirty seconds to five minutes, are being sold in substantial numbers, with the potential to achieve hundreds or even thousands of transactions on a daily basis⁹.

Mohan, a friend of Bhasker's, plays the role of a cultural courtesan in the play. For example, he finds pleasure in perceiving women as objects of desire and actively participates in affairs of this kind.

Realist writing is another component of this play. Realist writing is a literary movement that places an emphasis on "objective reality" and tries to depict ordinary, daily happenings and life. The majority of people who exhibit this conduct are those who belong to the middle or lower socioeconomic groups, and there is no romantic idealization or exaggeration involved. It is possible to see it as an all-encompassing attempt to describe topics in accordance with their observed existence in a world that is objective, free of further particulars or personal interpretation, and following to rules that are both secular and empirical. Therefore, this approach assumes that reality exists independently of human conceptual frameworks, linguistic practices, and beliefs. It suggests that the artist can have knowledge or understanding of this reality and accurately express it. Due to societal norms, women are frequently perceived as occupying a subordinate position in relation to men. The woman's status and suffering are evident in the dynamic between two influential individuals: firstly, an older guy who wields dominant power and exerts control over her, and

secondly, a woman who becomes a tool of his authority¹⁰.

Manjula's instructions are highly detailed and precise, and her skillful use of language and props produces an incredibly lifelike experience, giving little choice but to fully embrace realism. Her utilization of time closely aligns with the duration required to perform the performance. Temporal movement in this play follows a linear and uninterrupted evolution, without any possibility of traversing time in different directions. In the first scene, Bhasker arrives home after his day at work. Scene Two depicts the moment when it is time to have dinner. Scene Three depicts the characters partaking in a meal, which serves as the concluding scene of the play. After confirming that the occurrence was true and similar to the events in the play, a group of ordinary middle-class people chose to quietly witness a woman being brutally mistreated at a nearby house in 1982. This provides substantiation that society has remained static and unchanged up to the present day. Manjula argues that the increasing indifference of individuals is the main factor driving the rising crime rate in society. The Marxist critique urges us to contemplate the essential significance of class conflict and the significant function of economic forces and social ties in molding both society and literary works¹¹.

India should adopt stringent rules for women, similar to those in Western nations. Social equality is a prerequisite for achieving the anticipated societal transformation. It is the sole solution that instills accountability within society.

⁹ Kuhad, U., 2021. Science Fiction and Indian Women Writers: Exploring Radical Potentials. Routledge India.

¹⁰ Pal, S., Karna in the Modern Kurukshetra: Myth and Marginalization in The God of Small Things. Literary Voice, p.120.

¹¹ Chaudhary, N., Rahaman, S.A.H., Kaushik, A., Bora, M.B., Parray, A.H., Gupta, T., Singha, B., Maheswari, S., Sharma, S.L., Bhayana, G. and Chishti, H., Literary Voice.

Conclusion

The development of a new social framework that is capable of effectively controlling global social justice is required in order to guarantee the humanity of things. In order to ensure that our political and economic institutions are suitable for the coming century, it is necessary to undergo a comprehensive restructuring of these organizations. Furthermore, it should suggest that a coordinated effort is being made with the intention of tackling the political and environmental concerns that are interwoven and very complicated in the present period of globalization. In order to raise awareness among people and to underline the influence and repercussions that socioeconomic disparities have on the cultures and social structures of countries, it is vital to show real-life scenarios and socioeconomic injustices in a more prominent manner. Padmanabhan wrote her play with the sole intention of bringing about a change in the circumstances of countries that are economically disadvantaged. Particularly in comparison to other countries, emerging nations are more susceptible to the effects of inequality. Rai (2006) argues that Manjula places a particular emphasis on the vocalizations of a lady who is experiencing significant emotional distress. All aspects of women's life are subject to violence, and this is the case for all women. The violent conduct in question exhibits a number of different aspects. Not only does it entail the physical traits, but it also often encompasses mental, emotional, and sexual aspects as well. Due to the fact that the issue is very complicated, unobtrusive, and tough to comprehend, it is not only challenging to identify but also far more challenging to resolve (p.22).

Despite the fact that there are a number of case studies, according to Ottens and Hotelling (2001), only a limited number of them do an in-depth analysis of the efficiency of legislation and government programs that are particularly relevant to women. Furthermore,

there is a lack of assessment about the effectiveness of the educational efforts that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) undertake with the purpose of enhancing awareness, preventing and treating cases of rape and other types of sexual victimization, as well as the effectiveness of people's responses to reports of sexual assault. This increasing awareness will assist address the paucity of knowledge in these areas and provide light on effective measures to minimize incidences of rape and other types of sexual victimization against women. This will be accomplished via partnership with social activists and groups for women.

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