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**“FEMININE SENSIBILITY” IN THE SELECT PLAY OF MANJULA PADMANABHAN’S
LIGHTS OUT**

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ABSTRACT

Play/Drama is a revelatory genre that vocalizes human emotions and explores the possible hidden and biting realities of individual, group, politics and society. The text, the stage and performance validate the purpose of a dramatist. Many a playwrights have adopted the genre of multipurpose to revoke against injustice, evoke the awareness to refine the individual, to rationalize the social evil and rejuvenate the victims who identify themselves with the characters.

Manjula Padmanabhan is a versatile, prolific and radical Indian woman writer reverberating the painful echoes of her respective community and surrounding. She is known for her fiction, plays which echo the voice of voiceless of the woman in different parts of the country. She also outstands in the milestones of bringing front the feminine sensibility in the transient stage of contemporary India.

The play *Lights Out* is mainly focusing on the marginalization and Sensibility of women. Manjula Padmanabhan tries to point out the miserable life of the woman's life in India. This play witnesses all emotional and physiological devastation that a woman undergo.

Feminine sensibility means the sentiments of a woman, as it is concerned with a woman's feeling and emotions to her own miseries and circumstances. Through her sensibility we can recognize her psychology or longing. This paper has intended to explore and study the feminine psyche and sensibility of the protagonists in particular in the work of Manjula Padmanabhan and Indian women predicament in general at the backdrop of Mumbai Urban and patriarchal society.

Keywords: Sensibility, Emotional, Psychological, Women, Play/Drama.

Manjula Padmanabhan was born in Delhi in 1953, the daughter of a diplomat, and her childhood was spent in Sweden, Pakistan and Thailand. Her primary education has been in Kodaikanal, Tamilnadu and college in Mumbai. She now lives in New Delhi. She is also a skilled, talented and a multi-faceted personality, as she is a playwright, a cartoonist, a novelist and an artist. She is known internationally only after her play *Harvest* was selected from around 1500 entries from about 75 countries to win the first prize in the Alexander S.

Onassis Award for Theatre, at Athens, in September 1997.

In our traditional Indian society nobody tried to observe a woman's deep feeling or emotional response. They did not have any human rights to talk about her feelings and her dissatisfaction about destiny is of no account; she had been treated as a lower-caste.

Sensibility reflects the sense of ability to feel or perceive. It also depicts the refined awareness and appreciation in matters of feeling. The

sensibility or sensitiveness illustrates the quality or condition of being emotionally and intuitively sensitive. Females are well known for their sentiments, sensations, emotions, sensitiveness or sensitivity. The term is also used in a different sense in modern criticism, being a characteristic method of a given writers depiction of deep feelings while responding mentally and sensitively to experience.

Sensibility refers to a sensitive consciousness or attentiveness towards something, such as, the emotions of another. It is closely connected with studies of sense perception as the means through which knowledge or information is gathered. It is also related with sentimental moral philosophy.

Therefore, sensibility is all about the method of feeling. The word 'sensibility' points out the receptiveness of the senses and refers to the psycho-perceptual system. It indicates the function of the nervous system and the material basis for consciousness.

Feminine sensibility means the sentiments of a woman, as it is concerned with a woman's feeling and emotions to her own miseries and circumstances. Through her sensibility we can recognize her psychology or longing. On the whole it is a kind of reaction towards action. Thus, feminine sensibility is the matter of soft and pure emotions of a woman's heart. The feelings which she stores in her heart and had capacity to overwhelm her surroundings. The sensibility has the depths of sea and heights of sky.

In the Play Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights House* The Protagonist Leela and Bhasker is a young couple living happily with their children in an attractive looking apartment in a Mumbai suburb. Leela finds it difficult to keep herself as a passive observer of a woman being molested just outside her house. The rude and loud voices dread her continuously, which traumatized her mental state. The actual crime happens only in the evening. But the impact of it is felt terribly by Leela. She started imagining things. The fear goes to the extent that she gets frightened of getting mad.

Through the character of Leela, the dramatist throws light on the sensitive nature of female section of the society. Leela, as a housewife appears very perturbed and disgusted over what happens

outside their flat; she is almost hysterical as in her sub-consciousness she keeps on hearing the frightful voices of the victim when the latter is brutalized by the perpetrators of the crimes or the horrible scenes of crime keep floating in front of her mental eyes. She wants her husband to act by calling the police or take some steps for stopping this dastardly act on a hapless woman.

As this crime is committed continuously for many days at the appointed time and in a similar fashion, Leela, as the evening approaches, becomes alarmingly upset and acutely nervous. She undergoes trauma due to her hypersensitive nature and the insensitive attitude of her husband. The restricted surroundings make the women suffer intensely, due to which she reacts silently. So as C.S. Lakshmi in *Body Blows: Women Violence and Survival (2000)* says,

The violence in a woman's life often has no outward signs like a gash on the body or a body or a bullet in its crevices. It can seem bloodless, often. It can enter one's life as a newspaper item or the shattered or destroyed body of another woman. In whichever way it enters a woman's life, it remains a collective memory of experiences, where we are both participants and viewers. Every woman has known this demon. Some have battled with the demon and some have slain it. This demon has the capacity to change its nature and form, and hide itself in the most unlikely of places. But like ancient goddesses, one have to become *simhavahinis* and sit on our lions, the lions of expression, to battle with this demon. (Lakshmi C.S. xii, xiii)

Through the character of Leela, only a woman can understand the pains and angst of another woman; the victim in the play is in no way related to Leela, still she feels some sort of connection, rather than a blood relationship or a sense of belonging with the victim; She feels that it is not only the poor woman outside alone is being violated, rather she feels blows on her own body and soul.

Leela is occupied with fear and impending horrors that she even avoids to look outside the

window. She perceives the horrors of rape and has a realization of the horror of the self-respect of a woman. She finds herself humiliated and terrified. Leela is so frightened by the noise. She fears to go outside. Leela takes the issue with the human concern.

By keeping the window shut one wants to avoid facing reality but the ticking of mental watch in Leela's sub-consciousness makes her hysterical at the approach of evening. Psychiatrist Paul Chodoff in his work *Hysterical Personality: A Re-evaluation* (1965) argued that women's powerlessness led patients to find control through hysterical behaviors. Further, he argued that the root of the condition was of a patriarchal derivation. He wrote,

Women suffer these afflictions or behave in this fashion not because of anything inherent in their nature. Rather, they are prone to hysteria because of cultural and environmental forces. A major component of these forces is male domination as through the ages men have produced, or rather have invented, the myth of a unique femininity. (HPAR 546)

Leela never seen the crime but the nasty sounds by the criminals and the cries of the victim during assault make her understand the brutality of act and leave an unforgettable imprint on her mind whereas men's involvement in meaningless arguments becomes a ploy in their hands to thwart any attempt by woman to raise her head:

Leela: (Struggling in his half-embrace.) But their sounds come inside, inside my nice clean house, and I can't push them out! (Stops struggling.) If only they didn't make such a racket, I wouldn't mind so much! (Pause during which Bhasker rocks her gently.) Why do they have to do it here? Why can't they go somewhere else?

Bhasker: (Taking a deep breath.) Leela, the thing to do is not let them disturb you like this. Pretend they're not there...

Leela: But how? I can't help hearing them? They're so— so, loud! And rude! How can I make myself deaf just for them!

Bhasker: (Let's go of her.) But see— I'm not deaf and I'm not disturbed by them!

Leela: I don't understand how you do it.(LO 8)

The difference in approach is that a woman always has feministic sense of belongingness and identifies herself with the victim while a male fails to understand the delicate mind and sensitivity of women.

Leela is frustrated with the screams and sounds she hears every day in their vicinity. She accuses her husband's carelessness in lodging a complaint. The following lines reveal the husbands casual attitude.

Leela: (wheedlingly). Can't you call the police? Just for me?

Bhasker:(drawing away). No.

Leela:But why not?

Bhasker:We've discussed this before

Leela: I know, I know you've told me they're not interested in cases like this, they don't bother about minor little offenses but but I'm frightened! Can't you see that? Isn't that enough? (LO 5)

Leela becomes paranoid about the noises in the next building to such an extent that she stops to send the children out. She spends the whole day with the door shut, curtains closely drawn and stuffing her ears with cotton to avoid the sound. Leela feels that they are in fact making themselves responsible, revealing the active role a woman assumes in the making of society in spite of being conformed to the four walls.

For Leela the body-violation is the most horrific crime with which no woman can come to terms with, while for men like Bhasker it is just an everyday incident, because Manjula Padmanabhan opines that man cannot identify with what happens inside the heart of a woman on issues related with the purity of body and soul, But for a man a woman is an object of play and to have pleasure with her body.

Leela's behavior gradually becomes neurotic and she does not wish to call any guest to her home for the fear of those voices being detected by them. Her peace of mind completely shatters and she rejects the idea of listening to music because "the sound will make me tense, I can't bear any sound

anymore.” (LO10) To relax herself, she takes recourse to yoga but could not ignore the impact of the cries of the woman, coming from the nearby unfinished building. She gets disturbed with the voices so much as she asks her husband, “Am I going?”(LO 12).

Leela though sophisticated in nature, has clear-cut subjugation, suffocation, chocking of rights of her, blocking the space etc. Women in India are still not completely independent. Even if they are educated, they have to be dependent on a lot of issues on men. The play even after strongly advocating women’s rights does not remain a feminist play.

Leela’s protests have turned into hysterical cries and screams. She wants to be freed from the everyday torment. The men want to help her. However, helping her means plunging into the event happening outside! This is what they want to avoid. Thus they avoid Leela’s pleas also. Inside the house (Leela) or outside (raped woman), they stand marginalized emotionally and physically.

Thus, Manjula Padmanabhan through her character Leela, effaces the margins of her social that has canvass to work within frame of social set. The wider spectrum of visualization of the writer Manjula Padmanabhan has risen the writer’s art of storytelling unbounded by the exigencies of time. Leela Though educated and housewife by profession and a real human being tampered by fate and sharpened by sensibility, chiselled by conventions shaped by desire, she is a woman grows to be a human unpermitted by any outer external force but by the desire of heart. Manjula Padmanabhan showcases all the negative forces that cripple women’s feeling and emotions.

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