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Pankaj D Rathod

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English,

Sardar Patel University,

Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat, India

djdacharya@yahoo.com

Urban Ideology and Culture in Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out

Abstract: According to Oscar Wilde, theatre is “the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what is to be a human being.” Theatre/cinema is the best medium to bring social change in the society. Theatre is helpful to highlight the various issues such as community, culture, ideology, social change, feminism in the Indian colours. We find women as the headlines of almost all the newspaper daily in India. They become the victim of male dominated ideology and culture and the issues like rape/gang rape, exploitation, harassment etc have become normal in the society. So the theatre is helpful to present the burning issues of female psyche and ideology in India. My research paper draws attention towards ideology, culture and social structure of urban India in Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out. This play also highlights the female psyche and their existence at present in India and Indian literature.

Keywords: Culture, Ideology, Indian theatre, Indian literature.

Manjula Padmanabhan is a modern English playwright and writes about real urban culture of Indian society. Her dramatic works delineate the various psychological situations such as

women's emotions, desires, aspirations, frustrations, moral integrity and social predicaments of urban India.

Lights Out finds out the relationship between social change and urbanization. It can be traced at four inter-related levels. The first level is ideological, which tries to understand the effects of globalization and capitalism in urban area. Culture is the second level; it tries to see the effects of ideology. Third level is Urban, it highlights the change in urban structure of society. Lastly the fourth level is community; it depicts the growth and development in community.

Woman lives in the shadow of male ideology and culture from the ancient times. Violence on woman's body and gender discrimination is the central idea of the Lights Out. Here woman becomes a victim of male ideology and what is the actual situation of gang raped woman. She has discussed only a problem (gang rape) but has not provided any solution to the problem.

Still research is being done on gender discrimination of women in India and my paper tries to find out the possible remedy for women and violence. Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out represents gender discrimination on women. Here woman becomes a mouthpiece of Indian culture and ideology. The gang rape of a woman is the focal point of the play and the setting of the play is urban area. Here the man is not doing the rape but enjoying the female body. The play describes the rape culture and man's ideological thinking on such issues. The play is also unexpected in terms of men ideology and culture because Bhaskar and Mohan get scopophilic joy in gang rape and even called the victim a 'whore'.

The victim's pain showed us multi-layer of the text. After Roland Barthes's The Death of an Author, reader is at the centre so we can think of different layers of the play. First, the representation of the characters, Bhaskar and Mohan are sarcastic and enjoying the pleasure on victim's situation. Second, the women characters, Leela and Naina of the play have feeling for the victim but could not do anything against the male ideology. Third, the real situation of India is presented by the playwright that Indian people more worried about themselves rather crime.

Nobody wants to go police station or court for others. Fourth is about the modern culture in the metro cities where this type of incident happened in each corner of the city due to western influence.

Bhasker and Leela are the representatives of Indian society but could not raise their voice against the male centric ideology. Apart from that Mohan represents the narrow man's ideology towards women and their culture. He is a typical, orthodox and traditional husband of Indian culture. Leela and Naina wanted to call police but Mohan is not ready to call. He says that she is a whore as "she's with four men at once". (Chandra, 116)

Bhasker gives example of a whore and a decent woman. He says, "A whore is not decent, so a whore cannot be raped." (117) Mohan believes that a decent woman can be raped. He also compared woman with man. He even told her wife that "woman is vulnerable to rape". (119) In a rape, man controls the female body. In the same way, sometime man also controls the language to show their domination over the female culture. Mohan takes this incident in casual manner and believes that no one has a time to call the police. He adds on saying, "These things go on all the time, all over the city-who are we to interfere?" (118)

This shows the mind set of Indian man in the society and how woman's ideology and culture is caught in the web of man in this play. Leela is married to Bhasker and living in the city. She is disturbed by the noise of a rape and she says, "But their sounds come inside, inside my nice clean house, and I can't push 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?" (88) This shows that she has a feeling for the victim but she is under the influence of man so she could not do anything. She becomes a mere spectator of the crime. She says, "I want the police to come and clear them away. I do not want to go there myself!" (Italics in the text) (89)

All the female characters, Leela, the Rape-victim, Naina and Frieda represent Indian ideologies and its culture and try to raise/ fight against men but could not get success at the end. Naina also tries to raise the issue but her husband Surinder did not give her permission.

Conclusion:

Thus, urbanisation is an important social framework to reproduce the new relationship of globalisation and capitalism and Manjula Padmanabhan highlights the modern culture and ideology of Indian society in this play. Lights Out presents the change/transition in urbanisation at different levels, such as ideological, cultural and their effects. She presents the invisible issue of Indian society in the play with her artistic skills of theatre. She has also tried to represent the present scenario of India but did not give any solution to it. The social change will be remaining on the papers if we will not think about the proper action against the social evils of the society. We are living in the democratic world but still need to find out the genuine solution for the various issues like gender discrimination, poverty, communal violence, casteism etc.

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