**SEMESTER II**

**Paper 3: ENG-HC-2016 Indian Writing in English**

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**LIGHTS OUT: INTRODUCTION**

MANJULA PADMANABHAN

Out of the few Indian English Dramatists, Manjula Padmanabhan talks about the problems of Gender in Indian society. In her play, Lights Out, (2000) she is engaged in a discussion about the attitude of women towards themselves as well as society’s attitude towards women. The play is a feminist (নারীবাদী) play which brings one’s attention to the sad and deplorable condition of women in Indian society.

Padmanabhan started this play as a piece of journalism based on a friend’s account of how she and a group of people were witnesses to a gang rape in their neighbourhood. They were informed that it was a regular occurrence and the residents adjust their daily schedules accordingly. About the writing of the play the dramatist says that the Bombay’s Sunday Observer could not see any “news” in the story, as it was a year old. It can mostly be presented as a general piece about crimes against women, she was told. She wrote this play, first performed as an excellent reading in Madras, and later in Bombay and Delhi. It was also filmed for television.

The main issue of the play is that in domestic problems which prevail in every house hold, women is the silent sufferer and is subjected to both mental and physical abuse day after day. She is forced to live as a mute victim of psychological and emotional trauma of everyday existence replete with seen/unseen violence. As the play unfolds, the reader or audience is bound to realise that woman in her roles of wife, mother or daughter suffers domestic abuse. Manjula Padmanabhan handles this sensitive issue with great care.

Padmanabhan’s ‘Lights Out’ is a realistic play that can happen anywhere in India. The main theme of the play is associated with a sensitive issue a ‘gang rape’, giving rise to various questions related to the exploitation of women in the society and home. The role of women in the world is designated by a man ever since history has been written. Padmanabhan throws light on man-women relationships and the patriarchal (পিতৃশাসিত) power that rule the society. A woman is always seen playing a secondary and meek role to a man. The status of the woman and the plight of her suffering between two influential beings firstly a man, who with his age old dominant power has a control on woman and secondly a woman who turns into an instrument under his authority.

‘Light’s Out’ is a play based on the real incident that has taken place in Santa Cruz , Mumbai in 1982. Padmanabhan shows us a world in which woman has identity crisis, her every utterance is made silent ; she begs men for independence and tells them about her troubles and finds no help in return. The play is set in sixth floor apartment, in Mumbai which belongs to upper middle class married couple Leela and Bhaskar. They have been hearing to sounds of sexual crimes and cries from their neighbouring building.

The dramatist displays the reactions of women and men regarding the sexual assault and an urgent need to look at the growing demand of feminine point of view. The characters keep delaying calling the police as they keep wondering how they should attack the rapists. They keep having arguments and discussions when already time is running out of their hands. The rape victim is all the while crying for help, but Leela, Bhaskar, and their friends cannot agree on a single way to stop the rapists. It is frustrating for the readers and audience when the characters ignore the time they have left in their hands to stop the rapists.

Mohan, Bhasker’s friend adds a new dimension to the typical male response a crime to be depicted in the play. He expresses his curiosity over how often one can stand and watch a crime being committed right in one’s presence. The conversation that follows between Mohan and Bhasker throws light on the voyeuristic pleasure one derives by watching an act of crime. The discussion reveals that the crime is a rape and for sure that the two men take pleasure in discussing it.

Although the characters at first show a desire to interfere or stop the crime from happening, they all do not realise the seriousness of the matter. In the end, the victim has stopped shouting and there is a feeling that the audience and the readers get that the rape is over and that nothing can be done to undo it. But the characters do not show any intention of calling the police even at the end. Even if the women characters want badly to help the victim, they cannot do it because their husbands don’t want them to. The lack of freedom for the women to help other women is also highlighted by Padmanabhan.