



SOCIETAL STEREOTYPES AND GENDER EGALITARIANISM IN MANJULA PADMANABHAN'S PLAY LIGHT'S OUT

Mr. S. Koteeswaran

*Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Nallamuthu Gounder Mahalingam College,
Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, India.*

Dr. Mariammal

*Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Nallamuthu Gounder Mahalingam College,
Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, India.*

Abstract:

Indian dramatists Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan highlight the persistent gender inequality in Indian society, particularly in the context of gang rape. Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out* highlights the reluctance of men to rescue women in trouble, highlighting the impact of patriarchy and gender disparity on society. The play highlights the societal stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality, such as the assumption that men are more courageous and capable of handling any issue. The play also highlights the societal stigma surrounding women, highlighting the need for gender egalitarianism to address these issues. Despite the brutalization of women, Naina, a character in the play, advocates for gender equality, challenging the conventional notions of societal stereotypes. Gender egalitarianism aims to reduce gender to equalities, challenging societal stereotypes and promoting gender equality. Padmanabhan's play serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the need for a more inclusive society.

Patriarchal conventions and the suppression women witness in the world have not been abolished completely. Indian dramatists in English such as Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan bring the gender disparity of elite Indian society into limelight. Manjula Padmanabhan is meticulous in unfolding the gender, social, and cultural inequality that still exists strongly in Indian society. Her play *Lights Out* throws light on the contemporary issues raised by conventional notions. The play can be interpreted from multi-dimensional perspectives. It centers on various responses of different people to a single issue that takes place in a constraint way. The play is based on a real-life incident. The dramatist's friend has described a gang rape that took place near her residence. It has shocked the author, and her trauma echoes in the play. *Lights Out* vividly pictures the people's reluctantness to rescue someone who is in trouble. The writer is more concerned about the gender issues that take place in a family in the room. It is more important than the gang rape that happened outside.



In the play *Lights Out*'s introduction, she firmly asserts her beliefs against patriarchy and gender disparity. She states, "For me, the breakthrough was that the conversations in the room were more important than the event outside." Patriarchy and immoral conventions remain threats to civil society. Being conventional against injustice even after attaining literacy questions whether education and modernity really pave the way to assert the idea of being civilized. The writer is particular to show that even the educated people of elite society remain uncivilized since their dominant attitude towards women echoes in the play.

Gosta Espring and Andersent, in their research article entitled "Gender Egalitarianism and Resurgent Family," propose that gender inequality is the major cause for the erosion of the family. They focus on various kinds of egalitarianism, and they concluded their article with an expectation to see a resistance in family as the revolution of women's role moves from its infancy into maturity. Manjula Padmanabhan is meticulous in unleashing the gender politics in educated and elite Indian society in her play *Lights Out*. Many men in such a familial setup treat women physically, mentally, economically, and intellectually inferior. They commit violence on many occasions. All the male characters in the play demonstrate patriarchy in the name of conventions. The external issue that troubles Leela in the play forces her to seek the help of the male characters to save someone who is in trouble.

It is vivid that genetically, many women believe that only men are more courageous and they can venture into any kind of issue. Such notion enables men to assess and treat women as inferior. Suriendhar in the play asserts a patriarchal idea that men should not take women's suggestions into consideration while making decisions: "SURINDER: You Shut Up! This is no time for Women's Nonsense!" (*Lights out*, 52). He was not ready to listen to Leela and Naina since they are women.

The dramatist treats the woman who is sexually harassed outside the room and the women who are mentally harassed in the play alike. In fact, the conversation that takes place in the room troubles her more than the event that happened outside. She states in the introduction of the play, "For me, the breakthrough was that the conversation within the room was more important than the events outside. Once I had understood that, some of the other elements of the play fell into place. The verbal descriptions, the endless discussions about what to do and whether to do anything, with little or no compassion to spare for the victim" (*Lights out*).

Anne E. McDaviel, in her research article entitled "Measuring Gender Egalitarianism: The Attitudinal Difference between Men and Women," discusses the difference between men's and women's attitudes towards gender equality. She explores the causes and effects of gender egalitarianism in both western and non-western countries.

She concludes that egalitarianism asserts the need for gender equality for familial bonds. Though Naina in the play *Lights Out* is depicted as subject to oppression, she doesn't fail to voice for gender equality. Her argument with other men's characters asserts her firm determination for equality. Men's notion in the play is to make a wrong assessment of the woman who is being raped than the men who rape her. Gender politics falls on such notions to degrade the status of the victim more than the rapists.

BHASKER. A decent woman would never be with four men at once.

NAINA. But she could have been abducted from somewhere, been brought here, and...

MOHAN. Decent women would never submit to this sort of thing.

LEELA. (Dully) If she's a whore, does it mean you won't call the police? (*Lights out, 45*)

The dramatist focuses on the stereotyped view of assessing people based on their condition. Men characters in the play give various reasons for their reluctance to rescue the woman who is in trouble. They think that the sufferer could be a whore, and so they are not ready to help her. Naina in the play shows her agony by interrogating Bhasker, who was of the view that the whores are subjected to being raped.

BHASKER. If she's a whore, Leela, then this isn't rape... So on what grounds could we call the police?

NAINA. Why? A whore can't be raped? Is that law?

MOHAN. Oh, come on! After all, what is rape?

NAINA. (uncertainly) Rape is ... when a women is forced ... to have sex- (*Lights out, 45*)

Except Naina, all other characters in the play accept the brutalization of the woman, assuming that the victim could be whore. Leela, another female character in the play, has the conventional notion towards the victim. "LEELA. (with distaste) A whore is a woman without shame. NAINA. But does that mean that only decent women can be raped? (*Lights out, 45*)".

Naina voices against the shameless attitude of ignoring the brutalization of women to avoid confrontations. Gender egalitarianism is a belief that demonstrates that men and women are equal and they both should be treated as such with equal rights and responsibilities. Naina in the play advocates for gender egalitarianism. She says, "But if men are too indecent to be raped, does it mean that men are whores?" (*Lights out, 48*). Gender egalitarianism reconstructs the attitudes and behaviors of individuals. It reduces the gender to equalities.



Societal stereotype denotes the conventional practices that people follow without justifying the ideology. Manjula Padmanabhan makes an attempt to mend the social milieu by voicing against gender inequality and social injustice. She unfolds her agony by interrogating the character of Naina against societal stereotypes.

Reference

1. Padmanabhan, Manjula. Blood and Laghter. UK: Hachette Book Publishing India Pvt.Ltd. 2020 print.
2. Gosta Espring, Andersent "Gender Egalitarianism and Resurgent Family". Stato e mercato. 2014. Vol.100.Pp 127 - 144. 11 July 2024.
<www.jstor.org/stable/24650931>
3. Anne E.McDaviel. "Measuring Gender Egalitarianism: The Attitudinal Difference between Men and Women" International Journal of Sociology. 2008. Vol. 38. Pp 58 - 80. 11 July 2024
<www.jstor.org/stable/20628319>