**“Lights Out”** by **Manjula Padmanabhan** : A Comprehensive study (2)

‘Lights Out’ is an outstanding piece of literature which can light up the mind up the viewers by inducing them to think sincerely over the issues presented on the stage. The play is unique for its bringing out a social evil and its addressing of some other relevant issues centring such an evil. The playwright intends to put across a message to her audience about the need of realizing how it is necessary to challenge the conventional image of women and also about the power of women. Women have to suffer under the present social codes determined by patriarchy and the playwright in this regard very pragmatically highlights the essential causes behind the exploitation and violence against women in the play. There is display of an honest sense of social commitment on the part of the playwright and the work becomes a piece of beauty due to the amount of sensitivity with which she goes to present the problems.

Padmanabhan apparently does not adopt any romantic, fanciful ways to portray the problems in the play, but Leela- one of the characters of the play is found expressing her emotions regarding the sufferer with high intensity-which lends some subtle subjectivity to the work. It is also the poignancy of the human concerns of the play which lends upon the play its essential aesthetic beauty.

Through the play the playwright makes a very powerful plea for understanding the feminine sensibilities in a world which hardly allows woman to be independent, strong, organized and focused. The playwright by writing the play pleads to raise the voice against injustice and indignity to mankind. She wants to sensitize the common man about the rampant social evils around them. Her purpose is not just to state an issue, she rather tries to investigate the causes behind the evils. She also looks into the impacts borne by the society from injustice. As a result, the viewers can know what is just and right.

As regards to this play, one realizes that man cannot solve his problems by isolating himself from his fellow beings. She shows that many times our bondages to certain traditions and social norms too lead to the rise in the evil issues. Similarly, individualism too adds to our failure to solve many of our big social issues. Individualism many times leave us to remain tied to orthodox norms, traditions. We live in self-made cocoons beyond which we do not want to come out. In the play that is the plight with most of the characters. They remain so engrossed to the claims of ‘self’ that they forget what the society may demand from them. In today’s society, there is a growth of the rich middle class society and the members of this society are least concerned about their surroundings. Their sensibility is tuned in such a way that they become indifferent towards the events happening around them. The playwright makes her pen to affect the sensibility of the viewers, to the level of awakening them from their self-induced slumber, from their comfort-driven dreams and thus to sensitize them about the need to face the reality.

The play also contains the playwright’s feminine perspectives on some social practices. She intends to expose them as she finds them to be ineffective for the progress of the society. Women in the society by and large face subordination and oppression by men due to the traditional material structure of the society as a whole. Feminists want to change the social world, so they cannot much respect the past descriptions of social institutions. As men of letters, the intelligentsia can do a lot to protect the rights of women and to check their exploitations in the name of male hegemony. The existing mode of social conduct does not give women opportunities to live decent life. It is good to see that a consciousness has been growing in the society against the cycle of exploitation against women and that this consciousness has been especially becoming a part of the psyche of modern man. Yet, there is much left to be done for a proactive resistance of exploitation upon the womenfolk. As is being seen, everybody distances himself /herself from saving a sufferer-they remain passive observers-not desiring to directly involve themselves in the matters which are not related to the personal life.

In the play we are shown that a gang rape has been going on for a week and nobody is ready to do anything to either intervene the act or to book the culprits. The husband and the wife just whirls away time by talking upon the indecent activities outside their windows. Bhaskar—the husband is least bothered about it, while Leela- the ‘wife’ feels ‘tense’ and frightened. Leela of course pleads her husband to go to the police for informing about it but the response from the other side is: “There’s nothing we can do about it. We just have to ignore it.” With the arrival of Mohan, however, things change a little; but still they are found speculating whether it could be a case of exorcism only where the body of the women could be possessed by an evil spirit and the others might be trying to push out the spirit from her body by beating her.

Leela and Naina stand in contrast to the men and they agree about the possibility of the case being the rape of some woman. They try to find whether the woman could be a whore. Thus, it is seen that nobody could think deeply about the condition of the helpless woman. Now everybody is found proposing some unpractical ways to a solution to the problem. They also think of using weapons like knives, rods and acid against the gang- all this but only reflect the silly behaviours of the characters. Then, to top it all, they decide to take photographs of the scene of gang rape for earning money by selling them to the media and as soon as they prepare to go out, the screams cease and when they look out of the window, they see nothing in the neighboring building. Such a dramatic end of the play further intensifies the passivity of these characters vis-à-vis an issue as serious as sexual assault upon a woman in their vicinity.

The playwright through the play arouses the horror associated with the sexual assault upon women and at the same time she provokes the viewers to feel disgust and anger towards the passive spectators of such abuses and assaults. Thus, the focal points of the play are largely: to draw the attention of the viewers to the prevailing conditions and the problems of women, the apathy and insensitivity of the educated citizens to hold an cudgel against such acts of cruelty and subjugation, the indirect control of the patriarchal power in the relationship of man and woman , the socio-cultural level of the status of women in our society (our social structures being severely biased against women).