

Manjula Padmanabhan: Framework of Violence and Gender Relations

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ABSTRACT

When her play Harvest received the Onassis International Cultural Competitions Prize for Theatrical Plays in 1997, Manjula Padmanabhan became the first Indian English playwright to receive international acclaim for her writing abilities. Human exploitation in the 21st century is the subject of Harvest. A non-traditionalist in terms of subject matter, she is a well-known playwright. She focuses on issues of marginalization and exclusion. What sets her apart as a playwright is her ability to conjure up a universe that is both intimidating and disgusting.

Introduction

Novelist, short story writer, playwright, cartoonist, and illustrator Manjula Padmanabhan (b.1953) Twenty-four children's books have been drawn by her, eleven of which she wrote herself. From 1982 to 1986, her comic strip character Suki appeared in Mumbai's The Sunday Observer, and from 1986 to 1997, it appeared in New Delhi's The Pioneer. This is Suki! (2000) and Double Talk (2001) are two compilations of Suki cartoons (2005). Suki is now featured every Saturday in Business Line's magazine, The Saturday Magazine (Chennai). Kleptomania (2004), Three Virgins and Other Stories (1996), and Hot Death, Cold Soup (1996) are all collections of short stories (2013). One of Padmanabhan's best-known works is Escape (2008), followed by The Island of Lost Girls (1915). (1999). Harvest (1998), her sixth play, received the Onassis International Cultural Competitions Prize for Theatrical Plays in 1997, making her a household name around the world. Hidden Fires, a collection of five monologues, was published in 2003. Astro-Nuts, an Intergalactic Comedy is her most recent play (2007).

Violence and Gender Relations:

Using Manjula Padmanabhan's plays as an example, this study examines how the women characters' perceptions, attitudes and inner struggles are represented in their actions and relationships with other men/women. It is easy to discern throughout Padmanabhan's plays that the inner longing for liberation from social labels is what drives the female characters. The chapter also explores the various ways in which women are forced into gender roles. In her plays, gender relations and gender roles highlight the oppressive nature of human society in which women are denied the opportunity to act autonomously and their voices are strangled by male ego-centredness and indifference..

When compared to other types of writing, drama or theatre is an extremely powerful medium for conveying social ills. As a result, drama plays a pivotal role in literature, which makes it an excellent vehicle for exposing all forms of tyranny. These women playwrights have demonstrated their ability to put these topics to the stage via their works. The plays Lights Out and Harvest, by Manjula Padmanabhan, are essential to the canon of female theatre.

With Padmanabhan, we've seen a departure from the traditional male playwright model, both in terms of style and subject matter. Her plays add to the search for humanity's resemblance in a modern metropolitan existence on an existential level. Plays are set in a city flat, where the actors find themselves engaged in intense human tragedies characterised by escalating tensions, erupting crises, unravelling relationships, and the general feeling of urban claustrophobia.

Padmanabhan's plays show the same kind of evolution. As huge mirrors, her texts encourage society to reflect its genuine self in them; they also persuade men and women to modify their gross self. Her first play, Lights Out, is a debate piece that amplifies the voices of women. This is an on-stage demonstration of dissent. Body Blows–Women, Violence, and Survival–Three Plays was written and originally presented at Mumbai's Prithvi Theatre in 1986 and then published in 2000.

Padmanabhan juxtaposes a group of family members and their response to rape and physical mutilation, two of society's most horrifying sins. No one else shows up to confront the rapist's male chauvinism save the female characters. Every one of the women in the play, including Leela, Naina, and even Frieda, a domestic helper, fulfils her societal obligations.

The incident depicted in Lights Out happened in Santa Cruz, Mumbai, in 1982, according to a first-person account provided by a witness. When there are individuals nearby who can help the victim, Padmanabhan shows the communal apathy that is commonly present in rape scenes. Near their home, Leela and Bhasker, a married couple, have been hearing noises that appear to be the result of a sexual attack on a lady. Since there is no clear allusion to the assaults at the opening of the performance, the play builds up the scenario gradually. Leela's hyper-sensitive reactions to the heartbreaking screams, Oh don't!' are all we get. I'm offended that you're even bringing it up!

Bhasker and Leela's upper-floor apartment is the setting for Lights Out. It's clear from the first shot that Leela

has been frightened by the strange goings-on and hears calls for aid coming from the adjacent building. Her dishevelled look and tense speech are evidence of her fear, which she characterises as a shawl around her shoulders. She is afraid. Her first question to her husband Bhasker upon seeing him is whether or not he has informed the police of the ongoing commotion. Bhasker, on the other hand, is mellow and simply concerned with unwinding. While reading the newspaper, he invites their servant, Freida, for tea and casually tells Leela that he forgot to call the police. Leela is enraged by his comments and demeanour because she was only able to persuade him after a protracted discussion. He urges her to take some time out and practise yoga to calm down.

Through these characters, Manjula Padmanabhan seeks to convey the natural anxiety that causes people to approach a situation in a negative manner. When Mohan and Bhasker are unable to justify their inaction, they place the responsibility on the victim by branding her a whore. These people are trying to divide the subject into two camps: those who support them vs those who oppose them.

Men and women have quite different approaches to the same situations in Padmanabhan's play, and this variance has its origins in the human psyche. In Padmanabhan's plays, stillness is also a prominent theme. The author has handled the most potent powers of silence with great care in her plays. Because it's a discussion play, the entire thing is written in a conversational style. Leela uses pauses and silences to break up her statements. When it comes to the play's performance, the audience is aware of subversion through a woman's sensibility—the playwright expertly grasps a woman's voices, sensibility, and anxieties—through the interaction of emotions and talks amongst the six characters. Although Leela and Naina and Frieda all express their discontent verbally, the drama does not depict any physical reactions from any of the women.

Padmanabhan doesn't hold back when it comes to employing adverbs. Bold terms like 'arse', 'pimping rascal', and 'wetting yourself' are uttered by the characters without hesitation. The dialogues are as abrasive as shrapnel, leaving no room for the audience's sensibilities. The playwright employs a language without ambiguity and a language of power/men.

The alienation effect, a key Brechtian technique, inhibits the audience from fully engaging in the drama on stage and being passive spectators. It's a technique for isolating the audience from the character they're watching on stage. For example, a technology that allows viewers to analyse an issue rather than become emotionally invested in the storey of characters can be affected by an effect known as alienation. Direct engagement between actors and audience members is also a possible form of this.

Hidden Fires, a collection of five monologues written by Manjula Padmanabhan, is a ferocious attack on social ills. These monologues reveal the devastating consequences of violence and rioting throughout the country. In each one, a

distinct aspect of violence is brought to light. The director of the play, Jayant Kripalani, asked her to write a play about the turmoil and bloodshed that had occurred in India as a result of the riots. When I first saw the first riots in Bombay in 1992, I felt absolutely helpless." he explains. Because no one is doing anything, no matter how powerful, well-known, or well-networked a person is, they feel helpless. It is mentioned (Hidden Fires, 146vii). When she writes the play, she clearly intends it to be a tiny way of expressing her grief about what's taking place (x).

Throughout Hidden Fires, Padmanabhan demonstrates via various characters that the death of countless people for no reason is completely inhuman and cannot be justified. It infects the populace with a sense of resentment, misery, and grief.

Instead of adhering to the traditional five-act format, Padmanabhan uses forms and acts that best fit the plays' themes. On the basis of the plot and characters, the pattern is selected. It is unusual for the plays Lights Out and Harvest to be created as three-act works, but the monologue-based pieces in Hidden Fires break from this pattern. Her choice of props is groundbreaking for Indian English play, both in terms of significance and novelty. These things are so crucial to the plays that they cannot be staged without them.

She uses a window in the play Light Out, which is highly significant. With the use of the glass, the audience can see what's going on in the next complex over. It is not necessary for the playwright to depict this on stage. Audiences are able to figure out the crime even if the characters don't label it a crime because of the descriptions and the usage of sounds.

She refers to it as 'the white-faceted globe' in another play, where she employs the utilisation of the contact module. A key part of the play is the use of this technology, which enables the audience to keep track of the donors' life from the comfort of their own homes. This technology establishes communication with and has influence over the donors' life. As a result, it conceals the identity of the recipient and his or her objectives. Using this method, the playwright accomplishes multiple goals at once.

Using such methods as Aristotle's notion of tragedy, Padmanabhan creates a horrifying picture of violent acts in the minds of his audience, evoking fear and sympathy in their hearts. As a stand-alone piece, the character's initial monologue in Hidden Fires is chilling. The riot victim recounts how his entire family was brutally slaughtered in the riots. According to him, they never even asked any questions.

The drama Lights Out, written by Manjula Padmanabhan, makes excellent use of sound. The victim's sobs and cries may be heard constantly through the window of the neighbouring house. The dramatist has taken care to ensure that these sounds are neither too loud nor too subtle so as not to overpower the dialogue on stage.

One of the most recently released works in Manjula Padmanabhan's Science Fiction collection, *Astro-Nuts: An Intergalactic Comedy* (first published in 2007) is an intergalactic satire. Aliens, people from all across the world, and even talking animals all appear in Padmanabhan's latest drama. Despite the fact that the action takes place in the future, many of the themes explored in the play are still relevant today. People from around the world have gathered at the General Assembly to debate issues and find solutions. Eleven humans and six non-humans from around the galaxy travel to the Galactic Union's assembly to take part in the drama. Petty disagreements between the characters in the play eventually shed light on a number of current issues. Toxic waste and climate change are brought up in a light-hearted and self-serving manner. There is a story in the play about a group of extremely intelligent alien civilizations that contact mankind. Humans will be put to the test by the extraterrestrials before being admitted to the Galactic Union. If the mission is a success, the extraterrestrials will begin work on resolving the planet's issues.

His works include a book, a novella, and three anthologies of short stories and essays. Women's issues dominate her stories. Feminist stories tend to focus on well-known gender issues such as sati, dowry, and sexual reproduction; and on less talked about topics like as the rituals and practises of menstruation, according to Rajeswari Sunder Rajan. Padmanabhan's female protagonists with vocations, who are also often single women – even ladies who prefer to remain single, such as widows, spinsters who resist marriage – are defined by defiance of convention in their roles and attitudes.

In his satirical writing, Padmanabhan portrays males as ignorant, mother-obsessed adherents of patriarchy's worldview. Her stories often portray the underdogs, the destitute, the weak, and those who defy family, fortune, and

other social conventions as achieving tiny victories. 'The Other Woman' and 'Exile' are two of her stories in *Three Virgins and Other Stories* that challenge conventional myths. The prologue to these two stories states that they are 'speculative fiction based on the Ramayana' (*Three Virgins*, ix). In contrast to the original epic, these tales portray women as strong and capable. Readers get a new viewpoint on Ravana's wife Mandodari in 'The Other Woman'. Ravana is portrayed as a pawn in the hands of the brothers in her interpretation of events. That's what Soorpanaka's sister tells her, that Ravana merely wanted to revenge his sister's plight. A new perspective is offered to readers as Mandodari, a figure who has been silenced and oppressed for far too long, is given voice by Manjula Padmanabhan in her work. Ram, Lakshman and Sita are portrayed as female characters in 'Exile,' whereas Rashmi and Lakshmi are depicted as male ones. As depicted above, the new woman is more idealistic, less submissive, and incredibly gifted than the one previously pictured. Women's dignity is upheld in this novel, which depicts them as intellectually strong but also full of goodness, faith, and trust.

Conclusion

To end violence against women, Manjula Padmanabhan has worked to empower women through self-awareness. A patriarchal society's downtrodden women have a voice through her work. It is through such texts that we can see the current social, political and economic realities which are used as instruments to perpetuate the violence against women. Padmanabhan, on the other hand, claims that she has never written just as a feminist or a woman. Humanism is at the core of all she writes. Similarly to Virginia Woolf, she understands that gender norms are imposed on men and women by those who hold power and riches in society, enslaving both sexes for their own advantage. Humanist literature, by its very nature, transcends geography and time.

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