

The Spectacle of Societal Attitudes on Sexual Violence and Rape in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*

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Abstract

This paper explores the societal attitudes towards sexual violence and rape as depicted in *Manjula Padmanabhan's* play *Lights Out* (2020). It delves into how the play critiques the male-dominated societal structures that normalize and perpetuate rape culture. Focusing on themes of casual attribution towards rape victims, the paper investigates how society's dismissive and prejudiced attitudes towards survivors contribute to victim-blaming. Through a critical analysis, this paper explores the male proclivity for rape, the objectification of women, and the voyeuristic tendencies embedded within gender dynamics. It also examines how societal expectations predict attitudes towards rape victims, including the normalization of violence through the subjugation of women and the enforcement of gender norms. The paper highlights how *Lights Out* illuminates these societal flaws, questioning the conformity of gender roles and challenging the pervasive violence against women. Ultimately, the research underscores the significance of addressing these attitudes and practices to foster a more equitable and just society.

Keywords: Rape proclivity, Societal attitudes, Gender norms, Subjugation, Objectification

Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out* is a theatrical representation of the brutal act of rape happened in Mumbai, India, in the 1980s, where a host of "middle-class" bystanders watch a woman being brutalized in a neighborhood compound over a period of time. In the play, as in the real life, the urban middle-class characters goad over the victim's ordeals – off-stage screams, gargle and groan – through the traditional imagining of women. Apparently, the proscenium stage depicts off-stage rape with occasional specter, groans and screams to turn the female body into a site for the enactment of conflict and displaces the "realness" of "rape as a lived, personal, embodied experience" (Fitzpatrick, 2018, p. 2). Moreover, such approach negates women's subjectivity and subverts their agency, rights and freedom within market place. There appears incommunicability between the victim and witness, for the screams and occasional specter fails to arouse ethical response from the later.

The victimized body is not merely depicted in passivity throughout the play, but she responds in humiliation which makes middle class discomfort and deliberates on "Its action, its sounds, its inferiority, its fluids, its external constructions and reconstructions." (Nina Kane, 2008, p.1) The writer theatricalises rape in such a manner that instigates manifold viewpoints beyond the characteristic compassionate gaze consigned for a victimized body to performance of dissent. Padmanabhan does not

plead for a specific feministic point of view but the consciousness of woman in the advent of violence – either physical or psychological. As in the words of Helen Keyssar (1996) puts it:

...production of scripts characterized by the consciousness of women as women; dramaturgy in which art is inseparable from the condition of women as women; performance (written and acted) that deconstructs sexual difference and thus undermines patriarchal power, scripting and production that present transformation as a structural and ideological replacement for recognition; and the creation of women in the subject position” (p. 1).

While the play adopts despicable attitude towards sexual violence it also subtly iterates stereotypes of gender and a tendency for female characters to exist only in relation to male counterparts. The play invokes a tendency to assert female agency to reprimand their ills and ills ingrained in patriarchal society, its social and cultural attitudes that impede women’s ability to resist and respond. The author highlights how rape is ubiquitous in patriarchal culture, rooted in socializing myths as well as moral norms of gendered submission. She castigates monologic male narrations on rape and material impact of gender discrimination and violence on women’s lived lives. She exposes the vignettes of socially scripted male-female roles through the interactions (narratives) of the characters and in the power relation “the violence of rape is enabled by narratives, complexes and institutions which derive their strength ... from their power to structure our lives as imposing cultural scripts” (Marcus, 1992, p. 389).

The spectacle of the societal attitudes becomes evident when the male characters dissociate and dislocate the realness of rape and fabricate deviational signifiers to disengage interrogation on patriarchy and its different contours. The attitudinal indifference of the male characters to the painful calls and groans of the victim expose their traditional proclivities of domination ingrained in society, for societal power structures often discourage men from recognizing rape, as doing so would challenge the norms that maintain their own dominance and privilege (Foucault 1978). The male characters postulate different identities onto the victim through vacillation and Gish galloping only to reveal the gendered power structures and relationships to claim rape as a part of normative gender relations (Brownmiller 1975). In the process of this postulation, the male characters fabricate different false signifiers to dodge their female counter-parts in make-belief, when in reality rape is tied to uncomfortable truths about their own behavior and societal norms that condone violence (Katz, 2006). It is not plausible that male characters can’t recognize rape, for reorganization and acceptance would challenge their perception of sexual entitlement and control over women (Brownmiller, 1975).

The screams of the victim extract multiple meaning among the characters which in turn open multiple possibilities among the spectators or readers to indentify discourses, often contradictory, surrounding rape. The spectator’s mind remains constantly unsettled in the process of finding meaning in the dominant social discourses around the rape, for example, the woman outside the window and the women on the stage, although different in many respects, share some commonalities like fear and Susan Brownmiller (1975) calls the rape “is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (p. 15). The constant screaming and straining of victim’s voice and there upon commentary of the characters on the stage, keep the spectator’s focus both on the violence of the rape and misogynistic interpretation of the characters and at last their inaction without any titillating display. Manjula Padmanabhan seems to focus on the timely intervention and demand the same from the characters who instead engaged in Gish galloping to avoid this intervention, for Holly Henderson (2007) too criticizes the scholarship on rape and seek early intervention in the process to eliminate it “this relentless focus takes the very occurrence of rape for granted and offers

limited possibility for intervention or prevention” (p. 228). The extreme heinousness assigned to rape in law and culture reflects male phallogocentric values as Germaine Greer (1999) writes “It is not women who have decided that rape is so heinous, but men ... the notion of rape is the direct expression of male phallogocentricity” (p. 310). The screaming, of course subjective, fails to evoke desirable response among the characters, but it not only guided their whole conversation, it reveals their patriarchal discourses that deny that subjectivity. (Love 2002, 277). Elaine Scarry (1985) delineates on the subjective nature of pain that lacks communicability, for it is contained in the body of an individual – isolated and unshareable and resistant to language. She claims:

Physical pain does not simply actively resist language” it “actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned ... physical pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content. It is not of or for anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language (p. 5).

These moans and cries find their way in the deep recesses of their psyche despite their false consolation and indifference, and thus the screams of the victim gets heard by the other characters which is the clear act of defiance. Although, the patriarchal mindset of Mohan and Baskar connote these screams as ‘drama’ and dismiss it as lower class menial routines. Meanwhile, the unremitting horrid shrieks of the victim give way to ‘gurgling sound’ which is indicative of the constant struggle to resist and fight back to the violence of rape. In rejoinder to these screams, Leela and Naina speak out their hysteric responses as ‘AAAAAAH!’ and ‘Auugh! Auugh! ...they’re – they’re...’ (Padmanabhan, p.9). The bewilderment and shock exhibited in response to cries and screams is inevitably a challenge to the rape performance as R. Nina Kane puts it, “...the horror of such rape performance challenged patriarchal confinement of the subject, revealing a monstrously feminine rage that laid the mess, stink and effluence of the rape at patriarchy’s door” (Padmanabhan, p.9). Mohan further narrated, “After all, supposing it’s genuine screaming but they don’t want help” (Padmanabhan, p.23), he tries to defer it to the point of not helping the victim or taking an adverse position on women’s rights. It appears trivial when the characters get involved in a discussion about the nature of scream as Mohan says “Was it, for instance, like a singer’s voice, high and sweet? Was it musical?” (Padmanabhan, p.21), and when Leela negates it for “musical” and describes it “horrid and gurgly”, both men invent false signifiers of acceptability Mohan in nature of victim-bashing concludes the victim “diseased” and Baskhar in differential attitude evades the issue “Well, you know, after you’ve been screaming for a little while, I think ... I mean, perhaps ... uh ... your throat gets sore? Of course, I wouldn’t really know myself” (Padmanabhan, p.22). The frequent ellipses suggest his unwillingness to talk on the issue; in fact dissuade to question male reasoning. They fabricate the thesis that people often scream of no reason or they scream in pleasure they scream in nightmare when aware that the perpetrator and the victim are awake or it may be domestic fight and therefore they can’t intervene. The play highlights traditional power structures of gender and class governed by profoundly misogynistic logic. The interventions of female create disruption in this entitlement and breeds manifold rejoinders within the male dominant knowledge system. When Maya and Naina try to impugn the knowledge system, they cling to the societal narratives that reinforce their own power and control over women’s bodies (Ginsburg, 2016).

Each woman in the play finds entangled in the web of oppression, only varies in degree and mode; middle class women, Leela and Naina, both as victim of male dominance and also in a way in lieu with oppression for their inaction and differential attitude toward rape as Leela says when her husband

suggest her to avoid the screams, “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?”; (Padmanabhan, p.10) on the other hand Frieda, a maid, throughout the play remains “mute and undemanding” and follow the orders shows the automatization of the marginalized labor class who has no say in the neo-liberal world; Naia, although to a large extent reasonable in her argument, suffers from the domestic violence from her “large and burly” husband who is a typical example of “physical type”. There is a beautiful analogy of Frieda and the rape victim, the former although visible on the stage but remains mute and the later although invisible but makes some articulations, suggests the women in any social, economic and cultural context are destined to suffer at the hand of male folk.

However, the male characters not only cast aspersions on the victim, they take voyeuristic pleasure out of the victim’s suffering. Mohan urges Bhasker to provide detailed commentary of rape which the former enjoyed voyeuristically, and reduces the victim to a spectacle, stripping them of their humanity and reinforcing harmful power structures. Baskhar has, in fact, invited Mohan to the spectacle that displays great curiosity and enquired “Well! So, when does it begin?” (Padmanabhan, p.19). In his obstinacy, he proclaimed that he has right to watch “What harm is therein watching? (p.19), and there is no need get involved “Who said anything about help? I’m talking about looking, that’s all” (Padmanabhan, p. 20). It not only shows their scopophile tendency, but also an act of dehumanizing the victim in comparing rape with a road accident to justify their in action. Susan Brownmiller (195) contests that it is not only “passive observation” but an endorsement of a power dynamic that dehumanizes the victim Baskhar and Mohan, both, cling to the window as voyeuristic to the effect of titillation, and the former misspeaks recognition woman outside as victim “The victims [sexual] are generally held down” (Padmanabhan, p.20) that inadvertently reveal repressed desire for control over women, for the consumption of sexual violence as entertainment or spectacle reflects a deep-seated cultural normalization of power and control over women. The insistence and curiosity of male characters in watching rape demonstrates social control where they are both implicated and desensitized by the act. From the dialogue we come to know that Mohan has been invited to watch the horrible act of rape in Act I, Scene II:

Mohan: (Clears his throat) Well! So, when does it begin? ...

Leela: You wanted to see it!

Mohan: (unrepentant) Sure! Why not? ... But why not? What harm is there in watching?

Bhasker: (with an ironical smile) someone told Leela that to watch a crime and do nothing is to be – what? – involved in it yourself? (Padmanabhan, 2020, p. 17-19)

Mohan even finds it natural to watch rape and get involved “... It’s unnatural not to look. It’s unnatural not to get involved” (Padmanabhan, p.19), and for this reason Actor Doon Mackichan while querying the ubiquity of rape in British drama, she points that it has become “de rigueur” to start a drama with the body of a raped woman to normalize, fetishize and eroticize it for both male and female spectators (Fitzpatrick, 2018, p. 6) and to which René Branca (2005) calls “staging of attempted rape would ... draw a crowd” (p. 34-35).

Bskhar out rightly rejects the assertion that “That we’re part of ... of what happens outside. That by watching it, we’re making ourselves responsible.” (Padmanabhan, p.7). It seems to him that someone is challenging his authority or male ego on reasoning i.e. it is only male who can reason out things and this domain is not of women. This is the reason he calls her wife “hypertensive” only to assert her weakness

and everything bad associated with this word and its manifestations. He feels bad for his wife only to assert his position as someone who is strong and reasonable, and his vice-versa of it. It eludes a common notion that women are emotional entities or hypertensive therefore devoid of reasoning, naturally inferior to men folk. The social and cultural presumption of male characters out rightly rejects concerns of their counterparts and termed their testimony as “hysterical” or over-reactive which is conscious effort on their parts to delimit their representation. Here, social hierarchy prevents Leela not only to intervene, but also thrusts her in helplessness and passivity, and in this way depicts that how violence is endemic in the fabric of social structure. Lucy Nevitt (2013) has rightly put it, “violence tells us things about the culture that produced it: the kinds of power relationship on which it is built, the attitudes and values that it takes for granted. A representation of violence can reiterate or it can challenge existing social structures” (p.157).

Through these characters, the writer mirrors the ideological positioning of men folk to mouth venal idiocies. Very often, the inherent notion or grammar of sexual transgression, exploitation, suspicion and tension prevalent in traditional narratives finds the sexual mores and behavioral expectants in the play, who glossed the vocabulary of naming and shaming to disparage and derange women. For example, the characters in the play try to trivialize rape by naming the victim like “whore” or “possessed by evil” or “an exercise of exorcism” and thereby tries to not only justify but normalize it. In predictive association saturated with traditional normativity, the male characters try to identify the victim with some tainted or denigrated character so as to justify or naturalize and claim that “in rape cases, victim already has a bad reputation.” (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1995). It is often perceived in gendered violence that women are dubbed with the terminology like “whore”, “witch”, “spinster” and “bitch” etc. in order to make them repressive or psychologically submissive. Being a sexual worker, it has been far granted that she doesn’t possess rights and respectability and indubitably has no right to say “No”, and “men may go to assuage their primal fear of unrestrained female sexuality...” (p. 704). In a galling history of blaming, men create moral positioning where the onus of fallibility always falls on women.

Like reductionists, they turn the victim into whore who can’t be raped because of her profession as Bhasker puts in “If she’s a whore, Leela, then, this isn’t rape ... so on what grounds could we call the police?” (Padmanabhan p. 47). They try to mystify the whole matter by inventing new signifiers, and the latest one as whore seems to have no human rights for them. Again, Bhasker seems to be preoccupied with the idea of the binary of decent and indecent, and the woman can’t be decent for she is with four men and therefore can’t be raped “They’re like animals, really. Decent people like us, we can’t understand their lives at all” (Padmanabhan, p. 50). In a normative conformity, both Leela and Naina conform to social norms, socially accepted codes set forth by male dominant society as Leela says with distaste “A whore is a woman without shame” (Padmanabhan, p. 48), and then Naina tries to conform the same from their counterparts “Naina says “By losing their vulnerability to rape, whores lose their right to be women? Is that what you mean?” (Padmanabhan, p. 51). By terming the victim as whore, the characters in a make-belief encourages the reader to focus on the impersonality of the rape, and the class or social significance in which all the valuable characters (the men and the virgin) are saved, and only the “dishonored woman is punished” (Fitzpatrick, p. 2).

And they put a strange logic that women are raped, for they are decent and men are not and Naina, though unintentionally, she debunks the male notion of superiority as she puts it “But if men are too indecent to be raped does it mean that men are whores?” (Padmanabhan, p. 51). Mohan makes a closing statement brimmed with male alphasim “Right. After all, finally, the difference between men and

women is that women are vulnerable to rape ...” (Padmanabhan, p. 51). This is a typical example of gender stereotyping where casual attribution of sexual respectability and physical attractiveness fall on women. Here it seems that sexual respectability is confined or reserved to woman, and through the male evaluative standards only women can be raped because they are only responsible for sexual respectability. Gender stereotyping functions on flimsy ground of contradictions like women are both vulnerable and subject to blame, and Judith A. Howard (1984) writes that “If such differences in attribution of blame to female versus male victims are due to differences in perceived vulnerability to crime, controlling for these differential perceptions should eliminate the sex difference in attribution as well” (p. 494). He further writes that “When women and men are victimized, women, less able to cope with an emergency, should be blamed less than men” (p. 495).

Mohan remains adamant on the question of rape, when Bhasker seems to saturate his adamancy and declare frankly that “These things go on all the time, all over the city. Who are we to interfere?” (Padmanabhan, p. 49). He conforms to the normality of rape and makes clear his inability to interfere whatever is going around them. The male haughtiness and prejudice against women in general and whores in particular can be traced from Bhasker’s statement that “Whatever rights a woman has, they are lost the moment she becomes a whore” (Padmanabhan, p. 48). The characters become judgmental about the outfit of woman, and it seems as if the dress can determine the ones morality as Naina says “Surely there must be some way of telling a decent woman from a whore!” (Padmanabhan, p. 50). She further thinks that whores are “gaudy and vulgar” and “it must be terrible to be a whore” (Padmanabhan, p.50). The culturally nurtured normative masculinity unequivocally pervades over the public and private spaces to reduce it to desirable masculinity. Moreover, this normative gendered notion of good woman protected by any of the male member which is nourished on traditional arbitrariness of thought, discriminate the rest as ‘Other’ thereby; normalize the injustice meted out to them. The patriarchal society has tactically manufactured the dichotomy of good/protected and bad woman/unprotected for their own avail, for they assume the later to be easily available owing to their so-called unprotected nature (Kosambi, 1994). The emulation of traditional sagas, societal conditioning and political animus has charted ambivalent ideals for Indian women where men ostensibly come out chivalrous and the former defeated and responsible for all the evil.

The patriarchal normativity produces varied societal conditioning where women always find themselves at the receiving end, for example, if a woman comes out at night, she will be responsible for rape. Entrapped in a cocoon of superficial middle-class morality, the characters invalidates violence inflicted on the victim and hold the social and cultural presumption of her being base credibility and sexuality that hinders understanding of male violence women’s experiences of sexual violence are invalidated’ with resulting impacts on understanding experiences of male violence and related social policy (Liz Kelly and Jill Radford, 1996). Even Bhasker dehumanize the victim in this notion of “respectable people” “They are animals, really. Decent people like us, we can’t understand their lives at all” (Padmanabhan, p.50). The author debunks the shifting or fluid morality of middle-class and the notion that rape is committed by poor, villainous, psychopath or hardened criminals that reinforce the belief that it is rear. There is a typical example of gender stereotyping, when the characters try to frame a separate identity of rapists someone who is “crazy”, not normal or “decent” and “respectable” like them. In other words they try to make a point that rape is an exception perpetrated by “crazy” people, and in this way negate the gender discrimination and patriarchal normativity that encourages and nourishes it. Leslee Udwin says in her documentary *India’s Daughter* that the source of action lies in wider sphere of

patriarchal society and culture which seeds, and I believe encourages these hateful acts” TEDx Talks (2015). Bhasker had no issue if the victimizer had done the same thing in an isolated place devoid of human gaze, for it hurts the sensibility of middle class family. The characters on the stage as commentators try to find a signifier in a futile pursuit to avoid responsibility of action, and contrary invent false signifiers that reveal their bias against the marginalized communities especially women. In fact, They justify the rape if the victim is poor which clearly show class segregation and shifting or fluid morality deep seated in Indian culture as Mohan says, “Well, as long as it’s the poor attacking the poor ... you know how it is ... they live their lives and we live ours” (Padmanabhan , p.29).

The play delineates on the gender essentialism that breeds or fosters misogynistic hate. In scene three, the interaction among the characters on the stage render up vignette of underling power relationship that reduces to many cultural modes of feminizing women. As the characters on the stage give step by step description of the brutal act of rape and ultimately reduced their description to female genteel as Bhasker says, “... well, you know, illiterate people believe that when a demon possesses a women, it is always via the – uh – *lower orifice*” (Padmanabhan, p.44, original emphasis). They speak their minds using poor as shield to be castigated for such perceptions, and in this way they try to improve their superiority. In their male discourse, woman is termed or seen as unruly or possessed one that needs to be cured and disciplined; rape becomes an instrument to save the possessed souls. It is interesting to know from their conversation that if a woman resists whatever little, she has been castigated with terms like “Devil”. Secondly, it is the typical example of unequal norm and male Machismo when Mohan says that women under “demon’s power” “have the strength of three big men...” (Padmanabhan, p. 45). And woman can’t speak in the normal course of things, but only when possessed so termed it as abnormality that need male supervision, care and protection as Bhasker agrees with Mohan that “they are more susceptible”, “The weaker sex, after all ...” (Padmanabhan, p. 45). Moreover, according to Perry (2001) premises of misogynistic hate spring from notions of gender essentialism, described as a belief in innate differences between men and women, and a subsequent belief in a natural order whereby men and women are assigned different roles in society. Here, it is victim who is blamed responsible for her own condition, and when finally Leela declared that “It’s a rape, isn’t it?” (Padmanabhan, p. 45), they felt affronted and in negation demand proof, thus ultimately the burden of proof falls on the woman. Naina acknowledges observing and listening of the rape simultaneously and the think that is lacking is action as she says “She’s right. It’s an assault on all of us, to have to see them and hear them like this –” (Padmanabhan, p. 53).

There is a clear evidence of domestic violence inflicted on Naina when she urges her husband to maintain peace and decency of language; her husband retorted back “You shut up! This is no time for women’s nonsense!” (Padmanabhan, p.55) This exclusion of women from the performative discourse is not only oppression on her, but also increased male reliability, one who is responsible for her travails. The real intention of Surinder, who wants to commit violence on the name woman, becomes clear when he abused her own wife “Shut up or I’ll kick your teeth in!” (Padmanabhan, p.58). Surinder in a male supremacy wants to solve the problem of violence with violence “Let’s go and wipe them out ... I’m telling you – these bastards understand only one thing: violence!” (Padmanabhan, p.54). His idea to counter violence with violence will only aggravate the problem, for such approach will create anarchy in the society. Rene Girard (2005) dubbed such violence as self-propagating violence i.e. it the violence that can thwart and eliminate the violence (p. 20). It becomes clear that all the female characters become

the victim, directly or indirectly, of imposed silence where they found hard to voice their concerns. This enigma of the women characters is aptly explained by Helen Cixous (1997) when she says:

Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing at times entirely lost for words, sounds and language slipping away – that’s how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak even if she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear which hears in language only that speaks in the masculine (p.351).

The matter of fact is that rudiments of suppressed anger and hostility are present beneath the skin of every individual, and it pour out under repressed conditions. Hence, there are greater chances of violence which finds legitimization under the social norms as something “private”, and therefore beyond the scope of external agency. Commenting on this sort of violence, Linda Gordon (2007) says that here every family member become the stakeholder and active participant and in this way private becomes the public and thus attains the political tinge where every family member strives to attain material gain over the other. Richard Gelles (1985) has aptly said that there is only one place at home devoid of violence that is bathroom, otherwise every corner from kitchen to bedroom are pervaded with violence (p. 259). In India women suffer double punishment of being raped and then out of humiliation it is women who are supposed to commit suicide. In male dominant society it is the woman who is supposed to feel ashamed of being raped as Surinder logics the aftermath of rape victim “As it is, that woman’s life is over. She’ll commit suicide, if she lives at all” (Padmanabhan, p.55). The victims are treated as if they have brought shame to the whole society for being raped, and thus onus falls on the women to prove right. When the characters talk about suicide is the last option for the raped one, dramaturgically, however, her suicide suggests that she was raped: the convention of the raped woman dying by her own hand was an enduring one (Catty 1999, 93), and indeed even in contemporary attitudes to rape, evidence of extreme trauma or suicide adds credibility to an accusation (Fitzpatrik, 2018, p. 50).

The play also interrogates the confirmation of patriarchal normativity by women characters. They demand male authority and intelligence to determine whether it is a rape or not. The differential bias against the victim becomes evident when Leela says, “But we are good people, what we have done? We don’t go running around, screaming and naked in the middle of the night?” (Padmanabhan, 33). Although, women characters seem to get effected by the act, but only reading they, mainly Leela, in reality try to save or preserve her own privileged position “When the police come [They will see] how it’s invaded our lives, our homes, how we can’t have guests for dinner” (Padmanabhan, p. 12) . In same scene, when Bhasker instructs her to shut her ears to evade the screams she responds “But their sounds come inside, inside my nice clean house, and I can’t push them out! ... If only they didn’t, make such racket, I wouldn’t mind so much! ... Why do they have to do it here? Why can’t they go somewhere else? (Padmanabhan, 10). Here, the use of first person pronoun shows that she sees everything in relation to private lives or self, and she has no issue with rape until it will not invade her private life. At first, women characters try to confirm the authenticity of rape from the male characters, and thus retreated to the position of subordination, and when ultimately they retort to challenge their understanding “Just look outside the window, and you’ll see them at it!” and “We are listening to the sounds of a woman being raped outside our window, under the light” (Padmanabhan, p.45), they get sarcastic rebuttal to the point of humiliation for challenging male understanding of rape as Mohan says to Naina “You mist’ve seen a lot of rape, Naina, to recognize it at one glance!” (Padmanabhan, p.46).

Conclusion

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* exposes not only the brutality of sexual violence but the spectacle of societal attitudes that sustain it. The male characters' responses remain rhetorical displays of virility rather than ethical intervention. Their suggestion to photograph the rape and profit from it reveals moral bankruptcy, as Mohan asserts, "Pictures like these, even the foreign press would snap them up. I'm telling you, we'd make a lot of money. After all, how often does anyone see authentic pictures of a gang rape in action?" (Padmanabhan, p. 61). Ironically, their delayed action proves futile when Naina announces, "You needn't bother anymore!" (Padmanabhan, p. 62). The author highlights the moral and ethical bankruptcy of the male characters and media alike as Rosalind Coward (1984) writes that today that the media's portrayal of rape often reflects and reinforces patriarchal views, depicting victims in ways that perpetuate shame and minimize the gravity of their experience. In a larger spectrum, it is ultimately male attitudes that define and explain to woman about rape and its gravity as Rebecca Solnit (2014) states that media narratives around rape often frame victims' experiences in a way that serves to discredit and minimize their suffering, reflecting broader societal biases (p. 21-22). The final red-lit stage image and absence of a curtain call underscore rape as an ongoing social crisis demanding urgent resistance.

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