



THE USE OF POILE SENGUPTA'S UNIQUE INNOVATIVE STORY AND EXPERIMENTAL TECHNIQUES: A STUDY

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INTRODUCTION:

Sengupta is one of the great Modern Indian feminist writers. Though she is a profound pioneering voice in the field of Children Literature, she has her distinct place in the Indian theatre. She has used theatre the technique of play within the play to generate discussion and present her point of views through the characters. She has adopted innovative and experimental regarding themes, technique and considered to be one of the major feminist playwrights of India. She has shown the timelessness of violence against women through this technique. The device is used in most of her plays as a means to lend perspective to an issue. But in 'Mangalam' Poile Sengupta has used the same actors in both 'plays' as an indication that nothing really changes, the sameness of it all, to her, is deeply disturbing.

The title of the play is the name of the central character that is not present physically in the act, but pervades the drama and action throughout the first act. The first Act revolves around the marriage of Mangalam and Dorai which is unsuccessful and devastating. Both are considered themselves victimized by the other and so are at constant war with each other. They are married off to each other for urgent, confidential and practical reason. There is an absence of any kind of mutual affection, communication or understanding between them. Dorai, being a husband has been given an upper hand in a patriarchal societal structure. He harasses Mangalam to such an extreme end that she embraces death rather than life with him. This research article is aimed mainly to trace out her vital experimental techniques in her literary work "Mangalam"

KEY WORDS: Poile Sengupta, Mangalam, Thangam, Sumati, Dorai, Usha, woman, marriage, thali, autonomy, violence

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TITLE: As the play unfolds, it is realized that Mangalam is the victim of the vilest of crimes, but she is not able to express herself. One incidence- one heinous drunken act- rape by her drunken brother-in-law changes the course of her life forever. She is married off to economically poor Dorai, who comes to know of her pregnancy after marriage, which was an outcome of the atrocity committed on her. Dorai acts on impulse, branding her as characterless in his consciousness for the rest of their life together and punishes her in every way possible to avenge his betrayal by her and her father. She is humiliated, taunted, abuse physically and emotionally throughout her life by her husband who fails to understand her plight and silence. He interprets her silence as betrayal. Mangalam has to suffer in silence, because speaking up would compromise her family's honour. Perhaps she blames herself for whatever has happened with her or her fate, which is beyond her control. Mangalam has a troubled past which stops her from seeking help. This secrecy for the protection of family name is the very nature of the domestic violence. The woman has been made to think of this (violence) as 'normal', 'a woman's fate', religion, films,

her elders, her own and her mother's experience – tell her that if a woman is unhappy, nothing can be done about it. It must be her own self fault.”

Thus, the life of Mangalam leads with a series of never ending assaults on her mind and body, which she abandons at last by ending her life. In fact, Thangam, the elder sister of Mangalam, is a dominant and strong character, who wants to control others. She is a representative of older and orthodox generation. As a traditional woman, Thangam wants to impose her age-old values and restrictions on other women around her. She is the most outspoken character who openly criticizes Dorai's treatment of her sister in extremely blatant terms. Whenever Dorai accuses Magalam of characterlessness, she takes her side. She accuses Dorai of mistreating her sister, of torturing her when she says like this-

Thangam: ”.....*But what else can I expect from my brother-in-law? He has been like this since the day he tied the thali around that poor girl's neck! Thali! It was more like a rope” 1*

Here, when addressing the Thali as a rope, it has really potent meaning. It summarizes an experience of a woman in the institution called marriage. It forces her in a subordinate position when she is married against her will. Any traditional custom that places women in the subordinate positions within society or in the family has the potential to turn violent.

It is sure to say that marriage is a medium to control women's sexuality in traditional societies. A forced marriage will only suffocate and restrict a woman damaging her self-esteem and confidence. In Indian society, marriage is universally considered as the essential turning point in a girl's life irrespective of her class, caste, religion and ethnicity. A marriage forces woman into an unequal position, where she is supposed to forget an essential part of her identity and has to adapt to an alien one without asking any questions. She has to perform her roles of a dutiful wife and daughter-in-law. She is not supposed to show her individual existence, her point of view becomes secondary and if she strives to show independence, her own opinion, it is considered as rebellious and is generally looked down upon by her in-laws.

The suppression of a woman in a traditional of her in-laws happens at several levels. It is assumed that she will accept all the changes occurred in her post-marriage positions. The majority of women accept this kind of degradation silently without raising a question as in a patriarchal societal structure such sacrifices are expected and demanded from women. What Thangam says about Magalam's marriage stands true for her own marriage as well. Here is the woman who has to lead a life of mourning as a widow of a man who was an abuser, who abused no other but her own younger sister. She can not to do anything about the crime committed by her husband against her own innocent sister.

This is only to save the name of her family and her sister's prestige. She is as much as the victim as Mangalam is. Her marriage restricts her from asking for justice. She has to keep quiet and live through all of this for the sake of so called prestige. She cannot ask for separation from her husband for her own and her natal family's sake. In Scene one itself, the domestic violence and dowry related issues are discusses. Dorai's daughter, Usha is a victim of such issues for continuous torture and suppression that she had faced in her husband's house, she left his house. Her parents tried to fulfil their demands by selling ornaments and utensils in their house. Yet, the money minded in-laws demand for dowry is still growing. Usha wished to get marry a college lecturer. But her father denied it and fixed her marriage with a rich man. No one bothered about her feelings and emotions. Usha was suffered a lot. To see in the words of her neighbour Kamala:

Kamala: *So? The pain is the same. Anyway, now they are making life miserable for Usha, in spite of sacks and sacks of gifts that go to that house from here. I don't know why they got the girl married so quickly. She was only in college... 2*

The difference is also depicted clearly in the treatment of a man to his wife and sister through the character Mani, Dorai's son. Revathy, the wife of Mani, finds his partiality and his inclination towards his sister Chitra. He points out that women waste too much of their time indulging in pretty issues and brings out that he always points out her and not her sister –in– law:

Revathy: Yes, that's what you say when it comes to your wife. But, what about your sister. Then everything changes. Ayyo! poor girl. 3

Dorai: My wife wanted Chitra to go for higher studies. I will see my Daughter becomes an IAS officer.

Thangam: And what happened when my sister wanted to study? And when Usha got that scholarship? Did you allow them To study?... 4

The sister of Mangalam, Thangam sees marriage as not just joining of two souls, but as a binding rope for the suffocation of a woman. She comes to the house and makes a scathing remark on Dorai. Thus she says:

Thangam:He has been like this since the day he tied the thali around the poor Girl's neck! 5

She compares thali to a rope which symbolically represents the suffering stories of a woman, her slavery, loss of freedom, and the loss of identity from the moment she gets married. Mangalam was always afraid of her husband. It is true if we see through the words Thangam:

Thangam: she was afraid of you. My poor sister, she was afraid of you. Don't I know it? You are a raakshasan. A Kaliyuga Raakshasan. 6

The discussion between the siblings Sumati and Suresh about the play is seen the beginning of the Second Act with that they see in the last night. Suresh is a flirt and disrespects women. Sumati recounts her childhood experiences. She was always neglected and her more concern was always getting to her brother Suresh. She was expected to behave like grown up ones in her childhood. She has only one question to ask to her mother that it is the best example that reveals her grief.

Sumati: ...have you ever asked me how it was for me at school... apart from my marks, that is? What I thought of my friends, my teachers, whom I loved most? I even don't remember you singing me to sleep. You brought me up efficiently, correctly but without soul. 7

Sumati is of jealous to her mother as she has got a perfect partner that is her father. As the age of eighteen, her father married her mother and provided financial security to her. But the reality is harsh. Her mother was suffered in her married life utterly. She had to adjust a lot with Sreeni, her father. Sreeni too had illicit relationship with other women. The parents of Sumati had fixed her marriage with a boy from a rich family and get engaged. Before her marriage, she went out with her fiancé, but she was treated by him violently and left scars on her. This shows that illicit relationship is not at all safe. She asserts:

"A woman who allows herself to be soft, who relinquishes her weapons... well she gets chewed up, doesn't she? I know it is a terrible expression, but then it's a terrible state to be in..." 8

Later, her father's friend, Nari is a fatherly figure for her misbehaved with her. In the final scene of the act, Nari appears on the stage and notices well grown Sumati. For him, she is now a blossomed flower. At the end, from the back stage, we can hear Sumati's voice that makes us clear that she was molested by Nari.

Sumati: *Uncle...no...no...Appa, Appa... 9*

CONCLUSION: Poile Sengupta succeeds in demonstrating the problems faced by women in the society. It is clear to see in the play, which comes to end with a poem, where glows the harsh reality of the issues that is faced by a woman in her life.

As for the woman, the God said let them be strong rooted,

like trees the end of the world together,

And there will be storms and the winds will blow very strong

But the woman will stay like trees,

They will hold the world together. 10

She represents the domination of patriarchal society on the stage. She mainly intended to highlight the nature of female subjugation. She raises her voice against the sexual harassment faced by woman in her life. There is a wide difference between the traditional and modern (improved life styles, better education, advanced technologies) yet the mind-set of man towards woman is the same, no hints of changes. The patriarchal society has not given any value for a woman. For them, woman is made up of two words- 'Woo'+ 'Man'. It means woman is born only for wooing by man. A woman is never free in her life. The reason of this victimization lies in the system of marriage which renders women vulnerable to all kinds of atrocities and powerless to demand for any justice. They have to endure all the pains inflicted on them in the private space called 'Home' and the Family. Here is an analysis of the power hierarchy within the conjugal home. This would suggest some identifiable features- a gendered division of labour. This is the fact that in most Indian marriages women enters as strangers into an already structured world, the creation of a permanent inequality in the relationship of the natal and conjugal homes, and overarching domestic ideologies that legislates gender status and role.

Another woman character is Usha, Mangalam's daughter, who is also a victim of patriarchal oppression. Violence inflicted on Usha is not physical in nature, but is of subtle and invisible kind. She is married by Dorai for economic reasons against her will and wish too. Usha's affection for a lecturer who was also her teacher is looked down upon and criticized severely by Doari. Usha has her mother's sympathy and they share a close bond between them. Mangalam is a confidant for her daughter to express and share everything. This bond between the mother and daughter becomes a cause of concern to Dorai. He despises their attachment and sharing, taking it as a threat to his authority in the home. He marries off Usha into a wealthy family ignoring their wishes to punish Mangalam. Here, he is not only acting in financial interests, but is trying to prove his upper hand in the household.

Usha wishes to study further and Mangalam supports her in her desire but Dorai intentionally ignores that too. He considers Usha as the image of her mother and characterless like her. Mangalam is trapped in this forced marriage with Dorai. She wants to live her dreams through her daughter. She tries to fulfil her wishes through Usha by giving her the choices she never had. Dorai kills the dreams of his daughter by comprehending the wishes Magalam of and punishes Mangalam too. Poile Sengupta has pictured various forms of violence inflicted successfully on women in any patriarchal society through a single play. What Usha experiences at her in-laws is a subtle type of severe mistreatment, when her mother-in-law allegedly strives to take away any privacy to the husband and wife. She has no freedom to exercise her will. The in-laws keep by demanding for material possession and torture her mentally for the same.

She finally has to quit her marriage and return to her natal home. Even V. S. Elizabeth analyses the invisible violence succinctly. She feels that the gender-based division of labour, the differentiated socialization process, and the roles and characteristics culturally assigned to women restrict their options and their

autonomy. These are all based on repressive and symbolic form of violence. This is expressed in the limitations imposed on them in terms of employment, social participation, decision-making and power at all levels. This is what is known as invisible violence, which includes objective situations of aggression, physical, psychological or sexual, direct or indirect.

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