

## Gender Based Violence in the Plays of Poile Sengupta

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### Abstract

The present research paper is a critical and comprehensive study of the popular plays of Poile Sengupta. In her plays, she highlights various problems related to women who are subjugated and oppressed in the male dominated society. Through her plays, Poile Sengupta dramatizes several types of violence that are inflicted on female body. Violence is used as a tool of subordination to control mobility and free will women in the society. She reveals how women are exploited, tortured and victimized in the system of patriarchy. The main purpose of Poile Sengupta is to provide an insight to audience or readers and associate them with the reality of modern society where justice, equality, liberty and unity have no place at all. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the plays of Poile Sengupta. In this paper the attempt has been made to explore the patterns of violence dramatize in the plays of Poile Sengupta. It has also been investigated that violence is a mechanism to impose male authority on female body. This research paper is a profound study of several types of violence that are prevalent everywhere in the society.

**Keywords-** Violence, Discrimination, Gender, Women, Resistance, Exploitation, Patriarchy.

### Introduction

In patriarchal system of India, women are suppressed, oppressed and exploited everywhere. On the one hand they are worshipped as Goddess while on the other hand they are burnt for dowry custom. In male dominated society, boys are considered as a support for parents in old age but contrary girls are dependent on the mercy of their family. It is a double standard pattern for female. They face several types of violence such as rape, family torture, sexual abuse, exploitation and early marriage etc. Women are considered as a weaker section of the society. They are used as a puppet in the hands of men to enjoy sexual pleasure. In society women are subjugated at every sphere of life. She is made to suffer in every form and every role such as a daughter, as a sister, as a wife, or as a mother. She is tortured for dowry, sexual relation, equal status, freedom and educational rights. Several types of violence are inflicted on female body to establish authority of patriarchy system. She is harassed to bear a lot of pain, torture, humiliation and defamation of society. In spite of being educated, she is forced to lead pathetic life in the society. In this context, Mahadevi Verma, in her research paper, The Hindu Woman's Wifehood, rightly remarks-

**A woman is forced to live as an exhibition of a man's wealth  
and as a means of his creation.**

**(WCS. 310-320)**

There are several women dramatists who have raised their voice against the violence and atrocities that a woman has to face in her life. Poile Sengupta is an emerging voice in Indian theatre. She tries to

give a direction to those women who are oppressed and subdued under the patriarchy. Feminist writers' serious effort towards women's rights are significance. They provide an antidote through their writing to all types of exploitation and oppression of women. Govind Kelkar, human rights activist from India, explores the concept violence regarding women-

**Exploitation, discrimination, unequal  
economic and social structures,  
the creation of an atmosphere of  
religio-cultural and political violence.**

In her literary career, Poile Sengupta has written several popular plays such as Mangalam, Inner Laws, Keats Was a Tuber, Alipha, Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni and Samara's Song. These plays are focused on several social burning issues. Different frames of violence are exposed in the plays of Poile Sengupta to highlight the position of women. Gender discrimination is main cause to exploit the women in the society. Women have no equal status to live a comfortable life in this stereotype society. Most of the plays of Poile Sengupta represent the various forms and dimensions of the victimization of women. It prepares a complete picture of gender discrimination and female sufferings prepared in the dramatic frame work of Poile Sengupta.

In her first full length play, 'Mangalam', Poile Sengupta presents an Indian woman who is considered as suppressed human being. It was first performed on 14 January 1993 by Playpen at Guru Nanak Bhavan, Bangalore. In Hindu-Madras Player's Play Scripts Competition' 1993. Domestic violence and girlhood sexual abuse are the basic theme of Mangalam. Mangalam is divided into two acts. In this play dramatist has used Play Within Play technique to expose the violence revealing the situation of characters of Act-II. In act first, Mangalam, the the main character was a victim of rape and domestic violence. She is not physically present in the play. Dorai, her husband, is a symbol of patriarch. He is a father of Sriram, Mani, Usha, Chitra and Kannan. He is responsible for the sacrifice of Mangalam. Similarly in Act-II, Sumati is victim of Molestation. In every situation, woman is exploited to fulfil the desires of men. In the entire pay, Manglam has to suffer in silence due to the honour of her family. In this regard, through the voice over, Poile Sengupta writes-

**Women die many kinds of deaths;  
men do not know this.  
For them, when a woman cooks  
and arranges flowers in her hair  
and makes place in the bed  
she is alive.  
But a woman can smile,  
She can pin flowers in her hair  
and arrange red dot on her  
forehead and make place in the  
bed because her husband in alive.  
She may be dead. (WCS.11)**

Mangalam's daughter Usha suffers in the hands of her in laws due to their greed. Chitra is also suffers a lot in her life Poile Sengupta exposes that urban life is not free from gender discrimination and sexual

violence. In second act Sumati faces violence at the hands of her fiancé as well as her father's friend, Nari. Poile Sengupta tries to present violence against women in the society. Despite being exploited, Sumati, Thangam, Revathy protest against the tyranny and try to affirm their identity in the male dominated society. To quote-

**As for women, the gods said  
let them be strong rooted, like trees.  
For it is they who shall hold  
the ends of the world together.  
And there will be storms  
and the wind will blow very strong  
but the women will stay, like trees,  
They will hold the world together. (WCS:69)**

In her next play, 'Inner Laws', Poile Sengupta presents unconventional terms to project the social and psychological crisis of oppressive women in modern society. In this play, the playwright presents the traditional hostility between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. In 'Inner Laws', there are eight characters such as Mrs.Nandan, Radha, Mrs.Pandu, Chitra, Mrs.Vasudev, Rugmini, Mrs.Dasarath and Urmila who are well known in epics Mahabharat and Ramayan. Apart from these characters Mrs.Hrimaan and Laavanya are original character. In this play, they try to reveal their inner pathetic feelings through frivolity. Chitra states about club-

**It stands for freedom! for  
Liberty! It's our call to sisterhood!  
...join us....all you newly wed  
girls with mothers-in-law....  
....say it with me....down with  
reactionaries! Away with our  
suppressors! our repressors!  
our oppressors! our depressors! (WCS.78)**

In 'Inner Laws' Poile Sengupta tries to reveal the mental spectrum of two generation as Mothers-in-law and daughter-in-law who try to retain inherent hostility for the relationship. In Indian context, Poile Sengupta presents the familial identity and female roles through character. She tries to construct the awareness of women. She presents in the play socio-political and cultural structures. The play challenges the reader to think about inherited social patterns as well as stereotype thinking. In the play 'Keats Was a Tuber', Poile Sengupta presents marriage and conjugal relationship between men and women. Through the educational institutions, several types of violence and crimes are depicted. These institutions are the part of the society where teacher and students' relationship are converted into marriage. These relations are the cause of exploitation and oppression. In the life of women the influence and effect of marriage is so crucial to expose the glimpses of society. The play is set in the staffroom of the English Department of a small town college of Tamilnadu. The play is satire on Indian English. It functions several parts of world. Due to excess of British language, Indian culture is also affected.

The play 'Alipha' dramatizes a parallel story of a social activist and a politician along with his power that is the cause of exploitation. In Alipha, Poile Sengupta exposes such social evils love, lust, greed, anger, hate, revenge, gang rape, violence, political power and physical torture that are the root of women's pathetic condition. It is a one-hour play written in 2001, that opines for the discussion on the various forms of violence that is related to females. In this play, the Woman, social activist reveals miserable condition of her life how she faces problems such as sufferings, discrimination and illiteracy in the society. Through the Alipha, Poile Sengupta projects the character of the Woman as the spokesman of female pathetic condition. She admits:-

**How unhappy these women are! What  
a miserable life they lead. It's  
not just the poverty. That's bad enough.  
It's also the rules that they have  
to follow...because they are women.  
So many rules. Keep your legs closed....  
....keep your mouth shut. Don't  
dress up too much because a man  
will get attracted to you. Don't  
make demands because the man  
might get angry with you. Don't  
wear scent. Don't let the jasmine  
dangle in your hair. Don't swing  
your hips like a prostitute. Don't  
smile. Don't laugh. (WCS.233)**

In this observation, Poile Sengupta has tried to highlight every aspect of exploitation and oppression regarding women. She not only reveals the miserable condition of women but also tries to create awareness in the women to construct their rights and position in the male hegemony. Poile Sengupta's another play 'Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni', is a post modern drama that deals with conflict that is timeless. The two mythological characters the Man and the Woman suffer because they belong to oppressed modern society. The dramatist tries to give the voices for the real identity of Shoorpanakha and Shakuni that is hidden in the society. They reveal their inner pain, frustration as well as revenge against the society how they are neglected in this contemporary scenario. In the words of Shoorpanakha, Poile Sengupta admits:-

**'I was bleeding.....all down my face  
....Was it so wrong to tell a man  
'I love you? .....I wanted love....  
Just a little love.....for a little  
while.' (WCS.262)**

In this play, Poile Sengupta presents Shoorpanakha as helpless. History makes no justice against her, so she wants revenge. She raises a question against the society. She narrates:-

**What was Shoorpanakha's crime?  
That she approached a man with  
sexual desire ? Shoorpanakha merely**

**wanted love.... They assaulted a  
defenseless woman.... (WCS.277-78)**

In this statement, Poile Sengupta tries to present the pathetic condition of the woman. further the Man (Shakuni) also has revengeful feelings. He shares his innermost thoughts:-“I felt that Shakuni hadn’t been given his due.....I realized that he was a victim.” (WCS.276)

Poile Sengupta exposes that the Man and the Woman are still suffering in the modern times. The dramatist tries to reveal another story to expose the real condition of the characters in modern era. In this perspective, the playwright raises the question about subjugation and oppression regarding woman. She tries to give the voice to the most neglected, suppressed, oppressed and minor characters of the epics. In this play, Poile Sengupta tries to change the perspective of modern society towards the Man and the Woman and makes their new identity. In Samara’s song, Poile Sengupta explores governance and democracy that form another social institution where women are oppressed due to power authority. The title of the play ‘Samara’s Song’, in which Samara mean a helpless girl who has served in the palace. Her tongue has been clipped by the queen preventing her from divulging some hidden secrets about the intrigues played in the palace. In this play, the dramatist exposes how power and knowledge go together in rendering women subjugated. A voiceless woman, Samara had been a victim of the power of the queen in the palace where she works. The title of the play is symbolic. Here, Poile Sengupta reveals the sorrow and sufferings of the woman due to power authority. Through her plays, Poile Sengupta gives a voice to those voiceless and oppressed women who are suppressed under the patriarchy. Her plays explain the exploitation of female body as well as forming a resistance against atrocities. In her plays, she depicts a realistic picture of India where violence is prevalent everywhere towards women. Sengupta’s plays are centred around women’s subjugation, discrimination, domestic violence, patriarchy as well as female atrocities. The social issues are responsible for the suffering of women in the society. The subordination of women is well defined in Sengupta’s plays. In spite of being educated, women are oppressed and subjugated in the hands of male authority. Through her play, Poile Sengupta reveals the reality of the society where women are not secure in the male hegemony. It is evident, if violence is there, women are also equipped to exhibit their resistance against these patterns of violence.

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