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Impact of Technology on Human Values in Manjula Padmanabhan's Play Harvest: A Study

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Abstract:

Globalisation led to exponential growth of technology in late 20th century and has witnessed unprecedented advancement in field of electronics. The writer fictionally depicted illicit trade between the first and third world nation by organ (re)plantation and exploiting them respectively. The technological impact is mainly analysed in three ways and are as follows; firstly, health of donors, secondly morality or ethics in relationships, thirdly the everyday lifestyle of the people. At climax many spilled beans and misinterpretation occurs amongst cast of play, ultimately wrong person was scapegoated and becomes victim. The author dystopian vision of play and marvelously etching the plot in a utopian manner is eye catching for readers. The author gestured more on human values than education and no spoiler in between play, besides also reveals wicked agenda between first and third world nation and its modus operandi through anonymous syndicate.

Key words: -Globalisation, Technology, First (rich) and Third (poor) world nation, Dystopian and Utopian.

About Author

Manjula Padmanabhan was born in 1953 Delhi, and renowned journalist, cartoonist, illustrator, fiction writer and author and writer of children's books as well as writing for television and the stage work. Her works aim on the science and technology, gender, and global discrimination. After completing her varsity studies, Padmanabhan returned back to India and started her career in journalism. She wrote many plays– including Light Out! (1996), The Artist's Model (1995), and Sextet (1996) and a well-known book of short stories, Hot Death, Cold Soup (1915). Harvest won the first Onassis Prize for theatre and premiered its show in Greece in 1999; it has also been shown in theatres in India. Her recent most novel is Getting There (2000).

Preface

In this advance technological developing world where we dwell requires machine, no matter how the size of micro-processor of computing world reduces day by day and leading to development of society, All machine

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needs some soft data in form of codes or algorithm to function, the raw data which we feed needs top excelled minds in world, and is only possible through education, So along with education every citizen needs good moral values or ethics. Some learn it through school, some yield it by communicating, some acquire it by sensing surroundings, etc. Learning good things may take whole life or everyday habitual process, but learning bad things takes very less time, it all depends on will power of individual.

Objectives

This paper focuses on the following; firstly, how the evolved technology had drastically changed the lifestyle, livelihood of both world nations, secondly importance of human values and moral education in day-to-day life, thirdly determining the sense of assimilation of oneself getting involved in unwanted task and trap forcefully and getting out of vicious sinister by deciphering it successfully.

Gist and Plot of Play

Manjula Padmanabhan used a utopian (unreal planned) realm to predict the hardship faced by the poor third world city residents in the twenty-first century. She was confronted with the savage reality of the commoditisation of human organs on a morning tread walk around the city in Chennai on a random visit to her sister. Multiple socio-economic researches on Indian cities are there, but are not mainly poverty related studies. Prime causes of urban poverty are due to unemployment, employment with stress and low wages. Harvest play shows the eye-opener grim consequences of poverty such as over population, organ selling, arson like incarceration, biasing of parents towards wage earners, artificial insemination, and the ruining of women. This act of organ commoditisation also portrays the moral question of use and abuse of human body of both male and female persons, irrespective of justifying the point of organ selling; Padmanabhan depicts it as one of the utter realities of the modern third world. The rich Capitalist people have seduced the world with the promise of making money through the organ trade by preying on the third world people. Biopolitics, as per Foucault, it is a political logicity that controls the individual bodies and entire population as its subject, to keep them submissive and productive. The way in which Biopolitics exerts its power on human life and society is known as biopower. This article attempts to decode the globalised effects of first world people towards the third world, as it is expressed in the play Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan.

Characters in Play

Om Prakash: The lead protagonist of the story and bread feeder to his family.

Jaya: Om Prakash's wife, pretending to be sister at initial stage of play and external marital affair with Jeetu.

Ma: A widow named Indumathi, Mother of Om Prakash, Jeetu, and mother in-law of Jaya.

Jeetu: Om's younger brother, works as a gigolo kind of male prostitute.

BidyutBai: An elderly neighborhood of Om Prakash family.

Ginni: A false Simulation from Video Contact module in the form of Virgil, provided by Inter planta services.

Virgil: Cast from first world, aged around 50 years having transplanted his body fourth time to keep himself healthier from North America, never seen physically in the play.

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Etching of Play

The play takes in utopian fashion in Mumbai in 2010 A.D., set in a constrained single room apartment of a pale Mumbai of the dystopian vision, play resume by falling the audience in the middle of the problems and privations of Om Prakash's family, the dramatist effectively conveys the terrible tone of the play in a concise trend. The four Indian donors of the play Om, his wife Jaya, Om's mother Indumathi, referred to as Ma and his brother, Jeetu belong to the Om Prakash family. The plot gets into motion by revealing Om's Faustian (evil and submissive) pact with the Inter Planta Services and has been passed the only criteria of being physically fit. Om has been selected for the job for selling the rights of his own body to an anonymous buyer in the United States. Jaya, his wife, accuses him of making the deceptive choice but Om's reply to her reveals that the miserable condition of his life forced him to take this bitter decision to run the family daily expenses. Initially, we come across with the lead protagonists of the play - Om, who stands in a long queue with other younger ones, who have been lining up to sell their body organs in dark world market. Their restlessness implies the pessimistic attitude. They are left with no options but to capitulate themselves. They were like 'animals at the slaughterhouse'. Om sign up as an organ donor for Ginni, she is an American woman. It's just because he is unemployed. Life of a lower middle-class family without a job for the head of it will be unimaginable. Om does not have any other options, but to sign up the agreement and to get ready for the donation of body via Inter Planta Services, Inc.

He decides to sell unspecified body organs through a private confidential firm called 'Inter Planta Service' to a wealthy person, Ginni in North America. Inter Planta and the recipient is fed up with them self of maintaining Om's health and since control and commanding the lives of Om, his mother Indumathi, and his wife Jaya in their single room apartment. The recipient, Ginni, regularly looks on them via a video couch and treats them patronisingly. At beginning Om's volunteers to meet Ginni, has been projected as attracting white woman. The elementary theme of the play carries deep sense and constitutes the story of this play. It is a analogy of contemporary social scenario of the third world (poor) countries and specifically of India as the organ trading is preferred due to rising demand for donated organs, high economic profitability, and uncontrolled trafficking.

Some important notion by Michel Foucault related to this play,

Michel Foucault, throughout his conversation of biopower, attempts to move away from eloquent of power as rooted in sovereign authority (ruling body). As Foucault has asserted that "the force of sovereign power is planted in disciplinary control over the individual, in killing or letting live". Foucault imply by saying, "Modern biopower extends political control over all the major processes of life itself, treating men as a species, regulating the species' biological processes- including birth, death, and illness".

Later in the play, the guards of Inter Planta service install the Polygonal Contact Module, that looks like a "white, shape like globe", that projects the seductive figure and voice of Ginni, only a false virtual simulation, establishes bond between the first and the third world countries. The way Ginni introduce into the family mentioned in the Foucault concept of the sovereign power which "was exercised over bodies through a system of surveillance via a mesh or network of material coercions which show an efficient and controlled increase (less-expense, more-return) in the utility of the subjected body".

By the Act II of this play, Ma has lost her connection with the family members, completely astounded by the new lifestyle of richness provided by the first world patrons. The room of the family house has been drastically

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changed with ultra-modern gadgets that Ginni has arranged for them in exchange of their body organs like the TV set, computer system, mini gymnastic, an air conditioner, etc. Her adaptation of the new lifestyle shows Indumathi is the perfect receiver of Ginni's gifts, the life of unrestrained utilisation of the late capitalism which advertises.

The character of Indumathi represents a major portion of Indian women who are wholly depending upon men for their needs. Being the victim of a male dominating society, she cuts her links with it. Depending upon her elderly son and the happiness offered by Ginni; she thinks her life is well-settled. For her, Om is the bread earner and the one who can take care of her basic needs. She never cares or bothers about for Jeetu and Jaya. She also even let the Inter Planta Services to take Jeetu instead of Om. She loses bonding with herself and others, and feels completely by a super luxury video couch which takes care of all her needs. The colonised who think that they reached the social status of the colonised by using some of their gadgets is well showed by the character of Ma i.e., Indumathi.

The uniform and structurally monitoring of the contact module in Om's house enables Ginni not only to trespass in the third world, without ever having physically travelled in the geographical domain, which is even more effectual because only the recipient is able to work at their own will. Ginni's tactics of surveillance makes the donors disciplined and nerdy in character. The bitter truth is that their lunch consists of the multi-colored nutritional pills provided to them by Inter Planta Services. The constant vigilance of Om-Prakash and his family would help Om to stay healthy. It means to say, his good health would ensure the healthiest body organs and thus became docile as per recipient contract bond. Mother has become fully addicted to the new life style of luxury. She strictly adheres most of her time watching television.

Some important notion by Michel Foucault related to this play,

The Panopticon automatises and deindividualizes power so that no individual wields or commands it, it means the mechanism of vigilance is used to control the donor domain and force them for submission to the governing receivers.

Ginni finally reveals to be Virgil in virtual world, the first world recipient, eager to live perpetually, one among the people who have "lost the art of having children" and keep on buying human bodies as long as they willingly afford it, as Virgil says, " This is my fourth body in fifty years."

When the Guards arrive at Om's home, they take Jeetu mercilessly, thinking him to be Om, physically tortured, manhandling and humiliating him. Jeetu returns to home after his surgery with two "big-goggles, created to look like a pair of virtual eyes". Even as the transplant turns out to be a successful Jeetu realises that he has lost his ability to see the real world as his eyes have been taken out and shouts in annoying "I can't sleep, I can't dream, I can't even cry". But the programming done in his mind still makes it possible for him to see the beaming image of Ginni, the last line depicts how utopian concept has been inducted by the author, even though that technological advancement is mere impossible task in the present days.

But despite Jeetu has been tricked by the tempting image of the buyer Ginni (Virgil), who urge Jeetu to vow that he will do whatever Ginni desire of him, which ultimately results in the contract of Jeetu to the second phase of transplant. Here Jeetu serves a doppelganger for Om by substituting him. Later at the end of the play

we see that Jeetu also serves as an identical (clone) for Ginni, as his whole body is transplanted to keep Ginni alive. While Jeetu happily goes with the Inter Planta Guards, Om tries to assure them that he is real donor.

Some important notion by Michel Foucault related to this play,

As Foucault portrays it in *Self control and Punish*, that, “unlike a sovereign – judicial power, disciplinary power is not the crude fact of the controlling power of the one over the many, or one of group over another, but the many forms of domination that can be exercised in organisation; so not the king in his central position; not sovereignty in its one edifice, but the multiple conquest that take place and function within the social body”.

While both the male characters Om and Jeetu in circumstances where their maleness is dealt due to their poverty, in a patriarchal society a woman is not more than a body for quenching of their lustful satisfaction. Similarly in the play the binaries of male and female shift to third and the first world, where the third world citizens play the role of female shows prime identity is restricted to their body. Om sells his body, Jeetu world as a male gigolo, so both are depicting the role change and are projected as female equivalent.

The demeaning of the poor citizens does not end are projected as female equivalents. This is the promise that the necromancy economy of body organ trade extends to its objects, sell your organ and you will make more money than you will ever earn through years of strife and labour. The vow of millennial capitalism works, since it allows the third world person to see their body as that which contains a natural reserve part, a naturally occurring surplus that is not the product of labour yet is still in high requirement. The third-world individual is thus seduced into selling the organs that her body has a spare.

Virgil can influence over both the brothers, where Jeetu cannot control oneself from going to her “She’s a goddess and she exists. I would do anything for her anything”. Virgil virtually as Ginni has extended his destructive hands to Om also. Om with his high desire to meet Ginni determines to sell his own body for Ginni, after his brother Jeetu has already been taken away for the transplantation of his entire body. Thus, the Video Contact Module helps Ginni to kill the two birds with one stone.

An optimal ownership of organ is sustainable. The body organ once removed is irreclaimable or irreversible process. While the entire donor falls trap to Ginny’s tactics, Padmanabhan uses Jaya, the only bold character in the play, is completely opposed to Om’s decision, to reclaim a human dignity of sorts, a dignity that allows Jaya to resist the bait of money and the seductive escape from the evil technology.

The final act of this play presents Jaya on platform. Virgil, the first world receiver, now desire to hunt upon the body of Jaya by inserting his seeds in Jaya’s womb by virtual sex. For Virgil, now Jaya’s value lies in her reproductive abilities. Virgil desires to interpolate Jaya as an eager gestational surrogate, just as he had interpellated Om and Jeetu. But Jaya rejects the illusion of virtual sex by ordering Virgil who must come to her in person crossing the disease-free domain from the first world for the real physical contact if he wants to have a child with her – “I know you’re stronger than me, you’re richer than me. But if you want me, you must risk your skin for me”.

Thus, Jaya poses a serious challenge to the first world. But Jaya’s oppose reaches ultimate state in angst, by a broken piece of glass, she threatens to kill herself as Virgil orders the employees of Inter Planta to break the door of Jaya and force her to agree. She has rediscovered “a new definition for winning, i.e., winning by losing”, she states, “I win if you lose... If you want to play games with people, you should be careful not to push them

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off the board”. You pushed me too far. “Now there’s nothing left for me to lose... I am not willing to care take my body for your sake! The only thing I have left which is still mine is death. My death and my pride.” Thus, forcing Virgil to leave the situation in haywire and bewildered and unable to make any decision and making him to leave haphazard manner. She finally destroys all gadgets provided by Inter planta services. She saved herself from this vicious trap and won the battle.

Jaya is the personification of resistance, she is proud of her identity, as she warns Virgil, “I am holding a part of glass against my throat”, she reclaims the right of her own body through suicide threaten warning, which Virgil and the other first world receivers ask to snatch from them.

Jaya is the only trait who resists against the greedy evil motives of the American recipient Virgil by reclaiming her right on her body through killing herself via transplantation. For a third world people, this is the best feasible mode of resistance considering this situation. Jaya is represented as one who parades bravely against domination of the Inter Planta Services and simultaneously maintains the family bond by overcoming different kinds of temptations.

However, this play ends in giving hope that the threats of organ trade and deed could be oppressed by some conscientious persons like Jaya who is the representative of modern age woman of a third world nation. Harvest poses a strong critique of the first world’s deed of third world bodies for the commodities of labour power and, as the recently emerged trade in organs shows health. Padmanabhan notion of winning by losing seems a disturbingly suited to define the third world individual’s difficult situation by losing own body part to win the case.

Outline Theme of this Play and Brief Analysis

Economic Exploitation: - The theme of economic exploitation is dominant and the important aspect of the play. The family members of Jaya, Jeetu, Om, and Ma Indumathi are one family classified to the benthic strata of Indian society. Om decides to go look for a job and due to their economic instability and poor background he did not understand what mess he is about to enter by joining the Inter planta Services. The family of Om is ruined due to their finance and economy as Om decides to sell his own body organs and parts to Ginni (Virgil) to consume him wholly later and will pay them a sum of money from it. The economic exploitation is seen everywhere throughout the play where Ginni tells that they provide luxurious life for people like them, and they provide them with life which reflects the economic exploitation where the poor are taken advantage of their economic status.

Conditions of the Poor Sections of Indian Society:- The conditions of the poor sections of Indian society are worst. They are considered and treated as spare parts, with nobody to speak up for them. They are the subaltern who is exploited by the West for their organs in exchange of wealth. They are treated nothing more of an animal about to be slaughtered for wealthy class society who will consume their bodies to stay alive. This treatment reflects the worst economic and social status of poor in the society. Jeetu resembles a man who is a gigolo and sleeps with both man and a woman to earn money. His condition also reflects the type of job they are into and do in the society to keep them alive.

Body Commodification:- Body commodification is the important theme of the play. Human body and its trafficking are presented nicely in this play. Jeetu becomes a victim of human trafficking (hawala) and organ

transplant. Ginni watches every move of their family and later it was realised that Ginni was just nothing but a computer animated pet to seduce Jeetu to submit his body to Virgil. Jeetu's eyes were taken first for the transplant and later her entire body was transplanted into Virgil's body which made Jaya angry and question their work. Throughout the play, the body transplant is the issue, and it was Om who was supposed to donate the organ, but Jeetu was taken forcefully and later became submissive and fell into vicious trap to Ginni (Virgil), and he died giving his body, later had consumed his entire body for young Blondie looks.

Technology and Cyber culture: - The role of technology and Cyber culture is also predominant theme in the play. The Contact Module was not just an electronic gadget that connects the two worlds (realm) together, but also to monitor the inner world of Om, Jaya, Ma, and Jeetu. It was seen later in the play that Virgil knew everything that the family tried to hide away from him. Virgil told Jaya that he recorded their movements and their conversations as well as knows about Jeetu and his relationship with other family members. The most important aspect to know was that the Contact Module could see and record even if it was offline, and the family was viciously tricked thinking that Virgil cannot hear or see their talk and actions. Ma seems to be disappeared at the end of the play and her love for TV reflects that mankind is getting attached to technology and Ma's inability to separate from TV also shows the seductiveness of mankind in the world of technology.

Objectification of Woman:- There is an objectification of a woman in the play. It is however generalised where Jeetu objectifies Jaya even though it is immoral, but Jaya's desires and infidel relationship surpasses beyond the societal norms invoking a sense of implications that moral choices are always ambiguous. In this play, Virgil appears as Ginni, who is a pseudo woman through animating character to seduce man into donating their bodies and it is proof that when Jeetu falls in preying hands of Ginni and determined to give everything for her. This reflects that a woman body is used to seduce man to donate everything in the name of her. This genuinely says the objectification of a woman in the society.

Post-Colonial Elements:- The play can also be studied from a post-colonial lens. It is a post-colonial world India where the East is still exploited and dominated by the West in different dimensions. The postcolonial element of binary opposition is well deposited in the play where Ginni or Virgil and Ma, Jaya, Om and Jeetu show the colonised and coloniser relationship. It is ambivalent between Om and Ginni where Om has a varied feeling where he hates and loves the relationship simultaneously. He is in favor of Ginni sometimes and he hates for getting in trouble sometimes.

However, the post colonialism has always vie to subvert European stereotypes of the East and the action of Virgil who utilise human body of the Third World nation implying the cannibalistic attitude of the first world nation which they fully condemn it, but they project unto the East. Jaya erects and stands against Virgil calling his action as cannibalistic shows the subversion of European stereotypes of the East.

The postcolonial element of subalternity can also be seen in the play where Jaya is the subaltern woman, but she is the only vocal woman who is doubly sectionised in the society. She is marginalised by the patriarchal society where Ma and Om not liking her for in-relationship with Jeetu for she believes that she has lost Om as well as Jeetu as he is dead, and she is again sectionised by the imperial strategy of Virgil who tries to convince and seduce her to implant a e-device on her belly to make her pregnant.

Jaya represents a subaltern woman who stood throughout the play and resists the imperial strategy of Virgil and subverts his power on her. In final part, we attempt to bring together ecocritical and postcolonial concepts of

time, space, and the subject in addressing the concept of the Anthropogenic. We will show how postcolonial literature has contributed to addressing the urgency of conceptualising humans as a geophysical force with a potentially devastating impact on this planet.

Personal Views and Interpretation of Play by Author

The example Padmanabhan chooses is the transplantation industry, but with a sinister twist as the play shows that the organs are harvested in India, only to be transplanted into the bodies of affluent people in the First World. The circumstances surrounding the grooming of a perfect donor are visualised by making use of all kinds of modern technological advancements (more of these later), but the practice of organ trading is already a reality in today's world. Thus, due to a gap in Indian law, organ trading was legal until 1994 so that kidneys were openly bought and sold in certain quarters in the urban centers of Chennai, Mumbai, and Bangalore, which were accordingly referred to as 'the great organ bazaar.' The Organ and Transplantation Act, which was passed in 1994 and bans commercial trading as well as restricting transplants to organs donated by close relatives, failed in eradicating the international kidney trade (hawala method) as the harvesting of organs now continues underground covertly.

Ultimately, the transplant industry presents no exception from the usual paths that capital and technology follow in the global economy, which still exploits resources in the third world in a decolonising move by making use of technological advances in various fields. The big difference to the coveted resources in question here, i.e., organs, is that the neo imperialist West has now literally moved into the body of the Other and just like with many other industrial products employs a well-organised just-in-time system to extract the organs exactly when they are needed. Thus, the body turns into a site on which regimes of power are played out to transform it into a commodity consumed by the First World.

Conclusion

Most important thing is that Manjula Padmanabhan has skillfully presented the power equation in which power is equally divided by both the coloniser and the colonised. Ginni's body defects and richness and Om's bodily perfection and poverty make them equal competitors. Their mutual needs change the whole power equation where we cannot simply consider Om and his family at the oppressed end or victims of it unknowingly. Similarly, when Virgil, the real person behind Ginni (pseudo simulator image) wants Jaya to surrogate his child, Jaya asks him to come in person to get her. Here Jaya is positioned as a most powerful person who prefers and chooses reality over the virtuality. Women's bodies often bear the symbolic burden of signifying culture, tradition, community, and nation. Padmanabhan through the character of Jaya presents the reverse gaze of the colonised world to contest their position. So Padmanabhan through this play has projected the dystopian view of the futuristic Indian and had discussed about the apocalyptic future of the third world countries who are nothing more than the harvest to the first world.

Utopian Scope

The play *Harvest* is not just the social critique, but it goes beyond the boundaries of nation to delve into the relationship of human beings from different countries. It focuses on the blurring the ideas of boundaries in both political and psychological sense and highlights the neocolonial market. The play shows vision of Biopolitics and biopower in coming days, The play shows the crumbling of societal and familial relationship due to the

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increasing consumption of consumer products and unending materialistic pursuits of human beings; on the other hand, it also projects the operative of developed countries in the developing countries to propagate the notion of consumerism for mercenary purposes.

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