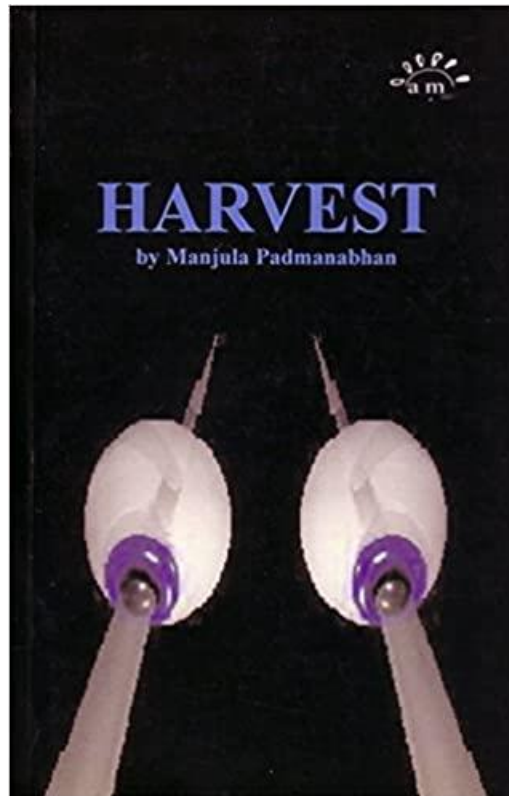


‘Harvest’ as a Metaphor in Padmanabhan’s *Harvest*

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Courtesy: https://www.amazon.com/Harvest-Manjula-Padmanabhan/dp/0953675777/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2VELGSO8J71VN&keywords=Padmanabhan%E2%80%99s+Harvest&qid=1647539601&s=books&srefix=padmanabhan+s+harvest%2Cstripbooks%2C176&sr=1-1

Literature is a powerful tool of expressing emotions, imparting knowledge, spreading enlightenment, and pouring light on contemporary issues. Literature is just not a freedom of expression but a weapon which has the power to bring change in the society and works as a ‘catalyst’. Literature is the mirror of the society and shows what we have made of it. It is a critique of contemporary issues and agendas. The purpose of literature is to convey message and to make people aware of happenings around them and the best thing about it is that it is done in a

lighter manner where people take it up as a source of entertainment and indirectly forces them to think about the evils of society.

There have been various genres of literature, Short Stories and Dramas are some of them. The desire to listen to stories is deeply rooted in human civilization world over. Man, being the social animal, is always interested in other man's life. This trait of human mind has given birth to the art of story-telling traditions which originally produced epics such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

When it comes to story-telling, how can women writers lag behind? We all, especially in India, have grown up in the atmosphere of *Dadi Nani ki kahaaniyaan*. These *Kahaaniyaan* are their accounts of wisdom and experience. Through story-telling they have been inculcating value system in the future generations.

Education and Economic independence have given women the power and self-awareness. Contemporary women writers see their women as individuals, not mere types. Contemporary fiction has changed the paradigms for women and is now a level playing field. But the ride is not that simple as it seems, it comes with its own pitfalls and challenges.

There is a sense of conflict in women's writings. It may be the conflict that the women are facing or of the society which is in the tumult because of the 'face off' between the traditional and modern values. The picture of new woman emerges from the woman trying to find her 'self.' She has become a conscious agent of change.

In the early years after Independence the writers have written about woman's powerlessness, helplessness and her being the 'victim'. According to Usha Bande,

The result is that the authors eulogies the stereotypes, advocate self sacrifice, meekness, and such other virtues and focus on the problems of women. Since these stories are written as the obvious message to the existing society, many of them have contrived plots and unconvincing situations. (Bande, Usha 40)

Literature springs from our innate likeness of telling a story, of arranging words in pleasing patterns, of expressing in words some special aspect of our human experience. Today's woman is struck between home and office, childbearing, struggling with conventions. Usha Bande says:

Shuttling between the burden of home and workplace, childbearing,

Mothering, struggling with conventions women have first to survive.
The question of equality arises afterwards. (Bande, Usha)

The modern woman has become more aware of her ambitions and career. Women have started writing freely about love, sex, marriage, extra marital status. Manjula Padmanabhan has been one of the most potent literary voices in contemporary India. Manjula Padmanabhan, the Onassis Award writer's short story entitled "Interface" published in the science fiction/speculative fiction anthology *Strange Worlds! Strange Times!* – provides an appropriate illustration of our present-day global community in its representation of the machine-dominated world of biotechnological implants, artificial intelligences, and other monstrous inventions that proliferate our world.

Manjula Padmanabhan won the prestigious Onassis International Cultural Award for her work *Harvest* in 1997 in Greece. Manjula was the first Indian English playwright to earn International recognition. Prof. B. Parvathi remarks:

Manjula Padmanabhan belongs to that generation of Indian women writers in English who have boldly stepped out of conventions that define respectability to address issues of gender, woman, her body and its behavior, its exploitation in a family and social setting. Manjula Padmanabhan has opened a fresh dialogue on a new angle of feminist concerns. (Parvathi, B. 38)

Harvest represents the imprisonment of a middle-class family of the third-world to the appealing but prohibited international economy of the first world. The play mainly highlights this social apathy, especially amongst the members of middle class society. It is an imaginary play about an unemployed Indian man and his family who trades his body to a customer in the United States. It is a futuristic play that throws light on the anxiety and the survival of a man and how he puts his whole family in trouble to sell organs via an agency to someone in the first world for a petty amount of money.

The economic losses and social dislocation that are being caused to many developing countries by rapid financial and trade liberalization, the growing inequalities of wealth and opportunities arising from globalization; and the perception that environmental, social, and cultural problems have been made worse by the workings of the global free-market economy. The soaring degree of attack by elements of terrorism are some of what have characterized globalization today. It means developing nations have faced more problems than ever as a result of the phenomenon of globalization.

In his very sublime analysis of *Harvest*, Rajkumar explains:

Harvest is an ironic examination of the relations between developing and developed countries. The play is set in the imminent future, it imagines a grisly pact between the first and third world desperate (sic) people who can sell their body parts to wealthy clients in return for food, water, shelter and riches for themselves and their families. (Rajkumar 2012:50)

The play is an ironic, sci-fi examination of the relations between developing and developed countries. It is a play about how the first world cannibalizes the third world to fulfill its own desires. *Harvest* is a dark, bitter, savagely funny vision of the cannibalistic future that awaits the human race; a parable of what will happen when the rich denizens of the First World begin to devour bits and pieces of the Third World poor. *Harvest* poses a potent critique about how the first world cannibalizes the third world to fulfill its own desires.

This play portrays the neo-capitalist attitude of developed countries towards the developing countries. The third world's materialistic desire and willingness to embrace the consumer culture for social mobility and to acquire better lifestyle has left them with a dehumanizing effect that affects their social and familial relationships.

In *Harvest*, Om, a just-laid-off breadwinner for a struggling Indian family living in a cramped Bombay tenement, decides to sell his organs to a shadowy company called InterPlanta in hopes of reversing his financial plight. Om's family is monitored around the clock, receiving frequent video phone-type inquiries and directives from the supposed organ recipient, an icy young blonde named Ginni, provided by InterPlanta. The family's lives continue to go awry.

The play may be set in future, but it reflects contemporary conditions as well. India, one-third the size of the United States, has three times the population and almost 30 percent of overpopulation and inadequate education.

Like a few of Padmanabhan's sci-fi stories and novels, *Harvest* shows some grey, almost anaesthetized near future time (year 2010) when the latest technological advancement in body-transplants have enabled endless prolongation of human life and the human body is under full control of the owner.

Padmanabhan uses such trade in human organs as a metaphor for neocolonialism. It is a futuristic play, and the future is used as a magnifying lens to look at a greedy and dead-end - a soulless world without exits. There are many reasons for the varying perceptions towards globalization. It has failed to give much propagated economic benefits to the developing

countries. Globalization does not promote, as it claims, the charity; instead it drags humans towards great loss to the poor people of developing countries. In the post globalized era, India is a big market in terms of selling products and a source of raw material. People from elite and upper middle class to the poor class, are attracted to the consumerist culture. The availability of plentiful consumer products within the reach of every segment of the society has created a materialistic desire among them and because of this a social behavioral change has taken place in the human relationships in society. There is no place for human value and ethics, as its adverse effect, in globalization.

Harvest revolves around aftermaths of ‘new trade’ between the two clearly defined groups the donors and the recipients of organs transplant. Ginni, Virgil, and the guards represent the recipients, obviously Americans – the first world people, and Om Prakash – the prospective donor and his family represents the Third World. Om is the head of a middle class family who is twenty years old and the eldest son of Ma. He is married to Jaya who with her passion for life is a contrast to her husband. Jeetu is a younger son of Ma, who is a male prostitute – a gigolo for whom life is just a joke.

According to Bauman, the poor people in a consumer society have no access to normal life, they are deprived of all kinds of normalities. The exclusion from aesthetic lifestyle of consumer culture leads the poor to social degeneration. Bauman concludes that the inadequacy and the failure to buy as a consumer evolve into bitterness at being abandoned, deprived, and excluded from the social feast to which others gained entry.

“Overcoming that consumer inadequacy is likely to be seen as the only remedy – the sole exit from a humiliating plight.” (Bauman 38)

In this play, the market value reigns in familial relationships. The commodification of mother’s affection with exchange value puts Jaya in the same place. Being a housewife Jaya is involved in non-salaried household works which have no exchange value in the production of consumer market and this situation disqualifies her for Ma’s affection and love. She criticizes Jeetu and Jaya as *rude, insolent, ungrateful...* (M. Padmanabhan 8). Thus, the marketability of its people deeply affects the social and familial relationships in the consumerist world. The poor of the Third World are hopelessly excluded from capitalism’s promise of global prosperity. Therefore, they are allured to get wealth and technologically advanced lifestyle through the occult trade of their organs, which needs no ‘expenditure of labour’ and yet promises of generating wealth without production, value without efforts.

From the very beginning, the playwright exposes the true degree of psychological compulsion that has taken place in the globalized world. The secret schemes of enticement and

controlling of the First World are seen when needy and anxious Om is decreed an eligible, healthy candidate for a 'job' at InterPlanta Services – a Transnational Corporation. He is made to believe that he is the 'chosen one' to receive a technologically advanced lifestyle provided by the unknown recipient through InterPlanta Services.

Like Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, he becomes an ambitious person for wealth and success and surrenders the rights of his entire body to an unknown purchaser. His perplexed feelings about 'The Faustian Deal' allow the playwright to describe the intricate blend of optimism and misery that has provoked his actions. Om becomes ecstatic but does not know that globalization deceives. By signing the deal, he has accepted his new 'rich' life as a 'slave'. The recruitment process shows the neo-capitalist attitude of developed countries towards the developing countries. There is an inhuman treatment given to deprived seekers who are merely 'objects' for them. The process of selection gives sad picture of the literal blind chase for a job without knowing what adverse effects it could have on their lives.

Harvest, technically means "the time of year when the grain, fruit, etc. is collected on a farm; the act of collecting the grain, fruit, etc." This word is a synonym for agriculture. But in this play, harvest ironically means harvesting of body parts. A 'body' is of primary importance for its owner. It is being nurtured, taken care of, and then finally is prepared to get 'sold'. The best body will get the best price and, in this process, the 'imperfect' or the 'diseased' body is rejected. In this play, human organs are openly selling in the market.

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