

## Negotiating Postcolonial Aspects in Manjula Padmanavan's *Harvest*

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### **Abstract:**

*Post colonialism simply focused on the impact of human control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. It aims to expose the themes and representatives that have imposed imperial ideology, colonial dominance, and western hegemony. This study attempts to explore the post colonial aspects in the play Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan. Using post colonial motifs and themes like cultural dominance, surveillance etc, and the paper explores how the people of the Third World are subjected to subjugation at the hands of the powerful people of the First World. Besides the paper aims to demonstrate that colonizing the mind is a constant process and there was also opposition to the First World influences.*

**Keywords:** Postcolonial, Surveillance, Subjugation, Hegemony, First World, Third World, Dominance

The term Post colonialism is used to describe all aspects of culture that have been influenced by imperialism from the time of colonization to the present day. By rewriting history and asserting cultural identities through strategies like separatism, hybridity, mimicry it undermines the universalist claims of literature, identifies colonial sympathies in the canon and replaces colonial metanarratives with counter-narratives of resistance. The aftermath of colonization and the repercussions of colonial oppression are examined and analyzed in post colonialism. Set against the backdrop of coalition between the First World and the Third World, the play "Harvest" by Manjula Padmanabhan led to the gateway of post colonialism. Hence, the paper proposes to unveil some of the postcolonial affairs elicited in it.

Written in 1997, the play is introduced in a futuristic Bombay of the year 2010, where all issues over the legal, moral and ethical acceptability of organ sales and transplants have been settled and the organ market has been fully institutionalized. The hypothetical

international firm in the play, 'Interplanta Services', which executes these processes, is a symbol of global capitalism's rising expansion. The drama focuses on how these issues affect the poor highlighting the disparities in wealth between the wealthy First World and their impoverished Third World counterparts.

Padmanabhan's "Harvest" is a three act drama about the commodification of the human body in third world countries. It is in this world people from the lower socioeconomic classes give their organs away in exchange for food and money. The same is happened with Om, the play's key character who is jobless and signs up as an organ donor for an American receiver named Ginni. This is where colonialism begins through Interplanta Services.

The First world receiver is preoccupied with Om's health and rigorously controls the lives of Om as well as his family members in their one room apartment. Under the instruction of the recipient, the Interplanta Services installed a contact module in the room and supplied food and fuel for the family members. They are forbid to consume anything on their own as well as sharing or selling the domestic unit provided by the Services. It is clearly seen in act one scene one when Guard 1 utters:

Right. All implements of personal fuel preparation will be supplied exclusively by Interplanta Services. Henceforward, you and your domestic unit will consume only those fuels, which will be made available to you by Interplanta...but will forbid you from sharing, selling or buy any means whatsoever, commercially exploiting this facility. (Harvest, P-15)

Om is treated like a slave even before he is chosen as a donor. He becomes a puppet in the hands of the First world as we can see during the selection procedure. He was placed in an environment where he had no control over himself. Everything was under the control of the receiver world. The room was like a cage shaped tunnel and the floor was moving; he followed everything instructed by the First World which we can see in these lines from act one -

Om: ...There's no time to think, just do. Put your arm here, get one prick, put your arm there, get another prick- pissshhh! -pissshhh! Sit here, stand here, take your head this side, look at a light that side. On and on. (Harvest, P-12)

Then even after being chosen as a donor, Om does not know anything specifically. In general when someone applies for a job, he is well informed about the position or environment, what exactly he will have to do or how things will be carried out. But here Om

is about to sell unspecified organs relying merely on the Starter Kit and instructions provided by First World recipients. The image of a master- slave relationship can be found here.

Despite being citizens of an independent country, Om and his family become victims of the First World. A stench of dominance can be found here which we might link to Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. It used to refer to one state's supremacy within a confederation but it's now widely understood as the exercise of authority by consent rather than force. It is useful to use this term to describe the superiority of the First World over the Third World in the context of the play. Even though Om knew that to remain employed they must maintain themselves according to their employer's wishes, the appearance of Ginni fueled this process. As we can see, the characters within the apartment are mesmerized by Ginni. In fact at the first sight of her, Ma got excited and expressed in act one, scene two - Ahhh! Who is this angel? (Harvest, P-22) Ginni's attitude and style of speaking strongly convinces the characters to do exactly what she wants. It takes Om and his family to change their daily habits, to leave their food habits as well as to change their lifestyle. They did it willingly without a second thought. Domination is thus not by force, but by agreement. As we can see when once they were late to eat, Om informed Jaya of Ginni's resentment towards it in act two, scene one- you know how she hates it when we're late to eat! (Harvest, P-36)

Right from the beginning the receiver world, as seen in the play, has been keeping an eye on the donor family with the help of the contact module. It is placed at the center of the room and it can be linked to the "Panopticon" (Jeremy Bentham's 18th century design for a prison, divided into individual cells that allow guards to keep a constant eye on the inmates from a single vantage point). It also serves as a means of communication between the donor family and the receiver world. Whenever the First World senses the necessity, they appear in front of the family through the contact module and modestly instruct or advise the Third World people. And, because the module can rotate to face each corner, it's even more useful. The First World can reach the donor family in any corner of the apartment at any time and meet their requirements. Even when the contact module was turned off, the First World receiver could hear every single word spoken by the donor family without their knowledge. It's very obvious at the end of the third act in scene two, when Virgil states-

Virgil: You did. I listened in to you, Zhaya. I heard every word said in the room.  
Even when the module was off, it recorded-

Jaya: Hhhhh!

Virgil: I know that Jittoo's not Auwm and that Auwm's your husband...

Jaya: And you heard every...everything?

Virgil: Saw too (Harvest, P-84)

As a result, the inhabitants of the apartment are enslaved by the First World's unwavering gaze. This is a kind of gaze where the subject is simultaneously identified, objectified and subjugated. That visibility lends power to the observer but it confers impotence to the observed. So here we can use the term 'surveillance' to describe the complete invasion of privacy. It is one of the most effective tactics for controlling, influencing and managing people.

In the third act, however, we witness that it is Jaya who finally expresses postcolonial resistance in such circumstances. Here we learn about the actual First World recipient who is Virgil, disguised himself as Ginni throughout the play. It is clear in scene two of third act when Jaya enquires about Ginni. He informs her that she was nothing but a computer-animated wet-dream and reveals all the motives behind this. And when Virgil expresses interest in Jaya and asks for her womb to sow their child she denies him saying- No...it was never meant to be. Years ago, a seer told me, my stars denied it. (Harvest, P-86) She appears confident in this situation. Meanwhile she makes him pronounce her name correctly. Furthermore, she tells Virgil that she would not listen to him unless he comes up to her in person rather than communicating through the contact module. In this manner she fights for her honor as well as her rights and her own self.

Virgil constantly tries to persuade Jaya into submitting herself to him but she holds firm and utters- ...you won't have me at all! (Harvest, P-90) Even when guard1 arrives to make Jaya reproduce and demands to enter the room, Jaya says she discovers a new way to stand against Virgil. She confronts him, stating that if he continues to insisting, she will kill herself, and that would be an honor for her to do so rather than obey him. This is evident in these lines from the closing scene-

Huh, my life! It's not really mine any more. You've shown me that. The only thing I have which is really mine now is my death. My death and my pride.

...you can't see me, can you? I'm holding a piece of glass against my throat. If you force the door, you'll push this glass into my throat. (Harvest, P-90)

In this way, she asserts her dignity, refusing to heed Virgil's words. This resembles the postcolonial other's victory in the world of force and control of the colonizer.

The concept of post colonialism is built on binary oppositions such as First and Third world, white and black colonizer and colonized. Based on our discussion it is evident that that the play resonated with postcolonial elements. The way donor family is being shown enslaved by the First World is very similar to the postcolonial experience. As a result of their superiority complex and the power they wield, the First world receiver treats the Third world giver as a second class citizen. The First World always considers itself to be superior and more knowledgeable in comparison to the Third World. They created their own picture of individuals from the Third World and they always regard them as low and primitive. We can associate them in the perspective of Said's "Orientalism". The goal of orientalism is to take control of the Orient and deprive it of the ability to speak for itself. This is clearly visible through the Interplanta Services. However it is not as if they are completely oblivious to the first world as we see at the end when one of the characters, Jaya, resists, astonishing the reader. This proves that they do have their own thinking ability but surrounded by conflict and chaos they still fall prey to the hands of the first world colonizers. Thus "Harvest" explores the heartless capitalism environment that is ruining India, as well as how Indians have become victims of these materialistic beliefs to the point where they are willing to sell their own organs.

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