

Thrashing Human Harvest: Market and Commoditization in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*

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Abstract

In the era of Globalisation, the globe has turned into a huge market with accessibility of any commodity anywhere. The Western countries are rich with potential buyers whereas the developing nations in Asia prove to be the potential markets; and, the rich customers from the West trap the unemployed, unmarried and potential young men for body organs. Globalisation creates a market for internal body organs wherein country like India becomes an open market for organ trading. The young men like Om Prakash willingly sign the bond of selling internal body organs. Ginni represents a wealthy buyer from the West who needs internal organs of young and potential men like Om. The present paper attempts to examine the Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* as a commercial document where the dramatist projects the relationship between Om and Ginni as seller and buyer and not as donor and done. As the buyer controls the market, Ginni controls the life style of Om and his family. The play is about modern human market wherein the people from developing nations suffer from unemployment and resort to sell themselves as commodities in international market.

KEYWORDS: Market, buyer, seller, donor, donee

Manjula Padmanabhan (1953-) is a writer, artist, cartoonist and playwright. *Harvest* is her fifth play, won the 1997 Onassis Award for Original Theatrical Drama in Greece. She is the author of several critically acclaimed books, including *Getting There*, *Hot Death*, *Cold Soup*, *Harvest* and *The Three Virgins* and other short stories. Also, she published her most recent novel *The Island of Lost Girls* in 2016. *Harvest* is dystopian play, stressing the potential of global capitalist Western elite countries. Subsequently, the play highlights pragmatically the whereabouts of vastly developing third world nations rather in a gloomy side under the sharp enigma of poverty, recession and unemployment in the spinning prism of Globalization. The medical miracle of human organ transplantation caters a hope of survival for an Indian family that lets itself be commoditized by a glamorous American female, Ginni. Om Prakash, a young, unemployed Indian man, signs a pact with a multinational company, InterPlanta Services to trade his body organs in return of certain luxuries of an upper middle class living. As desired, Om and his family avail the luxuries.

Manjula showcases that Om and his family enjoy luxuries given by InterPlanta Services, but these luxuries bring worries along with them. Om and his wife, Jaya always remain in the shadow of stress and anxiety. InterPlanta Services enters the slums of India, a potential human resource market. The company interferes the domestic ties and peace of mind of everybody in the lower class families. Subsequently, InterPlanta Services alters the traditional ways of living without the consent of Om, Jaya and Maa. The company has interviewed young men like Om Prakash for their body organs. Now, the company is compelling them to follow the instructions in order to maintain health and

hygiene. All the members of the family are subject to the whims of the intended recipient of Om's organs, manifest visually in the form of a blonde all-American girl called Ginni (in reality is Virgil, an old man) whose image comes in their home via a 'contact module' installed to allow interactive communication between donor and receiver worlds. Padmanabhan chooses the technological advancement as an extreme in commoditizing human life and aspirations. InterPlanta services are like any multinational company follows no ethical code and are emotionless towards common man and reciprocates only to the profit. It is worth noting that while the receiver can see Om, his family members and all other aspects of his life, the donor Om, gets to see only the face of the receiver and her sugary voice. The donor and his family is kept under the constant scrutiny of the receiver as the module can rotate round to face each corner and can flicker to life at any moment. Through the contact module Ginni informs Jaya that the contact module had spied on them, "Always I listened in to you, Zhaya. I heard every word in the room- even when the Module was off, it recorded." (Padmanabhan: 1997: 94)

Padmanabhan upholds the sensitive issue of human trafficking in the wake of Globalization. The developed economies looked for human organs from the developing nations. This buying and selling of human organs not only disturbs human relations in a country like India, but it also wobbles the institution of marriage, family and culture. Manjula in the Introduction to *Harvest* writes, "My decision to write the play in this way, with almost no cultural signifiers, was a deliberate. I wanted to use the traffic in human organs to make a more powerful universal point about use and abuse between people, culture and economies". (Padmanabhan: 1997: xiv) Human trafficking has been one of the major issues in the postmodern era wherein the developed nations are exploiting the human resource under the guise of money and other temptations. Wikipedia defines human trafficking as:

Human trafficking is the trade of humans for the purpose of forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others. This may encompass providing a spouse in the context of forced marriage, or the extraction of organs or tissues, including for surrogacy and ova removal. Human trafficking can occur within a country or trans-nationally. Human trafficking is a crime against the person because of the violation of the victim's rights of movement through coercion and because of their commercial exploitation. Human trafficking is the trade in people, especially women and children, and does not necessarily involve the movement of the person from one place to another. (Wikipedia: Web)

Harvest presents a thrashing human market and commoditization of humans and human relations. The play centralizes around the business relationships between people who trade human organs. It presents a world where every iota of living or dead comes with a price as 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)

Manjula exhibits how unemployed young men from developing nations are examined for organ donation. The procedure of examining these young men is very mechanical. They are made to pass through variant processes of cleaning and drying like goods and commodities. Further, it resembles the process of scrutinizing cocks, hens or goats that are made to pass through the process of cleaning and drying before they are selected for butchering and turning into flesh to be sold for consumption. Manjula elaborately explicates the process through Om Prakash:

Om: Then- a sort – rain burst. I wonder if I am dreaming! The water is hot, scented. Then cold. Then hot air. Then again the water. It stings a little, this second water. Smells like some medicine. Then air again. Then we pass through another place. I don't know what is happening. Ahead of me a man screams and cries, but we are in separate little cages now, can't move. At one place, something comes to cover your eyes. There is no time to think, just do. Put your arm here, get one prick- pissshhh- pissshhh! Sit here, stand here, take your head this side, look at a light that side. On and on. Finally at the end there's another tunne, with pretty pictures and some music and the sign comes: “RESUME CLOTHING”. I just do what I have to do. All the time the ground keeps moving. Then at the end, the ground stops, we are back on our feet, there are steps. It must be the another side of building. And as we come down, guards are standing there, waiting for you. And to me they say, “you, come”. And that was it! (Padmanabhan: 1997: 16)

Subsequently, *Harvest* portrays lives of the people from lower class Indian society, who are at stake for survival. Therefore, it is modern morality play presented with bitter, savagely funny vision of the cannibalistic future. Further, it is like Ben Jonson's *Doctor Faustus* in which the Faustus signs the pact with the devil with complete awareness that the devil will take away his soul one day. And he will be put in hell permanently. Similarly, Om Prakash, the protagonist of the play signs the agreement with InterPlanta Company. Om Prakash is equally aware, like Doctor Faustus, while signing the bond that he will be in hell like torments in future permanently. In *Doctor Faustus*, it is the ambition that makes the protagonist to sign the bond, whereas, in *Harvest*, it is the hunger that triggers Om to sign the pact.

Further, Manjula Padmanabhan exhibits how in present times human beings have been brought down mere commodities. Human beings are treated like commodities, manufactured in multiple functioning machineries where products are made to pass from various processes. Once they are selected “each man would be monitored carefully. Not just us but our... lives. To remain employed, we have to keep ourselves exactly as they tell us.” (Padmanabhan: 1997: 17) The playwright also unfolds the commercial relationship between the donor and the donee as they enter the contract. Om pretends being bachelor and tries to murk his relationships as he fills the form. Though Jaya is his partner he succumbs to opportunism introducing her as his sister. The following conversation throws light upon it:

Guard1: Missiz...Jaya J. Kumar. Relationship with Donor?

Jaya: (in a barely audible voice) Sister.

MA registers a shock..

Guard1: Madam please repeat response.

Jaya: Sister. He's my- I mean, I'm his-sister.

(Padmanabhan: 1997: 22)

Manjula touches upon the extramarital relationship between Jaya and Jeetu, who is her brother-in-law. The little space in the residences triggers to develop physical intimacies among opposite sex. Further, Jaya gets the opportunity to push further her relationship with Jeetu. The agreement between InterPlanta Company and Om facilitates Jaya to celebrate her intimacy with Jeetu in the presence of her husband and her mother-in-law. This also shows that in the era of Post-Globalisation familial relationships have turned more practical.

Manjula Padmanabhan exhibits how in the wake of Information Computer Technology the unskilled and semi-skilled human resource has to lose the jobs. Om had been working as a clerk in a company which turns him out as he does not acquire the knowledge of computer technology. Om states, "I lost my job at the company and why did I lose it? Because I am a clerk and nobody needs clerks anymore! There are no new jobs now; there is nothing left for people like us! Don't you know that? This is, of course, what the computer age makes us to believe that there are no jobs for less skilled people. (Padmanabhan: 1997: 238)

Further, Globalization caters various opportunities like wider markets and non-traditional and easy ways of money making. Success and prestige are connected with money and luxuries. Om represents such a lot wherein the young men of his age are unemployed and at the same time, they want to enjoy all the luxuries in life. Om wants to earn huge amount of money. Om becomes ecstatic when he is reporting Jaya and Ma: "We'll have more money than you and I have named for!" He says to Ma "who'd believe there is so much money in the world?"... But ... we will be rich! Insanely rich! But you'd rather live in this one small room I suppose! Think it such as a fine thing". (Padmanabhan: 1997: 219) Om irrespective of his fate, flattered with money and comfort dwells into the enigma of relaxing life absconds himself from the materialistic pragmatism of hard earned life. He commoditizes himself as a donor ready to help donee, Ginni in return of large sum of money. In the era of human marketing and globalization organ transplantation is surgical operation in which a failing or damaged organ in the human body is removed and replaced with a functioning one. The donated organ may be from a deceased donor, a living donor, or an animal. People from developed countries are rich but diseased who need body organs of the young and potential men from the developing nations like India. Ginni is a rich person who needs body organs from young and unmarried men like Om Prakash.

Manjula pin points the altering familial relations due to money and luxuries. The relationship between Ma and her sons as well as Jaya changes as Om brings home money and luxuries of the modern world. The way Ma, Om's mother eschews the worldly life and relationships and affectionately lures only Om; mostly throwing derogatory comments on Jeetu, Om's brother, who is a jobless youth and supports himself through prostitution. Throughout the play, Ma criticizes and abuses Jaya out of unconcern. She further envelopes herself in an automatic Video Paradisco unit in her greed to enjoy bliss away from the impoverished world irrespective of her family. Ma presents the inhuman strata of commoditized human world who embraces the luxuries greedily.

Ginni, the donee is a globalized deceiver icon created by the western world to attract the eastern third world crowd seducing them to sell themselves out of curiosity and greed. Ginni is a sexy blonde who in reality is Virgil, an old American tycoon eager to live perpetually. They are the people 'lost the art of having children' and keep on buying human bodies as long as they afford Virgil says, "This is my fourth body in fifty years". (Padmanabhan: 1997: 45) He follows the family of donors and chooses his worth. Jeetu a male prostitute falls into the inhuman trap of Virgil and loses his body. As money always attracted him "I will service all! For a price...I don't mind being bought. (Padmanabhan: 1997: 42-43) Virgil justifies the commoditization of Jeetu and his crime as he eventually goes boasting Virgil: He was willing to sell and I was willing to buy (Padmanabhan: 1997: 113)

Jaya is the only character who resists the inhuman situation. She realizes that she has lost every member of her family- Om Prakash, her husband; Ma, her mother-in-law; and Jeetu, her brother-in-law. Now it's her turn. She does not want to be a member in this race. Further, she threatens Virgil that she will prefer to kill herself if she is forced by him. Thus, she defeats the designs of the rich receiver. It is evident that she cannot resist the first world power structure through nothing but death, when she says, "I've discovered a new definition for winning, winning by losing. I win if you lose... If you want to play games with people, you should be careful not to push them off the board. You pushed me too far. Now there's nothing left for me to lose... I am not willing to caretake my body for your sake! The only thing I have left which is still mine is death. My death and my pride." (Padmanabhan: 1997: 101) Jaya is proud of her identity. She is the only character in the play that stands strongly against the rich West. Thus, Padmanabhan projects Jaya as the culture bearer and carrier who does not succumb to the temptations of the Western luxuries. She is the symbol of cultural fixity and satisfaction.

Jaya enjoys extra marital relationship with Jeetu wherein she does not find any wrong notion. Her love for Jeetu is evident throughout the play. But when Virgil proposes her, she discards his intentions and prefers to stand alone. She does not allow herself to be commoditize like Om Prakash and Maa. For her Virgil is a buyer who has been controlling everyone in the family. Consequently, she discards market and remains firm with her family and principles. Padmanabhan shows that every character is victimized by the modern marketing strategies except Jaya who does not succumb to the scheme of Virgil.

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