

Harvest-A Study on Literary Representation of Body amidst Technological Intrusion

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Abstract: Technology pervades every aspect of human existence, infiltrating both private and public domains. As science and technological innovations continue to flourish, we often praise their positive advancements while disregarding their intrusive nature and potential for exerting control over humanity. One area of debate lies in the utilization of technology in conjunction with the human body, including controversial reproductive techniques and other invasive technologies. These innovations, though imposed upon individuals, are frequently overlooked in terms of the detrimental effects they may have on society at large. In the play Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan, the narrative sheds light on the dangers of technology falling into the wrong hands within a capitalist-driven society. The storyline revolves around the trade and transplantation of human organs, exemplifying the ethical complexities surrounding technological intervention. This article delves into the portrayal of technological intrusion in human life as depicted in literary works, exploring the far-reaching implications and societal consequences.

Key-terms: Technology, Human body, Organ transplant, Trade, Capitalism, Commodification, Harvest, Third world.

1. Introduction

Technology pervades every aspect of human existence, infiltrating both private and public domains. As science and technological innovations continue to flourish, we often praise their positive advancements while disregarding their intrusive nature and potential for exerting control over humanity. One area of debate lies in the utilization of technology in conjunction with the human body, including controversial reproductive techniques and other invasive technologies. These innovations, though imposed upon individuals, are frequently overlooked in terms of the detrimental effects they may have on society at large. In the play Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan, the narrative sheds light on the dangers of technology falling into the wrong hands within a capitalist-driven society. The storyline revolves around the trade and transplantation of human organs, exemplifying the ethical complexities surrounding technological intervention. This article delves into the portrayal of technological intrusion in human life as depicted in literary works, exploring the far-reaching implications and societal consequences.

Human beings associate their lives with their bodies, but technological advancements have surpassed the boundaries of biological existence. Even domestic animals are now utilized as subjects for scientific experiments. Reproductive technologies such as test tube babies, along with other scientific and

technological developments, have compelled us to perceive our bodies from new perspectives. The exploration of human bodies can be greatly enriched by examining literary texts that document authentic human experiences. In Manjula Padmanabhan's inaugural play, *Harvest*, our attention is drawn to the issues it addresses. The play serves as a critique of how the human body has been commodified through the utilization of newly arrived technologies in the market. The work places significant emphasis on issues related to organ selling and transplantation.

1.2. The Commodification of the Human Body

Harvest, Manjula Padmanabhan's inaugural play, delves into the implications of technological advancements that have blurred the boundaries of the human body. It invites us to question the commodification of our bodies and the ethical dilemmas that arise as a result. By examining authentic human experiences in literary texts, such as *Harvest*, we gain a profound understanding of the impact of technology on our perception of the human body. Padmanabhan's play specifically critiques the commercialization of the human body through newly arrived technologies in the market. It raises significant concerns about organ selling and transplantation, shedding light on the inequalities and injustices that emerge when human organs become commodities. *Harvest* challenges our conventional notions of the value of human life and prompts us to contemplate the moral implications of such practices.

Through the exploration of these thought-provoking ideas, we are compelled to examine the future implications of technological progress and contemplate the preservation of the dignity and sanctity of the human body in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. *Harvest* serves as a powerful catalyst for deep introspection on the moral and ethical dimensions of our relationship with our bodies in the face of advancing technology.

1.3. Every day and the Intrusion

Technological interference into the everyday life of an individual who willingly agrees to sell an indefinite organ through InterPlanta Services, Inc to a wealthy buyer is wonderfully portrayed in the thought-provoking play "*Harvest*." The protagonist, Omprakash, finds himself in a unique situation where he allows the affluent individual to closely monitor not only his own life but also that of his family. This surveillance is made possible by the consent Omprakash has given to sell one of his body organs. Through the use of modern technology, specifically a videophone, the recipient of Omprakash's organ, named Ginni, continuously watches and monitors his every move.

This instance highlights a deeply unsettling phenomenon where the human body and the private sphere of an individual are infringed upon and controlled by the privileged members of society. Omprakash, driven by financial desperation after losing his job, makes the difficult decision to donate his organ in the hopes of receiving a substantial sum of money and potentially attaining wealth. However, this choice comes with a heavy price: the relinquishment of his ownership rights over his own organ. The agreement he signed to sell his organ essentially strips him of control and autonomy, making him vulnerable to the wealthy elite who now hold power over his physical well-being.

On the other side of this transaction, Ginni, who is financially capable but in need of an organ, willingly spends her wealth to acquire an organ from the economically disadvantaged Omprakash. This stark contrast between their respective circumstances highlights the glaring disparities within society,

where the rich can freely exert their influence and control over the less fortunate. By showcasing this power dynamic, the play *Harvest* raises thought-provoking questions about the ethical implications of commodifying human organs and the potential consequences of allowing technology to intrude into the most intimate portions of our lives.

1.4. The Futuristic Mumbai in 2010

In the play *Harvest*, written by Manjula Pamanabhan, the futuristic Mumbai of 2010 is portrayed, shedding light on the lives of its inhabitants. Within this city, many individuals find themselves relegated to menial jobs as a means to earn a living. However, the rapid advancement of technology has resulted in numerous job losses, as automation and skilled labor replace traditional roles. The play's protagonist, Omprakash, finds himself unemployed solely due to being a clerk, a profession no longer needed in Mumbai. Clerical positions have either become low-paying or have been entirely automated. Pamanabhan's work serves as a stark reminder of the socio-economic impact of technology on individuals' livelihoods.

As the narrative unfolds, *Harvest* also presents the distressing reality of some individuals in Mumbai turning to illegal means, such as prostitution, to earn money. These individuals utilize their earnings to acquire modern technological conveniences, such as televisions and refrigerators, which bring comfort into their lives. This exploration of the characters' choices highlights how technology permeates even the most intimate aspects of human existence. The desire to possess new technologies drives individuals to take on multiple jobs, leading to a constant struggle to provide basic necessities for their families. Pamanabhan's portrayal underscores the intricate relationship between poverty, unemployment, and the pursuit of technological advancement.

Moreover, the play delves into the socio-political dynamics that emerge from the impoverished and unemployed conditions faced by many in Mumbai. These circumstances inadvertently align with the agenda of Westerners who seek to exploit the healthy organs of individuals residing in developing nations like India. The narrative implies that the vulnerable position of the impoverished population favors the nefarious intentions of these outsiders. Pamanabhan uses *Harvest* as a platform to raise awareness about the exploitation and manipulation that can occur when socio-economic disparities intersect with technological advancements, particularly in marginalized communities.

Through the lens of *Harvest*, Pamanabhan masterfully examines the intricate web woven by the convergence of technology, poverty, and power dynamics. The play's exploration of futuristic Mumbai offers a thought-provoking commentary on the consequences of societal changes driven by technology. It urges the audience to critically reflect on the ethical implications of technological progress and its impact on individuals' lives, while also exposing the vulnerabilities that can be exploited within a complex global landscape. *Harvest* serves as a compelling testament to the intricate interplay between human existence, technology, and the social structures that shape our world.

1.5. Agents of the Machine World

In the play, Omprakash, the central character, grapples with unemployment and finds himself willing to go to extreme lengths to support his family, even contemplating the sale of one of his organs to Ginni, an American woman facilitated by Interplanta Services, Inc. The advancement of medical technology, specifically organ transplantation, has given rise to a burgeoning trade. Omprakash's decision to enter

into a contract with Ginni brings about profound changes in the daily routines and dynamics of his family.

The arrival of the guards from Interplanta Services, Inc serves as a foreboding symbol of the encroaching machinery and surveillance that now infiltrates Omprakash's otherwise typical Indian existence. Driven by the desperate need to provide for his family, Omprakash is compelled to consider the drastic measure of selling a part of his own body. Meanwhile, Ginni's relentless pursuit of a healthy organ leads her to closely observe Omprakash and his family. To maintain the health and viability of potential organ donors like Omprakash, Ginni takes on the responsibility of providing essential services, including food, hygiene, and toiletries.

The play confronts the ethical implications of the commodification of human organs, exploring the intersection of personal sacrifice and socio-economic circumstances. Omprakash's willingness to trade his own bodily autonomy for the well-being of his family exposes the harsh realities faced by marginalized individuals in a system driven by profit and exploitation. Ginni, motivated by her own needs, becomes a figure of both hope and apprehension in Omprakash's life. The play delves into the complex dynamics and moral dilemmas that arise when individuals are driven to extreme measures by the convergence of societal pressures and the potential gains offered by medical technology.

Throughout the narrative, Harvest urges audiences to critically examine the consequences of the medical advancements that have permeated our lives. It raises questions about the ethics of organ trade and the impact it has on individuals, families, and society at large. Pamanabhan's thought-provoking portrayal of Omprakash's struggle serves as a poignant reminder of the profound sacrifices individuals may face when confronted with dire circumstances and limited options.

1.6. Monitoring Module

The play was written before the arrival of modern social media. The presence of the contact module in Omprakash's apartment, courtesy of Ginni, serves as a affecting symbol of how communication technologies have been weaponized by capitalists to assert supremacy over the lives of ordinary individuals. The exponential growth of technological tools has eroded personal privacy. The ongoing debates surrounding privacy and surveillance emphasize the far-reaching consequences of this technological invasion. Within the confines of a family's home, every aspect of their lives is interfered with and closely monitored by powerful corporate entities, who assume the authority to dictate how individuals should navigate their existence in this technologically-driven world. In the context of the play "Harvest," Ginni assumes an invisible yet influential role, dictating Omprakash's dietetic choices, social interactions, and even his behavior. Through video conversations facilitated by the contact module, Ginni's pervasive influence infiltrates the very fabric of Omprakash's everyday life. This portrayal sheds light on the alarming potential for those in positions of power, particularly capitalists, to exploit science and advanced technological tools in order to manipulate and control the lives of the less privileged.

The play exposes the harsh reality of how the marginalized, particularly the poor, can easily fall under the power of capitalist forces through the insidious use of advanced technology. The intrusion of these powerful bodies disrupts the delicate balance of power, subjugating individuals who are already grappling with economic hardships. Ginni, as an embodiment of this capitalist influence, effectively

leverages the contact module to exercise control over Omprakash's choices and actions. By peering into his everyday life, the module blurs the boundaries between private and public spheres, exposing the vulnerabilities of individuals and families to external manipulation. Pamanabhan's narrative unearths the distressing truth that the convergence of science, technology, and capitalism can perpetuate a cycle of control and exploitation, with the most vulnerable members of society bearing the brunt of its impact.

The portrayal in *Harvest* underscores the urgent need for critical examination and regulation of the power dynamics at play within technological advancements. The play serves as a poignant critique of a society where the boundaries of privacy are increasingly blurred, allowing capitalists to infiltrate the very fabric of individuals' lives. It prompts us to reflect on the ethical implications of technological control and surveillance, particularly when it disproportionately affects those in disadvantaged positions. Through Ginni's invisible yet omnipresent role, Pamanabhan illuminates the potential dangers of unchecked technological advancement and the potential for its abuse by those with vested interests. Ultimately, *Harvest* serves as a cautionary tale, urging us to navigate the complexities of technology with a critical eye and a commitment to safeguarding individual autonomy and privacy in the face of powerful external influences.

The pervasive influence of money in today's society has transformed the body, personal identity, privacy, human agency, and freedom into commodities that can be bought and sold. However, the unsettling truth emerges that those who sacrifice their very lives for monetary gain do not find genuine happiness. This stark realization challenges the notion that wealth alone can bring true fulfillment, especially when individuals surrender their autonomy to the corporate world. In essence, this modern phenomenon can be seen as a manifestation of neocolonialism, a new iteration of the historical power dynamics at play. It is a system that manipulates and deceives individuals, convincing them to donate their body parts in exchange for financial rewards and the promise of a more comfortable existence. Yet, beneath this façade of progress and prosperity lies a deeply unsettling truth.

1.7. A Pace of Growing Technology Controls the World

The advancements in organ transplantation technology have unwittingly contributed to a situation where the people of the third world find themselves trapped in a web of exploitation and chaos. They are lured into the world of organ selling activities, either legally or illegally, by the promise of monetary gain. The allure of financial stability and the comforts it can provide blinds individuals to the deeper moral implications and consequences of their actions. The commodification of human organs strips individuals of their inherent worth and reduces them to mere objects in a market driven by profit and power. This new form of neocolonialism perpetuates a cycle of dependency and manipulation, leaving those involved in organ trafficking trapped in a perpetual state of vulnerability and unrest.

Within this intricate web of organ trade, ethical boundaries are blurred, and the lives of countless individuals are forever altered. The powerful allure of money and the false promise of a better life create a complex moral dilemma for those embroiled in these activities. The neocolonial undertones are evident as individuals from the third world are manipulated and coerced into participating in organ selling, perpetuating a system where the powerful few benefit at the expense of the marginalized many. The chaos and turmoil generated by this clandestine industry reverberate through the lives of those

involved, ultimately raising fundamental questions about the value of human life and the far-reaching consequences of unchecked technological progress.

1.8. Conclusion

In summary, the omnipresence of money in society has resulted in the commodification of human existence. However, the pursuit of wealth at any cost reveals a fundamental truth: true happiness cannot be achieved through the sale of one's own life to the corporate world. This phenomenon can be seen as a modern manifestation of neocolonialism, where individuals are deceived and coerced into parting with their body parts in exchange for financial gain. The progress in organ transplantation technology has ensnared people in the third world, plunging their lives into perpetual chaos as they become entangled in the morally ambiguous world of organ trafficking. The exploitation and dehumanization inherent in this system force us to question the ethical boundaries of progress and the lasting impact it has on the lives of those caught within its grasp.

The play *Harvest* draws inspiration from real-life news stories that shed light on the illicit trade of human organs, primarily concentrated in impoverished rural areas of Tamil Nadu during that time. While the playwright explicitly states that the play does not directly address surgical procedures and does not conform to conventional resolutions or align with established ideologies, it does explore the theme of technological intrusion into the lives of individuals. The play has garnered considerable attention and popularity, evidenced by its availability in various versions. One noteworthy adaptation is a gender-reversed version penned by the playwright herself. The present essay is focused only on the original iteration of the play.

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