

**GOVERNMENT ARTS COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS),  
COIMBATORE – 18  
POSTGRADUATE AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**WOMEN'S WRITING – UNIT IV – DRAMA  
SEMESTER – II**

**DETAILED**

**4.1. MANJULA PADMANABAN'S *HARVEST***

In the screenplay *Harvest*, by Manjula Padmanabhan, many global borders arise in which organ selling occurs in India in the near future, 2010. This screenplay deals with the first and third world countries. In India, there are more developed places than others. With people still suffering and finding a way to support their families with food and shelter they will do almost anything to make a living. The main character, Om Prakash loses his job while living in a one-bedroom apartment with his family and decides to sell unspecified organs through a company called, InterPlanta Services Inc. "I went because I lost my job in 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's nothing left for people like us! Don't you know that? There's us and the street gangs and the rich." (pg 62) Why do you think Jaya is fighting with her husband Om? Do you think that she thinks he is doing wrong by selling unspecified organs just so he can support his family?

In scene 4 (pg 61) The Guards take Jeetu instead of Om to do the eye surgery. Once the procedure is over his eyes will be donated and he will be left wearing a pair of goggles that look like a pair of imitation eyes. Om expresses to Jaya that since they don't care about Om and his family, the less fortunate that they are going to operate on Jeetu even though they made a mistake and took the wrong person. In this scene, Om acts very cold-hearted and seems to only care about the money he is going to be receiving. On the other hand, Jaya is very anxious and upset about what is taking place. When the Guards bring Jeetu back, he comes in white silk pyjamas and his head all wrapped up in bandages. "I won't listen! Because listening brings acceptance. And I will never accept, I will never live with this..."(64) Now that Jeetu is not able to see, he feels trapped and is built up with a lot of anger. "Why? Because I'm in a place beyond death. I'm in a place worse than death. ( 66). If Jeetu feels this way rightfully so, then why does

Om say that he is selfish? Is Om only worried about the money he is going to be receiving from this procedure?

Even though the family received money and were able to live a much better life through organ donation, many problems were created between each other. This is a perfect example of how money doesn't buy happiness.

Harvest is a play written by Manjula Padmanabhan focusing geographically on Mumbai, India. We see the character, Om, signing up as an organ donor for Ginni who is an American woman simply because there is no more jobs in India. Ginni pays him to lead and live a healthy life, so when it is time for doing an organ, there is no difficulty or problem in doing so. This play feels nice in the beginning because it seems as after signing up as organ donor, leading a happy and healthy life is guaranteed and certain, but what lies underneath is when Om and his small family starts to enjoy their new lifestyles, they also start to deny the consequences.

This play reminds the reader about a Brothel mainly because it takes place in India, although this time it is Mumbai and not Calcutta. This play also has a prostitute and revolves around poor financial situations resorting to doing very unfortunate jobs to keep their funds up. We see the family go through wonderful meals which can seem as space-age because the family is taking off at the beginning of the play with good promise. But as the play furthers itself, we see the promise becoming dark and uneasy.

By seeing the financial situations of Om and his wife Jaya, we can appreciate money as a necessity to life. In this play, we see Om pretty much selling his life in order to obtain the top dollar for this family, well at least in India it was considered top dollar. Jaya was evidently distressed about Om's decision on signing himself to Ginni because the family is already on an off and on a troubled relationship because Jaya is having a secret relationship with Om's younger brother Jeetu. Jeetu works as the prostitute mentioned earlier, Ma is Om's mother who also lives in the house who favours Om more so than the others.

Work itself is not even hard either. For the family, Ginni operates their services by dictating to Interplanta, which is the company that supplies them with food and services such as a toilet and shower that Om and his family received as newly rich people. This obviously made a foreshadow of his death. Personally, I wanted to just skip right to the point where Om was going to die because it was so clear that if he wasn't going to die...then this play would be

more interesting. I believe that this simplicity had been effective because it relates to this week's theme of 'problem with food.'

Om Prakash is an embittered, petty, unemployed youth who keeps the pretension of caring for his whole family. His new life with his family often surrounded around the luxury of food and the shelter with services they are not used to. The problem with this is that we as people simply take food and shelter for granted. I do not remember how many numerous times I have complained about how hungry I am or if my sister had used all the hot water in the shower, but as another dystopian play, Harvest showcases the morality and ethical views of our society in my opinion. As a result, Om's carelessness left his family in turmoil. But...but but but...the tables had turned when Jeetu has gotten sick. This is the point where I was like..wait wait..hold on...oh shit, so that means Om is probably going to donate his organs to Jeetu but he can't because he had signed to Ginni. We see Jeetu been taking away from the picture as well as the Donor and Jaya is left alone to fend for herself.

In the end, it is evident that the body serves as the major theme. Manjula did a great job on portraying the body's importance to our society as well as in this play. What I believe was effective is how easy Om was able to sign to Ginni because it shows how uncaring and what his body means to him, in order to get the riches. Kinda makes sense now why the title is Harvest because our body is like food, we can harvest it whenever in cases we need it as Ginni had portrayed it in this play.

Manjula Padmanabhan, a 21st-century woman, being a technocrat herself, uses the techniques and tools of the modern world in her most celebrated play, Harvest (1996). Though Harvest is not, as obvious, the first play Padmanabhan wrote, her fame as a playwright rest on it.

Padmanabhan drew the attention of the world when Harvest won the Onassis cash-rich award for the theatre at Athens (Greece) out of more than a hundred entries.

The underlined statement, though, made a decade later, seems to be predicted in the play. The economics of life rules the life. The events that take places in the play are the results of the economics/financial pressure as the only bead where now unemployed Om. Though the play, Harvest as Shital Pravinchandra comes as a critique of the commoditization of the healthy third world body, much thanks to the significant adventures in transplant medicine, has now been a bank of spare parts for ailing bodies in the first world (1). Apart from its futuristic approach

(as the play is set in 2010 Mumbai) the play also shows how the financially strong groups/agents use the modern electronic technology to control and govern the financially weak sections of society in the world at the risk of hell like life as is found in Padmanabhan's another play, *The Mating Game* (2003). Though the gist of the play, *Harvest* can be given in three lines, its presentation, characters, their behaviour, action and the space occupied the screen contact module speak of the value and possession electronic devices are going to have to the life.

The story of the play centres on Om, who signs up to be an organ donor for an American organ receiver named Ginny. Ginny provides all the facilities to make and keep Om's body parts hygienic. Gradually the electronic contact module takes possession of all the characters in the play. Om, Ma and Jeetu except Jaya, Om's wife who, as Durgesh Ravande says, represent the conflict between technological adventures and human relationship in life. (163) Jaya appears as the last hope of emotional value in the fire when a legal moral and bioethical debates about organ sales and transplants have been overcome when the trade in human organ is fully institutionalized and smoothly operated by the rapacious forces of global capitalism (Shital Pravinchalra, 8). Helen Gilbert in her introduction to the *Anthology of the Post-colonial Plays* rightly comments on the nature of the play. She observes:

*Harvest* can be read not only as a cautionary tale about the possible (mis) use of modern medical and reproductive science but also a reflection on economic and social legacies of Western imperialism, particularly as they coverage with new technologies.

The play is set in 2010 Mumbai. The financial crisis and computerization at the global level have turned the unskilled employees jobless. Ransacking job has become the routine of such middle-class and middle-aged people who can do nothing else. The play *Harvest*, with the very apt title, describes how one such family fall victim to the flesh-market controlled by the Western world. The action of the play moves around four full-fledged characters, Om the jobless husband, his 19-year-old wife Jaya, his 17-year-old brother Jeetu and his 60-year-old widow mother, Indumati Prakash. There are four other minor nameless mechanical guards, two-screen characters, Ginni and Virgil and a neighbour Vidyutbai. An attempt made herein is to describe how the machine world governs the human world and how the playwright has cleverly used the electronic devices turning them into characters.

When the play opens, Ma Jaya are seen waiting for Om who is about to come after job-hunting. Apart from the usual retorting and differences between the mother-in-law and the daughter-

inlaw, one notes their concern for Om's getting job. Though the ever-growing use of electronic devices like computer has turned Om jobless, his sixty-year-old mother seems to be addicted to another electronic domestic device-television. She appears to be less concerned about her son and daughter-in-law. One feels that she believes more in the celluloid world than the real world where one finds difficult to feed only four members in the family. Ma retorts her daughter-in-law Jaya when the latter asks to leave her alone.

MA. Alone, alone! Have you seen your neighbours? Ten in that room; And harmonious as a TV show! But you? An empty room would be too crowded for you. (Padmanabhan's Harvest, 218) One begins to feel the influence of technology more when Om comes back and begins to describe how he has been selected for a different kind of job. He narrates the non-human instructions at the time of his selection procedure. There begins the commanding influence of the machines in human life. Om narrates:

OM. We were standing all together in that line. And the line went on and on -not just on one floor, but slanting up, forever. All in iron bars and grills. It was like being in a cage shaped like a tunnel. All around, up, turn, sideways, there were men slowly moving. All the time, I couldn't understand it.

Somewhere there must be a place to stop, to write a form? Another question? But no. Just forward, forward. One person fainted but the others pushed him along. And at the corners, a sort of pipe was kept.

#### About The Writer

Manjula Padmanabhan (born 1953) is a playwright, journalist, comic strip artist, and children's book author responsible for the play Harvest. She has also written such plays as Lights Out! (1984), Hidden Fires, The Artist's Model (1995) and Sextet (1996). She was born in Delhi to a diplomat family in 1953, she went to boarding school in her teenage years. After [college](#), her determination to make her own way in life led to various kind of works in publishing and media-related fields

She has authored a collection of short stories, called Kleptomania. Her most recent book, published in 2008, is titled "Escape". Apart from writing newspaper columns she also created comic strips She created Suki, an Indian female comic character, which was serialized as a strip in Sunday Observer Before 1997 (the year in which her play Harvest was staged) she was better

known as cartoonist and had a daily cartoon strip in The Pioneer newspaper. This Delhi-based writer and artist. Her comic strips appeared weekly in the Sunday Observer (Bombay, 1982-86) and daily in the Pioneer (New Delhi, 1991-97). Her books include *Hot Death, Cold Soup* (Kali for Women, 1996), *Getting There* (Picador UK, 1999) *This is Suki!* (Duckfoot Press, 2000), and *Kleptomania* (Penguin Books India, 2004). *Harvest* (Kali for Women, 1998 and subsequently in three separate international anthologies), her fifth play, won the 1997 Onassis Award for Theatre. Manjula has illustrated twenty-four books for children including her own novels for children, *Mouse Attack* and *Mouse Invaders* (Macmillan Children's Books, UK, 2003, 2004).

Manjula Padmanabhan is an artist, illustrator, cartoonist, playwright and novelist. She has illustrated 21 children's books, and has had a longrunning cartoon strip, *Suki*, in the Sunday Observer and later the Pioneers. Her play, *Harvest*, was selected from 1470 entries in 76 countries for the Onassis Prize in 1997.

In the play the themes of economic exploitation, reification (=commodification) and acculturation are presented through the mercantile as well as surgical metaphor of body-parts transplantation. The Donors and the Receivers in the play represent the natives of the Third World and the First World respectively. Om, his wife Jaya, and Om's brother Jeetu are devalued as depositories where parts of the human body are sold at cheap rates. The most shocking irony is that the sellers are enthralled by the prospect of selling themselves and being devoured by the Western/capitalistic cannibals. Om has orgasmic pleasure in imagining parts of his body inside Ginny. "After all, who wouldn't want to be inside such a divine being?" (50T), asks Ma, who has been always disgusted with her other son's being a male prostitute. The inequality of the two groups (Donors and Receivers) is shown as rigidly stabilized as there is no possibility of the reversal of their functions. In other words, the Donors always give and the Receivers take; hence, there is no exchange by any chance. The Guards and Agents are the robot-like commandos of the Receivers. Acting as middlemen, they channelize resources from the donors to the Receivers. Their mechanical existence as revealed through their ruthless precision and efficiency is a mark of total dehumanization. Notice that Guard 3 is a male clone of Guard 2.

Delhi born Manjula Padmanabhan could be taken as a suitable match to the 20th century Rabindranath Tagore. Like Tagore, Padmanabhan has successfully tried her hand at all types of literature. It includes plays, comic strips, travelogues, short stories, and children's book and

additionally, she is as an illustrator. Before entering in the area of literature, she joined the staff of Manjula Padmanabhan's Harvest: a Battle Between Machine and Man. Harvest (1997) Lights Out (1984) and Hidden Fire(1991), the Artists' Model Sex tet and the Gujrathi Monologue, a collection of short stories (1996) Suki, a travel memoir like Getting there, a collection of short stories like Death and Old Soup and Kleptomania, Escape a book for children Muse Attack (2008). Even after writing plays, Padmanabhan continued to contribute as an illustrator both independently and in collaboration. In dependently she produces I am different! Can you find me? (2011), Unprincess (2005), A Visit to City Market (1986) and with Tara Ali Baij, Indrani and the Manjula Padmanabhan's Harvest: a Battle Between Machine and (wo)Man . She also penned a comic strip as "Double Talk" (2007). Her comic female character Suki was serialized in Sunday Observer. She also earned her name as a cartoonist and had a daily cartoon strip in The Pioneer.

Alienation and marginalization play a large role in her books. Harvest is a futuristic play about the sale of body parts and exploitative relations between developed and developing countries. It is being filmed by Govind Nihalani. Her short stories are marked by a wry sense of humour.

### **Character of Om Prakash**

He is the main protagonist of the play. We see the character, Om, signing up as an organ donor for Ginni who is an American woman simply because there is no more jobs in India. Ginni pays him to lead and live a healthy life, so when it is time for doing an organ, there is no difficulty or problem in doing so. This play feels nice in the beginning because it seems as after signing up as organ donor, leading a happy and healthy life is guranteed and certained, but what lies underneath is when Om and his small family starts to enjoy their new lifestyles, they also start to deny the consequences.

By seeing the financial situations of Om and his wife Jaya, we can appreciate money as a necessity to life. In this play, we see Om pretty much selling his life in order to obtain the top dollar for this family, well at least in India it was considered top dollar. Jaya was evidently distressed about Om's decision on signing himself to Ginni because the family is already on an off and on a troubled relationship because Jaya is having a secret relationship with Om's younger brother Jeetu. Jeetu works as the prostitute mentioned earlier, Ma is Om's mother who also lives in the house who favours Om more so than the others.

It can be said that it was so easy for Om to be able to sign to Ginni because it shows how uncaring and what his body means to him, in order to get the riches. Kinda makes sense now why the title is Harvest because our body is like food, we can harvest it whenever in cases we need it as Ginni had portrayed it in this play.

Om's insistence that his role in the selection procedure was entirely passive allows Padmanabhan to critique the liberal discourse of free will and choice that advocates organ markets on the basis of individual autonomy. She suggests that it is precisely this discourse which creates the economic structure of millennial capitalism in which the selling of organs becomes an 'option' for the disenfranchised third-world individual. As Om's final reaction makes clear, his judgement has been severely impaired by the lure of unlimited wealth. When the reality of what he has done hits him, he is terrified: 'How could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I?'

### **Character of Jaya**

Jaya appears as the last hope of emotional value in the fire when a legal moral and bio-ethical debates about organ sales and transplants have been overcome when the trade in human organ is fully institutionalized and smoothly operated by the rapacious forces of global capitalism. She is 19 years old. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *The Narrative Reader* by Martin McQuillan, (2000). Therefore, by offering us the opinions of women about the ongoing rape, Padmanabhan re-directs the 'gaze' as emanating from men, towards a situation where it is elicited from women, the sympathetic observers. Secondly, by not directly showing the assault, Padmanabhan carefully avoids any titillation that such scenes may provide the audience or readers. The assault is occurring in the background (both backstage and at the back of our minds) and is able to keep the sense of unease alive and imminent. As such, rather than 'witness' the rape and experience a sense of 'escape' in the immediacy of it, one is made to 'think' about it and its repercussions. There is no 'catharsis' offered here, but sheer irresolution, resting the burden of action on the spectator/audience's shoulders.

She is a very assertive female character, although women's resistance is not the central concern of this play. It is a dystopian play about the trade in human organs and the commodification of the third world body that such a trade is predicated upon. Here, it is through the character of Jaya that Padmanabhan voices a possible resistance. There are suggestions of a discord in her relationship with her husband. However, Jaya does not seem resigned to submit to her fate. She openly expresses herself in front her husband's brother Jeetu (with whom, it is suggested, she



has been having a liaison): “What do you know of my needs, my desires? ..... A woman wants more than just satisfaction.”(96). Although her illicit relationship with Jeetu is not condoned by the playwright, we are nevertheless given an insight into what miseries a woman’s life can be reduced to, if she does not find a legitimate outlet for her sexual desires. It is not just direct interference with the woman’s body, but also cultural dictates that can stifle her physical existence.

### **Character of Ginni**

She is the American woman who had paid Om to receive his organ through transplantation. Throughout the play, the characters on stage are seen talking to the image of a beautiful woman called Ginni, the alleged buyer of Om’s organs. The other main character is the module in the room which seems to have materialised from some futuristic thriller; Ginni (genie), the American lady, appears on it now and then like some Big Sister to see whether the Prakash family is following the rules. They lead antiseptic lives, eating multicoloured pills instead of food, not mixing with others, and God forbid, getting a cold.

Ginny is careful, however, to provide the donors with plenty of comforts to compensate them for their efforts. Ginny reminds the family that by pampering them so, she is only fulfilling her own contractual obligations. Ginny’s casual sentence serves as a jolting and disturbing reminder that receivers and donors hardly trade in equivalents: Ginny provides ‘things’ for which the donors pay her back in their own lives. In fact, Ginny’s continual gifts amount to little more than mere investment.

Her presence on the screen is invisible. She communicates with the donor family only through the contact module. She is thus never physically present on the stage, a fact that is highly significant because Padmanabhan’s chosen genre – theatre – is explicitly concerned with a tangible, embodied and physical presence on stage. Yet throughout the play, Ginny is only ever visible in two-dimensions, on the screen of the contact module. The only embodied performers on the stage are the racially and visually distinct bodies of the third-world donors.

### **Summary of Harvest**

The play Harvest, with the very apt title, describes how one such family fall victim to the flesh market controlled by the Western world. An attempt made herein is to describe how the machine world governs the human world and how the playwright has cleverly used the electronic devices turning them into characters. There begins the play of machines and

machine-like men (representatives of the machine world) instructing, commanding, interfering and grabbing the human lives. The entry of the Guards from the Interplaza services is the beginning of the machine era and the end of the human era.

Manjula Padmanabhan in Harvest presents battle war between machine and man for possession human beings have to wage in future if not learn to control machines. Where machine will succeed at the initial ground, but final victory will lie with a (wo) man. The play also shows the futuristic picture of modern times where the machines will be replacing and distancing human beings gradually. The play warns through the character of Jaya how one has to govern the machines instead of being governed.

### Analysis of the Play

Harvest is a play written by Manjula Padmanabhan focussing geographically on Mumbai, India. We see the character, Om, signing up as an organ donor for Ginni who is an American woman simply because there is no more jobs in India. Ginni pays him to lead and live a healthy life, so when it is time for doing an organ, there is no difficulty or problem in doing so. This play feels nice in the beginning because it seems as after signing up as organ donor, leading a happy and healthy life is guranteed and certained, but what lies underneath is when Om and his small family starts to enjoy their new lifestyles, they also start to deny the consequences.

This play reminds me to Brothel #9 mainly because it takes place in India, although this time it is Mumbai and not Calcutta. This play also has a prostitute and revolves around poor financial situations resorting to doing very unfortunate jobs to keep their funds up. We see the family go through wonderful meals which can seem as space-age because the family is taking off at the beginning of the play with good promise. But as the play furthers itself, we see the promise becoming dark and uneasy.

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Work itself is not even hard either. For the family, Ginni operates their services by dictating to Interplanta, which is the company that supplies them with food and services such as a toilet and shower that Om and his family received as newly rich people. This obviously made a foreshadow of his death. Personally, I wanted to just skip right to the point where Om was going to die because it was so clear that if he wasn't going to die...then this play would be more interesting. I believe that this simplicity had been effective because it relates to this week's theme of 'problem with food.'

Om's new life with his family often surrounded around the luxury of food and the shelter with services they are not used to. The problem with this is that we as people simply take food and shelter for granted. I do not remember how many numerous times I have complained about how hungry I am or if my sister had used all the hot water in the shower, but as another dystopian play, Harvest showcases the morality and ethical views of our society in my opinion. As a result, Om's carelessness left his family in turmoil. But...but but...the tables had turned when Jeetu has gotten sick. This is the point where I was like..wait wait..hold on...oh shit, so that means Om is probably going to donate his organs to Jeetu but he can't because he had signed to Ginni. We see Jeetu been taking away from the picture as well as the Donor and Jaya is left alone to fend for herself.

In the end, it is evident that the body serves as the major theme. Manjula did a great job on portraying the body's importance to our society as well as in this play. What I believe was effective is how easy Om was able to sign to Ginni because it shows how uncaring and what his body means to him, in order to get the riches. Kinda makes sense now why the title is Harvest because our body is like food, we can harvest it whenever in cases we need it as Ginni had portrayed it in this play.

The play is an ironic, sci-fi examination of the relations between developing and developed countries. Set in the imminent future "Harvest" imagines a grisly pact between the first and third worlds, in which desperate people can sell their body parts to wealthy clients in return for food, water, shelter and riches for themselves and their families. As such, it is a play about how the "first" world cannibalizes the "third" world to fulfil its own desires.

The story, centres on Om, who signs up to be an organ donor for an American woman named

Ginni because there are no other jobs available for him in Mumbai. Ginni pays him to lead a “clean” and “healthy” life so she can harvest healthy organs whenever she needs them. Ginni begins to control every aspect of Om’s life, from when and what he eats to whom he sees and how he uses the bathroom. In fact, Ginni comes to control the entire family until the end of the play, when Om’s diseased brother, Jeetu, is taken to give organs instead of Om, and the recipient, Ginni, turns out to not be what she initially seemed. In a final act of defiance, the seeds of rebellion flower in a “checkmate” ploy by Om’s wife, Jaya.

The author’s vision of a post-apocalypse future is dark but told with rich irony and humour. Themes of globalization abound. Director Benjamin Mosse says, “We are struck more and more by the loss of individualism because branding is becoming so universal. The first and third worlds are no longer geopolitical places, but economic zones. Om sells his body to the face of a corporation, which is indifferent to the fact that he is American or Indian.”

“Harvest” won the Onassis Award for best new international play in 1997. It was selected out of 1,460 entries from 76 countries. It has been produced in Athens, Delhi, Swarthmore College and UC Berkeley. This is its New York professional premiere.

Playwright Manjula Padmanabhan is a Delhi-based writer and artist. Being both a cartoonist and socially-conscious playwright, she invites comparison with America’s Jules Feiffer. Her books include “Hot Death, Cold Soup,” a collection of short stories; “Getting There,” a travel-memoir; “This is Suki!”, a collection of her New Delhi strip SUKI; “Hidden Fires,” a collection of five dramatic monologues; and “Kleptomania,” the second collection of short stories. Her comic strips appeared weekly in the Sunday Observer (Bombay, 1982-86) and daily in the Pioneer (New Delhi, 1991-97). Padmanabhan has illustrated twenty-four books for children including her own two novels for children, “Mouse Attack” and “Mouse Invaders. Her most recent book is “Double Talk”, a collection of the Bombay strip by the same name.

Manjula Padmanabhan’s dystopian play Harvest (1997) examines the trade in human organs and the commoditization of the third world body that such a trade is predicated upon. Padmanabhan’s play, in which an unemployed Indian man sells the rights to his body parts to a buyer in the United States, pointedly critiques the commoditization of the healthy third-world body, which, thanks to significant advances in transplant medicine, has now become a bank of spare parts for ailing bodies in the first world.

Describing this phenomenon as a case of 'neo-cannibalism', anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1998, p.14) notes that wealthy but ailing patients in the first-world are increasingly turning to healthy if poverty-stricken populations of the third-world in order to procure 'spare' body parts. It is tempting, at first glance, to read this illicit global economy as yet another example of the exploitation of third-world bodies that global capitalism gives rise to. Scheper-Hughes herself suggests that the trade in human organs is best understood in the context of global capitalism when she points out that the global circuit of organs mirrors the circuit of capital flows in the era of globalisation: 'from South to North, from Third to First World, from poor to rich, from black and brown to white' (2002, p.197).

And yet, as I argue in my essay, the human organ cannot be equated with other objects produced in the third-world for first-world consumption because the organ is not a product of the labouring third-world body. Unlike the commodity exported from an exploitative third-world sweatshop, the organ is not produced by the third-world body but extracted from it. The organ's particular characteristic as a product that requires no labour in order to fetch a price provides the key to understanding why third-world populations are increasingly willing to be preyed upon by first-world organ buyers.

Many theorists writing about global capitalism today have pointed out that first-world economies are increasingly reliant not on production but consumption. The workforce of the first-world is ever more disengaged from industrial labour and manufacture either because, in the wake of technological advances, such labour is carried out by non-human means, or alternatively, because human labour is obtained elsewhere. In their drive to multiply profits, first-world economies rely on production sites where labour is 'cheaper, less assertive, less taxed, more feminised and less protected by states and unions'.

Typically located in the third-world, such production sites displace human labour to remote geographical locations, allowing for industrial production to become increasingly less visible in the first-world. The first-world, on the other hand, sees a proliferation of service-economies, economies which rely on consumers to purchase increasingly nonmaterial commodities.

Yet organ trade does not strictly correspond to this global economic pattern. The organ is indeed a material good originating in the third-world, but it is not the product of labour. It is, rather, a product that can be sold without the expenditure of labour, while promising to generate 'wealth without production, value without effort' (Comaroff and Comaroff, (p.313). Undreamt-

of amounts of money with little to no labour: this is the particular promise that organ sale extends to the impoverished and disenfranchised populations of the third-world. In order to understand the often-irresistible lure of this promise, we must explore not the transformation in the conditions of capitalist production, but rather the transformation in the social imaginaries of the labouring poor.

Jean and John Comaroff theorise just this transformation. According to the Comaroffs, capitalism today presents itself to the labouring poor in a millennial, messianic form, advertising itself as 'a gospel of salvation; as capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalised and the disempowered' (p.292). Thus, the key to understanding millennial capitalism lies in the particular brand of seduction upon which it operates. This seductiveness, they argue, is most visibly manifested in the unprecedented proliferation of 'occult economies' in the third-world (2000, p.312). The Comaroffs cite not just organ trade as an example of these occult economies, but also the sale of services such as fortune-telling, or the development of tourist industries based on the sighting of monsters (2000, p.310). Occult economies are characterised by the fact that they respond to the allure of 'accruing wealth from nothing' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000, p.313). In other words, occult economies are animated by the same tendency that motivates wealth accruing actions like gambling or speculation on the stock market. It is within this millennial context that we need to understand the decision of the organ-seller to embark on the sale of her organ and seek out the occult economy of the organs market. The organ seller's voluntary decision is brought on by that set of contradictory emotions, hope and despair, that millennial capitalism and its occult economies unleash upon their targets. Despair, because the owner of a healthy organ is immiserated, poor and hopelessly excluded from capitalism's promise of global prosperity. Hope, because millennial capitalism's occult economies hold out the promise of a quick fix to this condition by presenting a new, quasi-magical means of making enough money to overcome poverty.

Making money. This is the promise that the occult economy of organ trade extends to its objects: sell your organ and you will make more money than you will ever earn through years of toil and labour. The promise of millennial capitalism works because it allows the third-world individual to see her body as that which contains a natural 'spare' part, a naturally occurring surplus that is not the product of labour yet is still in high demand. The third-world individual is thus seduced into selling the organs that her body has a 'spare' of – a kidney, a cornea – in

order to solve all her monetary problems. The organ hence emerges as a very peculiar kind of commodity: one that is not produced by a labouring human body but rather extracted from it. What kind of commodity, then, is the organ? Indeed, is it a commodity at all? It is instructive to turn here to Karl Marx's discussion of a particular kind of commodity: one that has a use-value, and thus fulfils a need, yet no value, insofar as it is not the product of labour.<sup>1</sup> Marx's primary example of such a commodity, which he discusses in the third volume of *Capital*, is land. Marx recognises that there are various modes of production arising from land, but he chooses to focus on the particular case of agricultural production, where the farmer-capitalist leases a certain amount of land and pays the owner of this land a fixed sum of money every month in the form of rent. Parenthetically, he adds that 'instead of agriculture, we might equally have taken mining, since the laws are the same' (1991, p.752). The phrase is suggestive, because both cases, agriculture and mining, involve the extraction of something from the land. We might easily include the human body in the same category. In the scenario, I explore here, the body, like land, is mined for its organs, and, as the title of the play I discuss below suggests, organs are removed, harvested, from the body

Marx's discussion of land as a commodity offers yet further insights into the trade in human body parts. In *Capital III*, he explicitly states that to speak of land as having value is 'prima facie irrational, since the earth is not a product of labour, and thus does not have a value' (p.760). And yet, as Marx recognises, the fact remains that land has a price, a money sum for which it can be exchanged. We might add here that the organ, too, fetches a price without being a product of labour. From whence then, does this price originate? To this question Marx provides a very definitive answer:

The prices of things that have no value in and of themselves – either not being products of labour, like land, or which cannot be reproduced by labour [...] – may be determined by quite fortuitous combinations of circumstances. For a thing to be sold, it simply has to be capable of being monopolised and alienated (1991, p.772,

Capitalist production, argues Marx, develops precisely by virtue of its ability to monopolise and alienate the special, natural properties of use-values without value, such as land. Thus, the sale of land might appear, superficially, to be similar to the sale of a produced commodity. However, they have different theoretical statuses (p.28). As Duncan Foley explains:

If we want to understand value relations in commodity production, we should centre our attention first of all on conditions of production, on factors such as labour productivity. If we want to understand value relations involving nonproduced things, we should look, not to production, but to the rights involved in the ownership of these things and to the bargaining positions these rights give to their possessors (28-9,)

It is thanks to the social phenomenon of landed property that land is able to command a fixed, agreed-upon money-sum, in the form of rent if the land is leased, and in the form of a price if it is sold. The legal notion of landed property effectively alienates certain portions of land and decrees them as the exclusive possession of a given individual. As Marx puts it:

The legal conception [of private property] itself means nothing more than that the landowner can behave in relation to the land just as any commodity owner can with his commodities (1991, p.753). Landed property thus renders land into an alienable, monopolise good in the possession of a given individual who can now sell it.

As the work of Lawrence Cohen (2002) shows us, the organ, too, has been rendered alienable. Cohen argues that biomedical advances in transplant medicine have led to the possibility not just of extracting and transferring an organ from one person to another: more importantly, these advances have created a much larger pool of both potentially useful organs and compatible recipients alike. This 'fortuitous combination of circumstances', to quote Marx (1991, p.772), results from the development of highly effective immunosuppressant drugs such as cyclosporine. The development of cyclosporine, Cohen states, effectively means that patients awaiting kidney transplants are no longer dependent on kidneys that match their own tissue types (2002). Theoretically, then, it is highly probable that anyone wishing to sell their 'spare' organ will easily find a buyer for it, for immunosuppressant drugs greatly reduce the chances that the organ will be rejected by its new owner. The arrival of cyclosporine, as Cohen puts it, '[has] allow[ed] specific subpopulations to become "same enough" for their members to be surgically disaggregated and their parts reincorporated'.

If, as Marx says, a thing needs merely to be monopolisable and alienable in order to be sold, then the global black market in organs shows that this process is well underway in the case of body parts.<sup>2</sup> Much more fraught, however, is the question of what it means to own one's body and the organs that comprise it. Land ceases to be a free resource for all once a given state espouses the notion of private property upon which capitalism is founded. An organ, however,



is always the possession of a given individual, who, theoretically speaking, is therefore entitled to sell it, should she so choose. And yet the legislation adopted by most nations of the world, explicitly prohibiting the trade in human body parts, proves otherwise.

Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell argue that if along with the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, no country in Western Europe has as yet legalised the sale and purchase of human body tissues, this is due to the fact that most politicians and bioethicists in these countries uphold the human body as 'the locus of absolute dignity [...]. [This] [d]ignity is destroyed if any part of the body is assigned a market value and rendered alienable' (2006, p.19). Citing Paul Rabinow, Waldby and Mitchell explain that such an understanding of dignity as an inalienable human right is derived from Kant's distinction between dignity and price:

In the kingdom of ends, everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity. (19) The most trenchant critiques of the commoditization, be it illicit or legalised, of human body parts, spring from a similar conception of the dignity of the human body. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2000) describes organ market proposals as being founded upon utilitarian and neoliberal principals that consistently undermine the fundamental dignity of the human body.

Furthermore, these libertarian arguments emphasize the right of every individual to choose whether or not to sell what she owns. However, as Scheper-Hughes points out, the very idea of choice becomes problematic in most third-world contexts:

Bio-ethical arguments about the right to sell are based on Euro- American notions of contract and individual 'choice'. But social and economic contexts make the 'choice' to sell a kidney in an urban slum of Calcutta or in a Brazilian favela anything but a 'free' and 'autonomous' one.

The remainder of this essay discusses *Harvest*, a play which, can be argued, launches a scathing critique of the organs market and of the global, predatory capitalism that results in the commoditization of the third-world body. Indian writer Manjula Padmanabhan's 1997 play confronts us with a futuristic Bombay of the year 2010, a time when legal, moral and bioethical debates about organ sales and transplants have been overcome. The trade-in human organs is now fully institutionalised and smoothly operated by the entity embodying all the rapacious

forces of global capitalism: a transnational corporation named Interplanta Services. The cast, Padmanabhan's stage directions tell us, is divided into two main groups consisting of Third World donors and First World receivers. Although Padmanabhan chooses, 'for the sake of coherence', to make the donors Indian and the receivers North American, her stage directions emphasize that : the donors and receivers should take on the racial identities, names, costumes and accents most suited to the location of production. It matters only that there be a highly recognisable distinction between the two groups, reflected in speech, clothing and appearance (1997, p. 217).

The play's futuristic [setting](#) allows Padmanabhan to deploy a series of sci-fi gadgets on stage. Their purpose, I argue, is to alert us to the crucial role that technology plays in both seducing and policing the third-world donors into submission. It is thanks to one such sci-fi gadget that we see the first-world receiver and organ purchaser Ginny, whose body is never present on stage, but visible only on a screen suspended from the ceiling. The four Indian donors belong to the same household: Om; his wife Jaya; Om's mother, referred to simply as Ma; and Om's younger brother, Jeetu. While Padmanabhan uses her donor characters to interrogate the particular circumstances that make the option of selling one's body parts so seductive, ultimately, I contend, she upholds the Kantian idea of human dignity which views the selling of one's body parts as a violation of human integrity. When the play opens, Jaya and her mother-in-law are impatiently waiting for Om's return from his job interview. Both are fretful: Ma fervently hopes that Om will get the job; Jaya, knowing what the job entails, hopes that he will not. But Om returns to announce that he has indeed been selected for the 'job' at Interplanta Services. Having passed the medical tests at Interplanta, he has been decreed an eligible, healthy candidate for selling the rights to his entire body to an anonymous buyer in the United States. His confused feelings about signing such a contract allow Padmanabhan to portray the complex mixture of hope and despair that has motivated his actions. At first, he verges on the ecstatic: 'We'll have more money than you and I have names for!' he says to Ma, proudly. 'Who'd believe there's so much money in the world?' (1997, p.219). When his wife expresses her reservations for what he has done, he becomes defensive:

You think I did it lightly. But [...] we'll be rich! Very rich! Insanely rich! But you'd rather live in this one small room, I suppose! Think it's such a fine thing – living day in, day out, like monkeys in a hot-case – lulled to sleep by our neighbours' rhythmic farting! [...] And starving (1997, p.223).

When Jaya accuses him of making the wrong choice, he is adamant that his decision was not made of his own free will:

Om: I went because 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's nothing left for people like us! Don't you know that?

Jaya: You're wrong, there are choices – there must be choices – Om: Huh! I didn't choose. I stood in queue and was chosen!

And if not this queue, there would have been other queues – (238)

Om's insistence that his role in the selection procedure was entirely passive allows Padmanabhan to critique the liberal discourse of free will and choice that advocates organ markets on the basis of individual autonomy. She suggests that it is precisely this discourse which creates the economic structure of millennial capitalism in which the selling of organs becomes an 'option' for the disenfranchised third-world individual. As Om's final reaction makes clear, his judgement has been severely impaired by the lure of unlimited wealth. When the reality of what he has done hits him, he is terrified: 'How could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I?' (1997, p.234)

Om's mother, however, expresses no such regret. Upon first hearing her son's promises of unimaginable riches, Ma is mystified: 'What kind of job pays a man to sit at home?' (1997, p.220). As she begins to understand what Om's 'job' entails, she resumes her queries as though she cannot believe their good fortune: 'Tell me again: all you have to do is sit at home and stay healthy? [...] And they'll pay you? [...] Even if you do nothing but pick your nose all day?' (1997, p.222). By showing Ma's continued amazement at the fact that her son will be paid to do absolutely nothing, Padmanabhan is able to depict the extent to which the forces of millennial capitalism appear to provide a quasi-magical means of making money.

By Act II of the play, Ma has become completely addicted to their new life of luxury.

The family household is littered with an array of gadgets that Ginny has provided in order to entertain the donors and keep them comfortable, and Ma spends most of her time compulsively watching television on the interactive set that Ginny has sent them. She becomes the perfect recipient of Ginny's gifts as she dismisses Om's compunction and increasingly seeks to escape

the reality of her life in Bombay through technological devices. By the end of the play, she has locked herself away into what Padmanabhan terms a VideoCouch, a capsule into which Ma can plug herself, watch one of 150 television channels, and not worry about food or digestion because the unit is entirely self-sufficient. The comforts with which Ginny so willingly provides her seduce Ma into an amazing contentment at their sudden reversal of fortunes. Surrendering to the joys of technologically-induced bliss, Ma is thrilled that, for literally performing no labour at all, 'they will be rich forever and ever' (1997, p.235).

Not all the high-tech devices that Ginny delivers to the donors are designed to pamper the body, however. In the very first scene of the play, shortly after Om's return with a new 'job', representatives of Interplanta Services, his new employers, barge into the donors' home to install a series of gadgets. As Om, Jaya and Ma watch, they dismantle the family's rudimentary kitchen and replace it with their own cooking device and jars containing multi-coloured food pellets. They then install a Contact Module, a device that hangs from the ceiling and which looks, Padmanabhan tells us, like a 'white, faceted globe' (1997, p.221). Each time the device springs to life, Ginny, the American who has purchased Om's body, is able to make contact with the donor family. I wish to dwell at length on the sci-fi gadget that is the contact module. What interactions between the donors and the receiver does the contact module permit? And what does this device allow Padmanabhan to achieve on stage?

Let us begin with this latter question. Ginny communicates with the donor family only through the contact module. She is thus never physically present on the stage, a fact that is highly significant because Padmanabhan's chosen genre – theatre – is explicitly concerned with a tangible, embodied and physical presence on stage. Yet throughout the play, Ginny is only ever visible in two-dimensions, on the screen of the contact module. The only embodied performers on the stage are the racially and visually distinct bodies of the third-world donors. Thus, the audience has no choice but to gaze on a body whose sheer presence on stage challenges the supposed remoteness of the labouring and now cannibalised body, the very body that capitalist production in the era of globalisation has displaced into the remote third-world. Furthermore, the contact-module allows Padmanabhan to establish a structure of gazing and surveillance that mirrors the role of the audience. For, like the receiver, the audience too, gazes at the only physical bodies on stage: the donors. The audience is thus impelled into an uncomfortable identification with the receiver, the very entity who is responsible for the objectification of third world bodies that the play so overtly criticises.<sup>3</sup> Keeping the first-world receiver's body

remote serves a second purpose. It allows Padmanabhan to signal to the profound tensions underlying the predatory relationship between donors and receivers. The donor's hitherto healthy body harbours, on the one hand, the possibility of prolonging the ailing receiver's life. Yet, on the other hand, the third-world body produces in its new owner, the first-world receiver, profound anxiety.

For like the receiver's own body, the donor's body too is vulnerable to the Encroachment of disease and degeneration that must be kept at bay at all costs. Firstly, then, the contact module enables Ginny to intervene in the donor world without having to set foot in the geographical location that the donors inhabit. Nor would she want it any other way. She has purchased the rights to Om's organs in order to fend off disease and death and has no intention of risking a visit to their unhygienic dwellings. Secondly, the contact module allows Ginny to police the daily habits of the donors in order to ensure that the organs that will one day be hers remain healthy too.

Thus, realising, after the first visit, that Om's family shares a toilet with forty other families, Ginny reacts with horror. 'It's wrong', she exclaims. 'It's disgusting! And I – well, I'm going to change that. I can't accept that. I mean, it's unsanitary!' (1997, p.225). Accordingly, Interplanta is commissioned to install a toilet in their home that very same day.

The regular monitoring that the contact module permits is rendered even more effective given that only the receiver is able to operate it at will. Om's family never knows when Ginny will 'visit' them next. By the opening of Act II of the play, we see how well her strategy is working. Two months have elapsed, and Om is panicking because they are late for lunch.

(Lunch, of course, consists of the multi-coloured nutritional pellets provided for them by Interplanta Services.) 'You know how [Ginny] hates it when we're late to eat', Om says, worriedly (1997, p.228). The contact module thus allows the receiver to establish a permanent structure of surveillance in Om's home. Fearing Ginny's rebuke, or worse, a revoking of his contract, Om urges his entire family to police their own behaviour. The contact module inculcates self-discipline, rendering the donors' bodies into perfect sites of 'docility-utility', optimal sites, in other words, from which to extract the healthiest possible organ (135-169).

Ginny is careful, however, to provide the donors with plenty of comforts to compensate them for their efforts. When the curtain lifts for Act II of the play, the stage reveals that, a mere two

months later, the donors' household is fully equipped with an air-conditioning unit, a mini-gym and a gleaming, fully-equipped kitchen (1997, p.227). Ginny reminds the family that by pampering them so, she is only fulfilling her own contractual obligations: 'I get to give you things you'd never get in your lifetime, and you get to give me, well... maybe my life' (1997, p.230). Ginny's casual sentence serves as a jolting and disturbing reminder that receivers and donors hardly trade in equivalents: Ginny provides 'things' for which the donors pay her back in their own lives. In fact, Ginny's continual gifts amount to little more than a mere investment. As she says to the family, warping the pronunciation of Om's name: The Most Important Thing is to keep Auwm smiling. Coz if Auwm's smiling, it means his body is smiling and if his body is smiling it means his organs are smiling. And that's the kind of organs that'll survive a transplant best, smiling organs... (1997, p.229)

Reading the receiver's actions as an investment permits us to return, once again, to the parallels between the human body and land that the play's title, Harvest, alludes to. The term effectively assimilates the whole human body, from which the part is extracted, to a crop-producing plot of land, and thus, by extension, to the possibility that land harbours of generating life. The extractable human body part is accordingly assimilated to the yield or crop; this is the commodity with genuine use-value, the part that it is profitable to detach from the whole. In order to obtain the best possible harvest, as Ginny is well-aware, one must not only select the best possible site in which to invest: one must maintain a continued investment in this site.

Quality input will produce the quality output: namely, a healthy harvest.

While Virgil weighs his options, Jaya threatens (promises?) to reclaim her own body through suicide. Padmanabhan thus leaves us to ponder a sobering question: is a victory that requires the death of the exploited target of millennial capitalism really worthy of being termed an act of resistance?

Harvest poses a potent critique of the first world's exploitation of third-world bodies for the commodities of labour-power and, as the recently emerged trade in organs shows, health. Should third-world individuals resist such commoditization? Indeed, can they? While opponents of organ markets embrace human dignity as an inalienable right that no individual should have to relinquish, the black market in human organs continues to be the only solution for those who have no other assets to sell. In this context, Padmanabhan's notion of 'winning

by losing' seems a disturbingly apt way to define the third-world individual's predicament: lose your own body part to win the cash. avoid"(Wandor,1993,55).