

‘COLONIZED BODY’ MEN, WOMEN AND MASCULINITY IN TECHNO-SCIENTIFIC FUTURISTIC WORLD: HARVESTING ORGANS IN MANJULA PADMANABHAN’S *HARVEST*

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Abstract

Padmanabhan in Harvest handles multiple issues such as post-colonialism, impact of technical and scientific advancement on the First and Third World people, Third World poverty leading its citizen to be the victims of First World citizens, etc. Apart from the multitude issues mentioned above, Harvest discusses the concept of men and masculinity in a techno-scientific futuristic world wherein everything is based upon technology and science, even sex. Through Harvest, Padmanabhan poses questions of men and masculinity like- If masculinity is inseparable from sex and producing an heir, what is the role of masculinity in a man-woman’s virtual sexual relationship? Can masculinity/manhood be separated from its social construction wherein children can be produced through semen injection in a woman’s body?’ In another way play comments on the IVF (In Vitro Fertility) and masculinity. The present paper focuses on analyzing the play from the perspective of colonialism and masculinity at the intersect of techno-scientific advancement.

Key Words: Colonialism, Masculinity, Men & Women, IVF, Colonized body, gays and heterosexuals, Sperm Father, No-Dad Society.

Introduction

Harvest is an Onassis Award winning play by the well-known dramatist Manjula Padmanabhan. *Harvest* is a futuristic play based on technical developments in the world. Though the play was published in 1998 setting of the play is 2010.

Action of the play takes place in 'a single-room accommodation in a tenement building' in Mumbai. Om is the head of the family who is living with his widowed mother, MA, his brother Jeetu, and his wife Jaya. Utter poverty and lack of opportunity frustrates Om. He was working as a clerk but now he has lost the job. There is tension and frustration in the family. In such a situation Om gets a job in InterPlanta Services, a company, which sells the organs of the poor Third World men to the rich First World people. Instead of taking Om, the guards of InterPlanta Services take his brother Jeetu. Initially, they take his eyes and fix some machine in his head. At the end of the play we come to know that the beautiful woman, who was talking on Contact Module as Ginni, was nothing but a computer animated object made by a man Virgil, who is living in America. He wanted the organs of a Third World youth, to remain youthful. He also needs same young woman to put his seeds to grow. At the end of the play Jaya rejects Virgil's proposal to make her pregnant by implantation through guards. She demands him to come to India and have real sex with her to produce a child instead of making sex on virtual level. This is not affordable to Virgil as he says polluted environment in India can't suit his body. Jaya remains enclosed inside the room waiting for Virgil to come until she finishes the remained pills and medicine on which she can survive. At the same time she is threatening Virgil if he happens to break the door and try to force her to put his seeds in her belly through guards, she would kill herself.

On the post-colonial level *Harvest* represents the pathetic plight of the Third World people. The play also shows how the freedom, self-identity and overall life of Third World citizens are crushed under the force of money and technical power of the First World men. The characters in the play are divided into two major groups: the Donors and the Receivers. The Donors are Indians and the Receivers are North Americans. However, Padmanabhan's Donors and Receivers can be different depending upon where the play gets staged. It's about post-colonial situation anywhere around the world. Post-colonialism creates binary opposition. In the play also Third World Donors are destitute, poor, unsanitary, technically zero, savage, easily deceived and mastered by anyone and thereby impotent, not masculine against the technically, economically and mentally powerful North Americans like Virgil.

However, these binary oppositions are not same as they were in pre-independent India. In pre-independent India along with scientific and technical progress body played vital role in ascribing white supremacy and white hyper masculinity. But in *Harvest* Virgil has changed his body four times in fifty years. It's not body in a true sense of the word. (He is just changing his body as anyone changes clothes.) He doesn't have 'masculine body', a major tenet of being masculine. But, as per the new parameters to judge one's masculinity in a highly technical world, wherein everything can be done with computers, internet and money, he is really masculine. Colonizers in the play look for young couples without children. They, as Virgil says, "look for young men's bodies to live, young women's bodies in which to sow their children" (3B6) because, as Virgil says, they have "lost the art of having children" (3B7). Now Virgil has got Jeetu's body. He intends to put his seeds in Jaya's belly to grow. (He has sent 'a device' with guards that can make Jaya pregnant.) At first, Jaya, who desperately wanted to have a child and is unable to get it from her husband and brother-in-law, tries to love Virgil. She "extends a hand towards the apparition-there is a crackle as her hand passes through it. She recoils" (3B8). That means it is just an apparition, not a real man. Virgil intends their relation on virtual level only. He says- "The guards will make the child possible, Zhaya. It's just a formality, a device-" (3B8). He further says,

VIRGIL. You know an implant. Something I sent, which they're ready to deliver. And you can take your time. About three days are still within your fertile cycle. (3B9)

Padmanabhan questions the very bases of masculinity. With the modern development in science and technology, manhood or the concept of masculinity is challenged. It has challenged old concepts of manhood which are dependent upon biological and social construction of masculinity. The ability of Science and Technology to produce progeny without actual sexual intercourse, without the union of male and female body, has put an end to masculinity or manhood. This detachment of male and female body also questions the special privileges for men, which constitute masculinity, vis-à-vis, authority over women and children at home, power, and social status.

Masculinity is constructed socially, politically and historically and it varies according to caste, class, religion, region, and ethnicity. Padmanabhan brings in another parameter-virtual relation-to problematize concepts like 'masculinity', 'femininity' as well as notion of 'husband', 'father', etc.

Actually, Virgil must have sent semen to put in Jaya's egg so that she can be pregnant. In these days, artificial insemination of a woman has become a common practice in First World countries like America and England. A single woman can be artificially inseminated. She doesn't need a man to make her pregnant. One of the most recent innovative procedures available in medical science which threatens men's role in human production is Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI). In this process a physician selects a sperm cell from the tests of epididymides for direct injection into the egg. With the help of this process sub fertile men, as well as infertile men who can still produce a few sperm cells are able to participate in human reproduction. This process puts an end to the most common differentia between men, i.e., gays and heterosexuals. As there is no role of penis to be 'straight as stick', which gays can't make, the sole criteria to differentiate men on the basis of sexuality comes to an end. By suggesting such a radical way to make Jaya pregnant Padmanabhan eradicates the difference between Om, who is unable to produce child to Jaya, and Jeetu, who is a male prostitute.

ICSI technology has the potential to make men unnecessary in reproduction. At present there are many sperm banks around the globe. "Cryopreserved sperm has no known expiration date, sperm banks across the globe have hundreds of thousands of vials of semen with millions of sperm cells encapsulated in each vial, and ICSI only requires one sperm cell per injection in Ovum" (Moore 30). These NRT's (New Reproductive Technologies) have made it possible a No-Dad society. It has reached up to such a mean level that any youth who is in need of money can masturbate in a cup and can sell it to produce an offspring he will never see and care about. Such possibility puts an end to the concept of father and fatherhood. Virgil remains neither 'New father' nor 'Old father'. He is a 'Sperm Father'. When biological fatherhood comes to an end, moral obligations to the child by biological fatherhood, comes to an end too. There doesn't remain fatherhood at all. When fatherhood ceases, authority in the family, respect, and all that comes with fatherhood, which constitute masculinity, comes to an end.

Now, if women don't need men to produce children and if there is no fatherhood at all in the society, there remains no masculinity. There remains no difference between homosexual and heterosexual; whole base on which the concept of masculinity rests comes to an end. Like other scientific fictional writers, Padmanabhan through *Harvest* imagines a utopian society with gender equality. But she just opens a new vista to think. She doesn't accept this. Jaya in the play doesn't accept Virgil's

proposal. She doesn't want the sexual relation on virtual level. She asks Virgil to come to India and have real sex with her. She says,

JAYA...I want real hands touching me. I want to feel a real weight upon me... (3B9)

Jaya supports hegemonic masculinity. She is aware that in this solution, she is not going to get what she actually wants. She has in her hand her death and her pride.

JAYA. ... And if I let you take it from me, I will be naked as well as poor! You'll never let me have that what you have! You'll only share your electronic dreams with me, your "virtual" touch, your plastic shadows- no! If the only clothes I can afford are these rags of pride then I'll wear them with my head held high. (3B11)

Jaya knows very well that if she accepts Virgil's proposal and gives birth to a child she will never have the pleasure which she will get from a man. Her child would never have his father's name. For Virgil, fatherhood will come to an end at the moment he has sent his semen. There will be no one in the family to protect Jaya and her would be child. So, she rejects Virgil's proposal.

Jaya's rejection of Virgil's proposal has a colonial meaning also. At the end of the play the colonized self understands that she has been deceived, she starts protest. Jaya at the end of the play becomes a victimized, colonized woman whose honor is involved in her death. She says she would die rather than became pregnant by implantation. Because she knows that even though it is Jeetu's body, seeds which she is going to bear are those of the foreigner, the colonizer, Virgil. So she prefers death to implantation. She knows very well that Virgil can't come to India risking his skin. So, she asks Virgil either to come to India and make her pregnant or leave her on her own fate to live. She also threatens that if guards happen to break the door by force she would kill herself. In death, she says, lies her honor. She further adds,

JAYA....but I'll die knowing that you, who live only to win, will have lost to a poor, weak and helpless woman. And I'll get more pleasure out of that first moment of death than I've had in my entire life so far!' (3B11)

Jaya here tries to break the binary opposition created by the mutual understanding of both the colonizer and the colonized; the colonizer is always superior to the colonized; the colonizer is born only to win and the colonized to lose; the colonized is feminine and the colonizer is masculine, etc. Here, until the end of the play all the four lives in the family were controlled by Virgil by sitting thousand miles away, in America, but now at the end unlike the colonizer it is the colonized who has

the choice. Jaya ceases to obey the orders of the colonizer. Throughout the play every freedom of an individual was controlled by the colonizer. Now Jaya, as she says, is free to take her own decision. And death becomes only solution to keep the colonized self's honor intact.

Conclusion

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* presents the ways of rich First World countries to colonize and oppress poor Third World countries with the help of modern technology. The First World countries, by the power gained by money and technology harvest healthy organs of the Third World citizens. In this way, the Third World people are 'effeminized' by the First World 'masculine' people. It is not only the male body but also female body is exploited in this process. Through the character Jaya, Padmanabhan shows the need to resist the colonizers. Unlike the male characters in the play (Om and Jeetu) Jaya is bold and courageous enough to fight against the rich and powerful colonizers. Unlike the most of the writers, Padmanabhan does not use body to locate masculinities; instead, she shows body as an item, a commodity to be harvested by the colonizers. Jaya shoulders the responsibility of resistance.

Padmanabhan goes a step further by showing that the difference between male and female body is not very important for both can be seen as a crop of body parts for replacement. The colonizers or the rich people from the First World may choose to harvest this crop any time. Significantly, it is a woman who decides to fight this losing battle against the all-powerful enemy who wants to impregnate her. Padmanabhan's Jaya, even if a female, fights against the attempts at 'harvesting' the crop of living bodies of the Third World people by the First World colonizers even if the other two male characters have failed.

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