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Dehumanization under Racial Capitalism in *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan: A Critical Study

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Abstract

This research paper examines the dehumanization of working-class and unemployed communities in the play Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan under racial capitalism. The paper uses the theoretical framework of racial capitalism to describe global inequality and the commodification of marginalized bodies and organs. By studying Cedric J. Robinson's concept of racial capitalism, the study argues that the dominant class extracts the working class's organs for the global economy and that poor people become resources for the survival of wealthy-class consumers. The relationship between the Indian donor, Om Prakash, and the Western recipient portrays inequality. It reveals the power structure, as well as the economic and technological dominance of the wealthy capitalist class. The paper further analyses organ transplants, technological dominance, and the worth of the working-class community in capitalist society. Harvest criticizes the global capitalist system that values profit over humanity. The study concludes that the play presents the ultimate exploitation of the human body, while Jaya's refusal to fall into the trap of global capitalist dominance represents resistance to the commodification of her body.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and technologies have grown widely for the development of human beings and created significant relationships among human beings, contributing to both social and economic development. Medical science has grown over the past few years in the field of organ transplantation and donation and organ donation has traditionally been regarded as a noble social service for saving the life of a needy person. But at the same time, in the last few decades, the possibility of buying, selling, and transferring organs has also raised serious ethical questions concerning poverty, inequality, bodily autonomy, and the value assigned to human life. When access to medical technology is determined by the economic condition and status of the person, the human body is placed at a much lower value, which results in unequal exchange. Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest*, which was first published in 1997, exposes such realities of India. In this play, the relationship between the First World and the Third World forms a vicious circle: the First World represents the dominant class, which uses its access to medical science and organ transplantation to exploit Third World countries. Om Prakash, a socially ruined and sympathetic character, represents an unemployed Indian man who accepts an offer to become an organ donor in exchange for economic security. The play deals with Om's family and household, which represent the subordinate class following the instructions of the dominant class. Through surveillance and restrictions, the dominant class controls their personal autonomy. Om and his family receive technological devices and access to a

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materially comfortable lifestyle, but this apparent prosperity is accompanied by surveillance, restrictions, and the gradual loss of bodily and personal autonomy. The play complicates earlier understandings of capitalism as an economic system based on the exchange of commodities. Here, in this play, commodities are no longer limited to labour, land, or material goods; the human body itself becomes a resource. Organs are removed, transferred, preserved, and consumed according to the requirements of wealthy recipients. The human body is separated from the individual who inhabits it and treated as an economic object.

This transformation can be examined through Cedric J. Robinson's theory of racial capitalism. Robinson challenges the idea that capitalism developed as a purely universal economic system and argues that capitalist development has historically been connected to racial, colonial, and hierarchical forms of social organization. His concept of racial capitalism provides a useful framework for examining how economic exploitation operates through pre-existing racial and colonial divisions. From this perspective, capitalism does not exploit all populations in identical ways. Certain populations and territories have historically been positioned as sources of labour, resources, and wealth for others.

Such a theory is relevant in the play *Harvest*. Under the economic power of the First World, the economically vulnerable Indian population becomes a supplier of biological resources to the internationally dominant class. The paper argues that the play *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan exposes the logic of dehumanization and bodily commodification of Indian bodies under racial capitalism. In this capitalist economy, the dominant class does not value Indian bodies as human beings, treating them instead as biological resources. Through organ transplantation, technological surveillance, economic dependency, and the unequal relationship between the Global South and the wealthy West, the play demonstrates how global capitalism transforms human bodies into sites of extraction. At the same time, Jaya's resistance to the control imposed upon her family challenges this process of commodification and suggests the possibility of reclaiming human agency.

The study addresses four major research questions: How is the Indian body represented as a biological resource and commodity in the global capitalist market? How do technology and economic inequalities produce dehumanization? How does the relationship between Indian donors and wealthy Western recipients reveal global economic and racial hierarchies? How does Jaya resist the commodification and technological control of her body?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* play has attracted substantial critical attention in the fields of organ transplantation, biopolitics, technological development, the impact of postcolonialism, and gender studies. The play's dystopian representation of Indian society enables scholars to examine the relationship between the global market and the human body.

2.1 Studies in Globalization and Capitalism

Many scholars have studied *Harvest* through the lens of globalization and capitalism. Gilbert studies the play in relation to the impact of globalization and economic inequalities between India and Western countries. Gilbert's study of *Harvest* suggests that the technological world cannot be separated from globalization. Technology plays a vital role in the global economic structure. Therefore, her study provides a foundation for examining the technological impact on the dehumanization of human bodies in the modern era (Gilbert 2006).

Priteegandha Naik similarly examines *Harvest* but through a science fiction study. She reveals how the play uses imagined technology in transforming the whole global market into the central figure of the dystopian play. She elaborates that technology is not merely an accessible device but can transform and represent futuristic social and cultural values (Naik 2020).

Therefore, the present study discusses and examines how such inequalities can be looked at through the lens of Cedric J. Robinson's racial capitalism.

2.2 Studies on Bodily Commodification

With reference to the present research, Cheng examines the issue in "The Commodification of Bodies: The International Organ Trade in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* (1997)," arguing that international trade and technological development transform the body of the human being into a

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resourceful commodity. Her discussion is particularly relevant to the present research because she connects bodily commodification with the position of Indian bodies within a global technological and economic system.

However, the existing scholarship can further be looked at from the racial capitalist point of view, and it connects the historical inequalities between the Global North and the Global South.

2.3 Studies on Surveillance and Control

Technology and surveillance have attracted critical interest in the play *Harvest*'s representation of technology and its impact on the lives of the people of underdeveloped countries. The poor family gains material comfort through its participation in the organ economy, but this comfort is accompanied by surveillance and restrictions on personal autonomy. Archana Gupta's 2026 study, "Bodies under Scanner: AI, Surveillance, and Gendered Resistance in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*," demonstrates that technological surveillance does not stop with the agreement to the commercial use of the resource but also serves as a tool for depriving the family of personal freedom and autonomy.

The present study builds upon racial capitalism to examine how technological tools serve the dominant power of the capitalist economy and are used to control marginalized people. Those who control advanced technology also possess greater power to regulate those whose bodies become resources within the system.

2.4 Gender Studies

Moni studies the impact and the relationship between transplant tourism and patriarchal standards. She analyzes the circulation of organs across nations, creates space for the voices of vulnerable and marginalized people affected by organ transplantation, and helps explain power relations (Moni 2014). Gupta's studies further examine Jaya's resistance in the form of taking control over her own body and refusing the patriarchal standards. Her resistance therefore introduces an important counterpoint to the play's representation of exploitation.

Therefore, although the play has been studied through several critical frameworks, studying *Harvest* through Cedric J. Robinson's Black Marxism helps us understand capitalism as a historical system of economic inequality and examine how the development of some populations contributes to the decline of others through unequal economic conditions. The study contributes to existing scholarship by bringing together racial capitalism, bodily commodification, technological surveillance, dehumanization, global inequality, and resistance within a single analytical framework. Thus, the study examines not merely the metaphors of bodily commodification and dehumanization but also how society functions within the capitalist market and how racial exploitation takes place. At the same time, Jaya's resistance demonstrates that marginalized bodies are not simply passive objects of capitalist society but, on the other hand they are active consumers and owners of their own bodies.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research applies a qualitative and interpretative methodology. Further investigation is based on analysis of the play, particularly its dialogue and dramatic representation. Another important element is character analysis, focusing on how Om, Jaya, and Jeetu represent biological resources and commodities. Their allegorical representation and their country's vulnerable economy contribute to the development of the play and are examined through Cedric J. Robinson's theory of racial capitalism. Cedric J. Robinson's theory of racial capitalism serves as the primary analytical framework. Rather than interpreting the conflict in *Harvest* simply as an opposition between the rich and the poor, the study investigates how economic exploitation is connected to historically produced racial, colonial, and global hierarchies. Robinson's framework is therefore used to examine why the economically marginalized Indian body becomes positioned as a source of biological value within a global capitalist system.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The present study employs Cedric J. Robinson's theory of racial capitalism with reference to the book Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition, which helps develop a conceptual foundation for understanding how the capitalist system works, draws on racial hierarchies, and operates through historically established hierarchies rather than economic relations alone in the postmodern world. The study applies this framework in the play *Harvest* to investigate how the unequal

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distribution of technology and economic resources has positioned marginalized people's bodies as merely biological resources for international consumers. It does not assume that economic differences automatically constitute racial discrimination, but it explores how the unequal relationship between the donor and recipient reflects the historically established hierarchies between economically powerful populations and vulnerable populations. The study's framework explores how capitalist populations exploit other populations not merely through economic resources but also through bodily commodification and the erosion of individual identity and autonomy.

3.2 Primary and Secondary Sources

The primary source for this research is the play *Harvest* (1997) by Manjula Padmanabhan. The study closely examines the dramatic situation, dialogue, character interaction, character discussion, and representation of technological control and surveillance to understand Dehumanization and Resistance. The major characters Om, Jaya, Jeetu, and Ginni, as well as the revelation concerning Virgil's role in the organ-trading system, are particular focuses of the study.

The secondary sources include the relevant research articles, essays, book chapters, and academic studies concerning the play *Harvest*, racial capitalism, bodily commodification, postcolonialism, organ transplant, technological surveillance, and resistance. Cedric J. Robinson's theoretical framework provides the principal basis for the criticism and for viewing the play *Harvest* through the lens of racial capitalism and studying bodily commodification, dehumanization and Global Capitalism.

3.3 Textual Analysis

The study uses close reading and thematic analysis for the interpretation of the play. The selected dialogues and dramatic effects can be examined through the research questions and theoretical framework.

First, the study examines Om's unstable economic condition and unemployment and how they influence his decision to sell his body within the international organ market. His dialogue, "I didn't choose. I stood in the queue and was chosen!", illustrates this pressure. This statement analyses how economic conditions can influence a person to commodify his own body for financial stability.

Second, the study examines the unequal relationship between Om and Ginni and how wealthy recipients can exercise technological control over the bodies of economically marginalised donors. The study challenges the assumption that technological progression will also result in social progression for all classes.

Third, the study examines technological control and surveillance that lead to control not merely over the body but also over individual autonomy. The study therefore explores the contradiction between material freedom and personal freedom.

Fourth, the study examines Jaya's refusal to commodify her body in exchange for material freedom and pleasure. Her objection leads to the resistance. 'The only thing I have which is still my own is my death. My death and my pride.' This analysis explores how her resistance challenges the capitalist assumption that economic stability permits them to exploit any individual of vulnerable economic condition. It also considers the limitations of individual resistance within a broader system of economic and technological domination.

3.4 Scope and Limitations

The research is limited to the primary textual analysis of the play *Harvest* and its representation through racial capitalism, bodily commodification, global capitalism, technological surveillance and resistance. It is a theoretical and interpretative study, not empirical research of the organ transplant industry. The interpretation is based on the playwright's *Harvest* and does not provide findings about practices in the actual medical system.

The study recognises that the relationship between the Global North and the Global South is not identical to concepts of racial classification; therefore, it examines how economy, class, and racial hierarchy intersect with the dramatic world. The research applies Robinson's theory of racial capitalism, connecting the exploitation of Om and his family to wider global hierarchies while examining Jaya's resistance as an assertion of bodily autonomy and human dignity.

IV. RESULTS

The major findings concern the theory of racial capitalism in Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest*.

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It reveals how economic vulnerability operates within the framework of racial capitalism.

In the play *Harvest*, the central figure, Om, is commodified as a resource in the capitalist market. Om's unstable financial condition makes him an organ donor in the international market.

It reveals a contradiction between contractual consent and freedom. The financial instability and unemployment of Om restrict the alternatives available to him. Therefore, economic necessity becomes a condition through which his body acquires exchange value for Ginni. Hence, Ginni gains biological access to the body of Om. Om exchanges his own body but also exposes his family's organs and way of life to surveillance. Ginni represents the capitalist system that turns economic needs into an opportunity to acquire Biological resources from vulnerable people like Om. The particular transaction therefore exposes how economic necessity transforms into an instrument of domination of marginalised people. The analysis results in the unequal distribution of rights between Om and the privileged Ginni. The technological surveillance snatches the autonomy of Om's family members. With reference to colonialism and racial capitalism, this system operates through unequal economic distribution and mechanisms of dependency that affected marginalized populations in the colonial era. The family's participation in the organ market does not eliminate the existing power imbalance; rather, it reorganises that imbalance through technological and economic mechanisms. The technology becomes the instrument through which economic inequality is forwarded into social and bodily control. It results in dehumanization as the human body of Om is constantly treated as a commodity for exchange in the unequally structured capitalist market. The process results in the unequal relationship between the First World country that governs the market through the capitalist system and the Third World country of vulnerable economic standards. The result is reestablishing the historical hierarchy of race distribution not based on colour but on the basis of economic condition in capitalist international markets. Jaya's resistance questions whether economically disadvantaged people have the right to control their own bodies or whether that control falls to economically powerful recipients and countries. Her actions do not eliminate the broader system of bodily commodification, but they challenge its authority to determine the value and meaning of human life.

V. DISCUSSION

The research discusses how the representation of Om as a working-class person in a Third World country places him within the trap of racial capitalism. Here, racial theory can be examined through the character's economic instability, which represents both his individual circumstances and the Third world's vulnerability,specifically India in this play. This situation introduces Ginni, a computer-generated representation of the dominant class who is not a tangible person but embodies submission to the racial capitalist system of Western or First World countries.

> Om:- "I didn't choose. I stood in the queue and was chosen!" (Padmanabhan, Act I)

This is further elaborated through Om's character, whose situation represents capitalist exchange involving bodily modification. If Om had economic stability, then he would not be forced to enter the organ market for the commodification of the body. The capitalist system presents bodily sacrifice as an opportunity for social mobility, while concealing the extent to which poverty has created the conditions for that sacrifice. Under colonial systems, economically weaker territories were treated as sources of raw materials for powerful imperial economies. In *Harvest*, the body itself becomes the raw material. The organ donor represents and occupies the resources of the supplier, and the dominant class person takes over the position of consumer. The difference is that the resource being extracted is no longer land, minerals, crops, or labour; the human body itself represents an asset. It is represented in the weaker section of society who are from third world countries. Earlier, the slave trade was based on colour and the country's economic instability. In modern times with hold over technological advancement the dominant class remains the same and slave classes are from the developing countries only. The sources and resources have changed, but neither the representation of racial capitalism has changed nor the capitalist mindset.

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5.1 Global Capitalism and the Relationship between Third World and First World Countries

> Ginni: "I get to give you things you would never get in your lifetime, and you get to give me, well… maybe my life." (Act II of Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*).

The play represents the unequal distribution of technological and economic resources, in which the First World country becomes the owner of the Technological Market and determines the condition in which the people of Third World countries live. This can be examined from Om's family's perspective when Om himself becomes the commodity for Ginni (Western recipient). In the eyes of Ginni, Om and his family are not treated as independent individuals but as biological resources whose value is determined by Ginni. Here, in Cedric Robinson's theory of racial capitalism, this unequal relationship reveals how a good economic structure can produce racial bias, enabling the privileged population to take control and exercise power over the bodies of the Third World Country's population.

5.2 Technology, Surveillance, and Economic Control

> Ginni-Human goldfish bowls, you know? I just look in on you folks every now and then and it just blows my mind. Better than TV. (Padmanabhan, Act II, Scene 1)

> Om-You know how Ginni hates it when we're late to eat (Padmanabhan, Act II, Scene 1).

The dialogue by Ginni represents the contribution of Om and his family as a donor in her life. The presence of Om and his family members is like entertainment for Ginni. Like fish trapped in a fishbowl, the whole family is trapped in surveillance and technology that has been created as a controlling unit by the Dominant class. The mentality of the dominant class is portrayed in this dialogue, as the whole family is viewed through the lens of racial commodification. The whole family acts as a bodily commodity under surveillance because of the economic condition of the family. The play demonstrates how the accumulation of technological power and surveillance can reproduce the historically established hierarchies between marginalised and privileged populations. In this play, technology is not merely presented as a neutral unit but as a controlling unit that encourages the earlier mechanism of the dominant class,which results in the racial hierarchy based on the vulnerable economy of the Third World Country. Technology and surveillance become an integral part of eroding the privacy and autonomy of Om's family. The technology here works in two contradictory forms. On the one hand, it liberates Om's family from poverty. On the other hand, it produces a new form of dependency which results in the loss of autonomy which is visible through the dialogue by Om, where he suggests Ginni will not like it. So, the technology is important for surveillance in this play, which results in economic control for Om's family. The family is not simply moved from poverty to prosperity. Instead, one form of vulnerability is replaced by another. The wealthy capitalist system consequently controls both the body and the environment surrounding the body.

5.3 Dehumanization and Bodily Commodification

> Om- There are no new jobs now – there's nothing left for people like us!
> (Padmanabhan, Act I, Scene 1)

Om's dialogue represents the value assigned to marginalized communities in the capitalist market, modern forms of racial hierarchy and discrimination, and the ideology of economically stable countries. Slave catching and bodily commodification are presented in Om's dialogue: the country's vulnerable economic condition allows economically stable populations to discriminate, take control of bodies through technology, and ultimately commodify them through organ donation.

The system of racial capitalism, based on the developed economy of one state and the vulnerable economy of another, results in dehumanization. *Harvest* play exposes the dystopian world market of calculating human value through economic standards. Om's vulnerable economic status transforms him into an inventory of organs. The economic vulnerability of States makes the marginalised population available for their Bodily commodification. The Body of the marginalised population acts as a calculated commodity for the developed economic states or the dominant class. This represents a global economic order in which the material advancement of privileged societies can depend upon the exploitation of vulnerable populations, reproducing racial hierarchies, but this

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time based on the economic condition of the Country. The end reveals that Ginni is not an actual person; the elderly Virgil is the mastermind of Dehumanization and the commodification of Om's family's body. He creates this trap to conceal the reality and profit from the organs of the whole family. The dehumanizing value of Virgil's character reveals the systematic exploitation of marginalized communities to sell organs for a better lifestyle and to produce immortality and youth for himself. Earlier, capitalists dehumanized the underprivileged based on their skin colour; marginalized people were historically exploited through the sale of their labour. In this play, it is revealed that they are being compelled by economic vulnerability to sell their body organs to the privileged consumers. Through this play, it is shown how economic hierarchies have reproduced the historical racial bias and how capitalists have commodified it.

5.4 Jaya's Resistance

> Jaya (to Om) - "You are selling your body. Not just yours—ours. House, our privacy, our liberty. What do you consider you have done?" (Padmanabhan Act 1, Scene 1)

The Dialogue said by Jaya represents the resistance and the morality which she possesses from the beginning, and she challenges the idea that Om's contract affects only his body. The character of Jaya is portrayed to us as a person who always pays attention to her conscience. The effect of economic instability, which is presented to us earlier, and the stability that comes with surveillance does not alter her consciousness and resistance. The play represents her character as the only person who focuses on the fact that Om is not merely selling his body to the donor but in a way,exposing the entire family to the exploitative trap of racial capitalism. From the beginning, she resists surrendering physical and mental control to Ginni in exchange for financial stability and exposing the whole family to surveillance. Although the contract offered by the multinational company Interplanta is made through Om, it eventually extends beyond him to entrap the whole family. As a result, Jeetu, Om's younger brother, mistakenly becomes a victim of the dehumanizing organ transplantation market. The whole family's economic vulnerability exposes them to the mechanism of racial capitalism.

Jaya's second declaration, 'The only thing I have which is still my own is my death. My death and my pride.'(Padmanabhan, Act 3 Scene 2) asserts her right to control her own body and retain her individual dignity, resisting the racialised structure of bodily commodification. She challenges the assumption that economic deprivation grants the market the right to exercise control over the human body. Jaya's resistance does not erase the economic system of bodily commodification but it interrupts its ability to define the meaning of the human body. Her resistance has political significance. Politically, her resistance challenges the economic structure in a way that every economically marginalised person in the same country cannot be converted to a commodity. Jaya's resistance gives priority to dignity, autonomy, individuality, freedom, and agency. Under the conditions of economic and technological domination, the right to refuse and to retain autonomy over one's own body is fundamental. Resistance serves the purpose of discontinuing the economic racial hierarchies which are based on filial relations.

VI. CONCLUSION

Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest* represents the dark reality and disturbing effects of Global Capitalisation, Technological effects, and Surveillance in the lives of marginalised people. Examining the play through Cedric J. Robinson's theory of racial capitalism reveals that exploitation of marginalized communities with vulnerable economic conditions is no longer just restricted to the extraction of material or labour from those communities. In the present scenario,the human body has become a biological resource, and capitalists look at the human body in terms of economic value. Om and Ginni's relationship establishes the claim that the stabilised economic condition of the recipient can transform the mindset of marginalised people, in converting their bodies into biological resources for their survival. Through this play, we find that capitalist markets have reestablished the historical hierarchy of race based on economic power. Jaya's resistance plays a vital role in reclaiming physical and mental control over her body;, although it does not contribute to dismantling the capitalist system, it interrupts the systematic exploitation of characters like Virgil in Global Market.

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