

The Influence and Control of Technology in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*

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Abstract

This paper examines the influence and control of technology in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*. It analyses how technological systems function as instruments of surveillance, power, and domination within a dystopian framework. The study highlights the commodification of the human body and the reduction of individuals to economic resources in a global capitalist structure. It further explores how technological advancement intensifies social inequality and erodes human autonomy. The paper argues that *Harvest* serves as a critical warning against the unchecked expansion of technological control over human life.

Keywords: Technology, Surveillance, Dystopia, Capitalism, Identity, Power, Control

Introduction

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* (1997) is a dystopian science-fiction play that foregrounds the pervasive influence of technology on human existence. Although written in the late twentieth century, the play anticipates contemporary concerns surrounding digital surveillance, corporate dominance, and the erosion of personal freedom. In *Harvest*, technology does not merely assist human life; rather, it restructures and controls it, raising fundamental questions about autonomy, exploitation, and the nature of humanity in a technologically mediated world. The narrative follows Om Prakash, a financially vulnerable Indian man who agrees to sell his organs to a wealthy foreign recipient through a corporate agency, InterPlanta Services. This agreement subjects not only his body but also his domestic space and family life to technological surveillance and regulation. Through this premise, Padmanabhan exposes the dehumanizing consequences of technological control.

Technology as Surveillance and Control

From the outset, *Harvest* presents technology as a powerful mechanism of surveillance. Once Om enters into the contract, his household is transformed into a monitored space filled with advanced devices. The Contact Module, in particular, enables the foreign receiver, Ginni, to observe and regulate the family's daily life without physical presence. This reflects a form of panoptic surveillance, wherein constant observation leads to self-regulation and loss of autonomy. Such technological intrusion extends beyond privacy into behavioral control. The family's routines, consumption patterns, and interactions are dictated by external authority. Technology thus operates as an invisible yet pervasive force that disciplines and governs human life.

Commodification of the Human Body

A central concern in *Harvest* is the commodification of the human body within a technologically advanced capitalist system. The organ trade transforms the human body into a marketable commodity, driven by economic desperation and global inequality. Om's decision to sell his organs illustrates how poverty compels individuals to surrender their bodily autonomy for survival. In this context, technology becomes a facilitator of exploitation. It enables corporate systems to extract value from marginalized individuals while masking the ethical implications of such transactions. Human beings are reduced to functional entities, valued only for their biological utility.

Psychological and Social Implications

The technological control depicted in the play extends to the psychological realm. Continuous surveillance produces a sense of fear, dependency, and submission among the characters. Although the technological system provides material comfort, it simultaneously imposes mental constraints, limiting freedom of thought and action. The Contact Module's constant presence reinforces the internalization of control. The characters begin to regulate themselves in anticipation of surveillance, illustrating how technology shapes not only external behavior but also internal consciousness. This psychological domination underscores the depth of technological power in the play.

Technology and the Construction of Identity

Padmanabhan also explores how technology reshapes human identity. The receiver, Ginni, exists primarily as a mediated digital presence, blurring the distinction between physical reality and virtual existence. Her authority is amplified

through technological mediation, while Om's identity diminishes under constant surveillance. This dynamic reflects broader concerns in the digital age, where identity is increasingly constructed through virtual interactions. The play suggests that technological mediation can distort self-perception and weaken authentic human connections.

Global Capitalism and Inequality

Harvest situates technological control within the framework of global capitalism. The organ trade symbolizes the exploitation of economically disadvantaged populations by affluent societies. Advanced technology becomes a tool through which wealthier nations exert control over poorer bodies. This global dimension highlights the intersection of technology, power, and inequality. The play critiques a system in which technological progress benefits the privileged while intensifying the vulnerability of the marginalized.

Resistance and Human Agency

Despite the overwhelming control exerted by technology, *Harvest* presents moments of resistance. Jaya, in particular, challenges the system by asserting her autonomy and questioning the authority imposed upon her. Her actions suggest that human agency persists even within oppressive technological structures. These moments of resistance provide a counterpoint to the dominant narrative of control, emphasizing the possibility of reclaiming identity and freedom.

Conclusion

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* offers a compelling critique of the role of technology in shaping and controlling human life. The play illustrates how technological systems, when intertwined with corporate interests, can lead to surveillance, exploitation, and loss of autonomy. Through its dystopian vision, *Harvest* warns against the uncritical acceptance of technological advancement and underscores the need for ethical awareness.

In an era increasingly defined by digital surveillance and global capitalism, the themes explored in *Harvest* remain profoundly relevant. The play ultimately calls for vigilance in preserving human dignity and freedom in the face of technological power.

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