

Global Capitalism and the Exploitation of the Subaltern in *Harvest*

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Abstract

This paper examines the representation of the subaltern body under global capitalism in Manjula Padmanabhan's dystopian play *Harvest* through a postcolonial lens. Set in a futuristic society where poor individuals sell their organs to affluent Western consumers, the play offers a deconstruction of neoliberal globalization, neo-colonial exploitation, and the commodification of human life. Drawing upon Subaltern Studies, postcolonial theory, and contemporary critiques of global capitalism, the study investigates how economic inequality changes the bodies of marginalized subjects into commodities circulating within transnational markets. The paper argues that *Harvest* represents the subaltern body as the ultimate site of capitalist extraction, where deprivation, technological surveillance, and corporate power converge to erode autonomy and human dignity. Moreover, it explores how the play exposes the persistence of colonial hierarchies within contemporary global economic systems and demonstrates how multinational corporations exercise biopolitical control over vulnerable populations.

Keywords: Global Capitalism, Subalternity, Postcolonialism, Biopower, Neoliberalism

Introduction

The accelerating expansion of global capitalism has fundamentally reshaped the relationship between the developed and developing worlds, generating new forms of economic dependency, social inequality, and corporeal exploitation. While the rhetoric of globalization advances interconnectedness and prosperity, critics have increasingly pointed to its uneven consequences, particularly for marginalized populations in the Global South. Contemporary postcolonial literature has arisen as a crucial site for analyzing these asymmetrical power relations and exposing the mechanisms by which neoliberal capitalism reproduces structures of domination that echo earlier colonial practices. Within this critical landscape, Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* offers a compelling dystopian critique of a world in which human bodies become commodities disseminated within transnational markets. Set in a futuristic Mumbai, *Harvest* depicts a society in which economic deprivation compels individuals to surrender their bodily autonomy to multinational corporations serving affluent Western consumers. The narrative revolves around Om Prakash, an unemployed young man who contracts with InterPlanta Services to sell his organs to a wealthy recipient from the developed world. Although presented as a voluntary economic exchange, the interaction reveals the coercive logic of global capitalism, in which poverty transforms the body into a site of extraction and survival itself becomes contingent on participation in exploitative market relations. In this disturbing scenario, Padmanabhan interrogates the ethical foundations of a global order that treats human life as a consumable resource.

The play's portrayals of bodily commodification acquire particular significance when examined through the theoretical framework of subalternity. Originating in Antonio Gramsci's writings and subsequently rearticulated by the Subaltern Studies collective, the concept of the subaltern refers to populations excluded from dominant structures of political, economic, and cultural power. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential question—"Can the Subaltern Speak?"—further illuminates the conditions under which marginalized subjects are denied agency within hegemonic discourses. In *Harvest*, Om and his family inhabit precisely such a position. Their voices are mediated, regulated, and ultimately subordinated by transnational institutions whose economic power determines the conditions of their existence. The play, therefore, expands the discourse of subalternity beyond the colonial encounter, demonstrating how contemporary globalization generates new forms of subjugation that operate through economic coercion, technological surveillance, and the commodification of the body.

A notable feature of *Harvest* is its portrayal of the body not merely as a biological entity but as a contested political and economic terrain. The subaltern body functions as the primary site upon which global power relations are inscribed. The extraction of organs, the surveillance of domestic life, and the regulation of personal behavior reveal how neoliberal capitalism penetrates the most intimate dimensions of human existence. In this regard, Padmanabhan's dystopian imagination connects with Michel Foucault's notion of biopower, wherein systems of authority exercise control over life itself, while simultaneously engaging postcolonial critiques of neo-colonial exploitation. The affluent recipient's access to technological superiority and economic privilege mirrors broader global inequalities, exposing the persistence of imperial hierarchies within ostensibly postcolonial societies.

This study asserts that *Harvest* portrays the subaltern body as the ultimate commodity within the circuits of global capitalism, where economic inequality enables the systematic appropriation of marginalized lives for the benefit of transnational elites. Through its representation of bodily commodification, technological surveillance, and neo-colonial power relations, the play reveals the structural violence embedded in contemporary globalization. A postcolonial reading of *Harvest* exposes not only the persistence of colonial patterns of domination but also the emergence of new mechanisms through which global capitalism disciplines, consumes, and exploits subaltern subjects. Ultimately, Padmanabhan's dystopian vision challenges readers to face the ethical consequences of a world in which human bodies are valued primarily for their marketability and usefulness within a disparate global economy.

Literature Survey

Pravinchandra examines *Harvest* as a dystopian play that emphasizes the global trade in human organs and the unequal relationship between First-World recipients and Third-World donors. The study argues that organ transplantation functions as a metaphor for global exploitation and economic dependency. The author highlights how technological advancement facilitates new forms of domination. However, the study does not engage extensively with Subaltern Studies or biopolitics.

Rahmathunnisa and Abdul Jaleel explore postcolonial themes such as cultural hegemony, Western dominance, and neo-colonial exploitation in *Harvest*. The authors argue that globalization reproduces colonial patterns of power through economic and ideological mechanisms. The study successfully establishes the play's postcolonial dimensions but pays limited emphasis to bodily commodification and subaltern agency.

Deshmukh examines the intersections of neo-colonization and technology in Harvest. The study argues that technological systems strengthen global hierarchies by enabling wealthy nations to exercise control over marginalized populations. The article contributes to understanding technological domination but does not employ a biopolitical framework to analyze surveillance and bodily control.

Cheng focuses on the commodification of the human body and the ethics of the international organ trade. The study demonstrates how capitalism transforms the human body into an object of exchange within global markets. It provides valuable insights into bodily commodification; however, the relationship between commodification and subalternity remains insufficiently examined.

Sarmah examines the organ trade illustrated in the play as a reflection of economic inequality and social marginalization. It argues that poverty compels individuals to surrender their bodily autonomy to survive. The work offers a strong discussion of economic exploitation but does not connect these issues to contemporary theories of neoliberal globalization and biopolitics.

Research Gap

The existing scholarship on Harvest has primarily focused on globalization, neo-colonialism, organ commodification, posthumanism, artificial intelligence, and technological surveillance. Although these studies have made valuable contributions, limited attention has been paid to examining how global capitalism, biopower, and subalternity intersect through the body. Moreover, few scholars have integrated Subaltern Studies, Foucauldian biopolitics, and neoliberal globalization within a single analytical framework. The present study addresses this

gap by investigating the subaltern body as a site of capitalist extraction, technological governance, and contested agency in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*.

Material & Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on textual and critical discourse analysis. The primary text for analysis is Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*. The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating postcolonial theory, Subaltern Studies, Foucauldian biopolitics, and critiques of neoliberal globalization to examine the representation of the subaltern body under global capitalism. The study relies on close reading as its principal analytical method. Key dialogues, character interactions, symbols, and dramatic situations are examined to explore themes of neo-colonial exploitation, bodily commodification, surveillance, and subaltern resistance. Particular attention is paid to how the play creates relationships among power, technology, and economic inequality. In addition to textual analysis, the study examines secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and contemporary research on postcolonialism, globalization, biopolitics, and Subaltern Studies. These sources provide the theoretical foundation for interpreting the play's socio-political implications.

The research follows an interpretive and analytical framework rather than a quantitative approach. Through the synthesis of literary analysis and contemporary critical theory, the study scrutinizes how *Harvest* critiques the structural violence of global capitalism and represents the subaltern body as a site of economic extraction, disciplinary control, and contested agency.

Findings & Discussion

Global Capitalism and Neo-Colonial Exploitation in Harvest

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* presents global capitalism as a contemporary manifestation of neo-colonial power, revealing how economic globalization perpetuates

asymmetrical relationships between the Global North and the Global South. Although colonial administrations have formally disappeared, the play substantiates that structures of domination continue to operate through economic dependency, technological superiority, and market-driven exploitation. Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized that globalization often reproduces rather than dismantles colonial hierarchies. Chakrabarty contends that contemporary global modernity remains inseparable from the historical legacies of imperialism, which continue to shape economic inequalities worldwide (Chakrabarty). Similarly, Veracini observes that colonial relations have evolved into more diffuse forms of political and economic control rather than disappearing altogether (Veracini). Within this context, *Harvest* reveals how transnational capitalism transforms postcolonial subjects into resources for global consumption.

The contractual relationship between Om Prakash and InterPlanta Services embodies this neo-colonial logic. Om's decision to sell his organs appears voluntary; however, the choice is structured by severe economic deprivation and unemployment. Om justifies his decision by declaring:

"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 is nothing left for people like us! Don't you know that? There's us -and the street gangs – and the rich."
(Padmanabhan 244)

The apparent freedom of contract, therefore, conceals deeper mechanisms of coercion characteristic of neoliberal capitalism. Harvey's concept of "accumulation by dispossession" is particularly useful here, as it elucidates how contemporary capitalism appropriates resources from vulnerable populations under the rhetoric of free-market exchange (Harvey). Likewise, Kapoor and McBride argue that neoliberal capitalism increasingly penetrates intimate aspects of

human life, transforming emotions, desires, and bodies into objects of market value (Kapoor and McBride). Om's body becomes one such site of derivation, illustrating how global capitalism extends beyond labor exploitation to commodify biological existence itself. Furthermore, recent studies of the Global South emphasize the endurance of unequal economic relations in the international order. El Bernoussi et al. contend that contemporary global capitalism continues to privilege wealthy nations while relegating developing societies to positions of dependency and vulnerability (El Bernoussi et al.). The relationship between Om and Ginni mirrors these structural inequalities. While Ginni enjoys mobility, technological privilege, and economic security, Om's family remains trapped within conditions of precarity. Padmanabhan thereby exposes the continuity between colonial extraction and neoliberal globalization, revealing how the bodies of the marginalized preserve the privileges of transnational elites.

The Commodification of the Subaltern Body

The most disturbing aspect of *Harvest* lies in its portrayal of the body as a commodity circulating within global markets. The play depicts how the subaltern body is stripped of its social and human significance and reconfigured as a source of economic value. Contemporary postcolonial scholarship has increasingly focused on the body as a critical site where global inequalities become materially visible. Banerjee argues that postcolonial bodies are frequently positioned at the intersection of biotechnology, global capitalism, and state power, making them particularly vulnerable to commodification and extraction (Banerjee). Padmanabhan's dystopian future extends this logic to its extreme conclusion, portraying a world in which bodily organs function as market commodities.

When Jaya says, "yet you've taken Jeetu's body" (Padmanabhan 267), Virgil replies:

"Jeetu is Om's brother. He was an even better match; we look for young men's bodies to live and young women's bodies in which to sow their children" (Padmanabhan 269)

Individuals' transformation from human subject to biological resource reflects broader processes of neoliberal commodification. The corporation treats Jeetu not as an individual but as biological property. As Virgil said, "he was willing to sell, and I was willing to buy" (Padmanabhan 265). And Ginni's response to Om, "If you get a cold, Om, I can't take your transplant! You'll be quarantined! This whole program will go to waste!" (Padmanabhan 221). These statements metamorphically erase personal identity and reduce the body to an object of commercial ownership, reinforcing the commodification central to neoliberal capitalism. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics is particularly relevant in this context. According to Mbembe, contemporary systems of power determine which lives are protected and which are represented as redundant within global economic structures (Mbembe). Om's body acquires value only insofar as it can prolong the life of a wealthy Western consumer. His humanity becomes secondary to his biological utility.

Biopower, Surveillance, and Corporate Control

The operation of power in Harvest extends beyond economic exploitation to incorporate the regulation and surveillance of life itself. Foucault's concept of biopower provides a useful framework for understanding how corporate institutions exercise authority through the management of bodies, behaviors, and populations. However, contemporary scholars have expanded this framework to explore the growing role of digital technologies and corporate governance in regulating everyday life. Mohamed, Png, and Isaac argue that contemporary technological systems frequently replicate historical patterns of domination through new forms of algorithmic surveillance and control (Mohamed et al.). Similarly, Davies observes that

neoliberal institutions increasingly depend upon monitoring practices that transform individuals into measurable and manageable entities (Davies). These insights resonate strongly with Padmanabhan's portrayal of InterPlanta Service.

Through constant surveillance, health monitoring, and behavioral regulation, Om's body is recast into a biological asset whose value must be preserved for future extraction. When Ginni says, "Look towards the contact module! You know the thing hanging in the room?" (Padmanabhan 206). This continual observation reflects Foucault's concept of biopower, where power operates through discipline and regulation rather than direct physical violence.

Povinelli's analysis of late liberal governance further clarifies how power operates through the management of life rather than direct coercion (Povinelli). The corporation's intrusion into domestic space demonstrates this shift precisely. Om's home ceases to function as a private sphere and instead becomes an extension of corporate authority. Om says, "How long can we wrap up? And what if Ginni finds out?" (Padmanabhan 227). Padmanabhan thus foresees contemporary concerns regarding digital capitalism, data governance, and the increasing influence of multinational corporations over individual autonomy.

Resistance, Agency, and the Limits of the Subaltern Voice

Although it's bleak portrayal of exploitation, Harvest raises important questions concerning resistance and subaltern agency. The figure of Jaya challenges the structures that seek to commodify and silence marginalized subjects. Unlike Om, who largely internalizes the logic of capitalist exchange, Jaya persistently questions the ethical foundations of the organ trade and recognizes its dehumanizing consequences. Recent postcolonial scholarship has revisited the question of subaltern agency in the context of globalization. Nayar argues that contemporary postcolonial theory increasingly understands resistance as fragmented, negotiated, and enacted

within structures of domination rather than entirely outside them (Nayar). Similarly, Santos contends that marginalized communities continue to produce alternative forms of knowledge and resistance despite systemic exclusion from dominant institutions (Santos). Jaya's resistance represents these perspectives, demonstrating that subaltern subjects are not merely passive victims but active participants in the contestation of oppressive systems.

Nevertheless, Padmanabhan simultaneously exposes the limitations of defiance under global capitalism. Spivak's argument concerning the difficulty of subaltern representation remains highly relevant. Although Jaya articulates dissent, her capacity to transform the structures governing her life remains severely constrained. Jaya says:

"That's all right. I'll tell you what I'm doing. I'm collecting all the pills and medicines I can find. I'm going to take the ones for staying awake until I run out. And if I don't hear the sound of your own hand on my door before that time, I'll take my life" (Padmanabhan 273)

Mbembe's later work on decolonization similarly emphasizes that contemporary forms of domination are deeply incorporated within global institutions and therefore difficult to overcome completely (Mbembe). The play's ambiguous ending reinforces this tension between resistance and power, suggesting that while the subaltern voice may emerge, it remains constrained by structures designed to contain and regulate it.

Conclusion

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* presents a powerful critique of globalization, neoliberal capitalism, and the exploitation of marginalized populations. Through the dystopian organ trade, corporate surveillance, and technological control, the play exposes how the subaltern body becomes a site of economic and political domination. Drawing on postcolonial theory, Subaltern

Studies, and Foucauldian biopolitics, this study demonstrates that globalization often reproduces uneven power relations between the Global North and the Global South. The commodification of the human body in the play foregrounds the dehumanizing effects of market-driven systems, while corporate surveillance reflects growing concerns about technological control over individual lives. Although characters such as Jaya embody resistance, their agency remains constrained by larger structures of power. Ultimately, *Harvest* challenges optimistic views of globalization and raises important ethical questions about human dignity, bodily autonomy, and the consequences of treating the body as a commodity in contemporary capitalist society.

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