

## **Globalization In The Eyes Of India’s Manjula Padmanabhan Through Her Play Harvest**

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**ABSTRACT :** *Globalization is a concept that seeks to unify and intensify the socio-cultural landscape of the world. It is raging to achieve this feat through Information Communications Technology (ICT) which has intensified and shrunk all frontiers all over the world. It has brought to the fore uneven rates of development around the world, and it is further enhancing the interest of developed nations who are the major players in globalization, hence eliciting different sheds of reactions from concerned intellectuals. It has since been distorting the culture and arts of economically weaker nations of the world. Using the analytical theoretical framework, this paper attempts an investigation into India’s Manjula’s play Harvest as a true reflection of the tendencies of this well acclaimed phenomenon, yet very exploitative, oppressive and marginalizing practice that sooner or later will bring these weaker nations to their knees. This brings attention to the fact that ‘global consciousness’ does not mean ‘global consensus’. One of the effects is that the world is in a moment of unease. African and indeed Nigerian playwrights should learn from what Harvest has to offer to the apparent state of disequilibrium in the interplay between nations in this globalised age which the world is in.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

A spectre is haunting the world today – that of globalization. It is the buzzword of the moment as it is used almost in every field of human endeavour. Globalization as a concept is breaking into different discourses because it has changed the patterns and dynamics of viewing other social, economic, political, cultural and psychological happenings around the world. This is because it has, through its technological enforcer, information communication technology (ICT), brought individuals, groups and nations closer to each other than ever before. Globalization as a multi-disciplinary phenomenon has had its share of interpretation in the theatre. India’s influential playwright, Manjula Padmanabhan has dramatized what appears as the true artistic portrayal of both exposed and concealed intentions of the phenomenon and she has also captured the unhealthy relationship that first world nations have with third world counterparts which the former depend on for survival and expansion. Globalization had to be the surest option for continued contact between advanced cultures and other cultures which has had its consequences in the quality of life and prospects of individuals and nations. Now it looks very inevitable, but it is not. Ever since slave trade was abolished and colonialism was discouraged, there had to be a means through which the beneficiaries of these practices would keep their benefits coming to them. The propagation of democratic ideals in nations by America and the continued revolution in technological development gave birth to the phenomenon of globalization in the world which has further forced the developing nations to a disadvantageous position (Kieh 2008:vii). Two years after the play *Harvest* was written, there was a conference on ‘Globalization and Regional Security: Asian Perspectives’ in 1999 in Honolulu, Hawaii. Participants agreed that globalization has some core characteristics:

- [1] Unprecedented economic interdependence, driven by cross- border capital movement, rapid technology transfer, and “real time” communication and information flows.
- [2] Rise of new actors that challenge state authority, particularly non-governmental organizations and civic groups, global firms and production networks, and even financial markets.
- [3] Growing pressure on states to conform to new international standards of governance, particularly in the areas of transparency and accountability.
- [4] The emergence of an increasing Western-dominated international culture, a trend which in many countries has sparked concern about the erosion of national identity and traditional values.
- [5] The rise of severe transnational problems that require multilateral cooperation to resolve.

A close look at the play will reveal the relevance of the aforementioned characteristics in the socio-political and cultural relations between the characters in the play. The play opens up the disturbing circumstances that developing nations face in today’s globalized world. This can be seen from the dehumanizing attention given to the Third World by their exploitative First World that trade is even done in human organs.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF GLOBALIZATION AND ITS DEBATE

Globalization is a phenomenon by which the experience of every day life, as influenced by the diffusion of commodities and ideals, reflects a standardization of cultural expressions around the world. Propelled by the efficiency or appeal of wireless communications, electronic commerce, popular culture, and international travel, globalization has been seen as a trend toward homogeneity that will eventually make human experience everywhere essentially the same. The instrumentality of media in aiding the real actualization of this homogenizing process must be emphasized. Indeed, many scholars have studied the link between globalization and media and 'most theorists agree that there is practically no globalization without media and communication' (Rantanen 2005:4). Globalization has become a process in which world wide economic, political, cultural and social relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space. According to Robertson (1992: 8) that globalization refers to '... the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole'. This shows that the phenomenon has ossified the consciousness of the world toward the same cultural expressions and, to some degree, the awareness of the world. This denotes the de-localization of policies and programmes by government of countries thereby giving more space for global trends. But Robertson (1992:5) warns that 'Global consciousness does not imply global consensus'. Even as the world moves toward a process of integration into a common system, economical, social, cultural or commercial, there are still palpable signs of lack of agreement in the way events are happening and this is why there has been debate on the phenomenon of globalization. This view is akin to Worthen's that with the rise of global communications, global economy, and global political and military interests, social and political revolutions immediately become the world's business. They reshape the world we live in even as we watch the changes unfold on our television screens. Fortunately, television has not really transformed the world's diverse cultures into a single "global village", but local cultures all feel the impact of events around the world (2004:1341). There are varying views on the impact of globalization in the world and below are a few of them. This paper cannot contain all the views on the phenomenon of globalization as the field is quite broad. So it is only proper to start with the views of the hyperglobalists, the skeptics and the transformationists on the debate on globalization. Hyperglobalists thought that contemporary globalization defines a new era in which peoples everywhere are increasingly subject to the discipline of the global market place (Ohmae 1995). By contrast the skeptics argue that reality of an international economy increasingly segmented into three major regional blocs in which national governments remain very powerful. The financial and trading blocs are Europe, Asia-Pacific and North America. That the world is less integrated as it once was. Then the transformationists contend that contemporary patterns of globalization are conceived as historically unprecedented such that states and societies across the globe are experiencing a process of profound change as they try to adapt to a more interconnection by highly uncertain world.

Also the new level of globalization debate is still a reflection of the early debate in which, on one side is the fear that the world is on a brink of collapse as a result of the finite resources it has and the environmental issues, inequalities and financial crisis that confront it. On the other side is the view that globalization and information technology are bringing about an era of opportunity and knowledge sharing unseen in human history. This, certainly, is not the view of Padmanabhan as described dramatically in her play *Harvest*. Globalization is one of the greatest challenges of this contemporary era because it gives very ambivalent feelings in the sense that on one hand, it looks as if developing nations are the only ones exposed to the effects of it, on the other hand, the phenomenon drags the world to the brink. However global the effects may be, the full brunt of globalization is experienced by poorer nations.

### Brief Biography of Manjula Padmanabhan

Manjula Padmanabhan was born in 1953, and is well known as a journalist, illustrator, cartoonist, fiction writer and author and writer of children's books as well as writing for television and the stage. After completing her university studies, Padmanabhan returned to India and began a career in journalism. She wrote several plays – including *Light Out!* (1996), *The Artist's Model* (1995), and *Sextet* (1996)- and a well-known book of short stories, *Hot Death, Cold Soup* (1915). *Harvest* won the first Onassis Prize for theatre, and premiered in Greece in 1999; it has also been produced in India. Her most recent novel is *Getting There* (2000).

## III. ANALYSIS OF HARVEST

Written in the lineage of plays like Vaclav Havel's *The Memorandum* or Slawomir Mrozek's *Tango*, Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* develops an absurd narrative of the structure of presentation and power in the contemporary globalized culture. For *Harvest* brilliantly allegorizes the relationship between the first and third worlds, literalizing the fundamental practice of globalization as its central situation: the third world provides the raw material that the first world consumes for its own survival and expansion. In the play, Om has sold his body – through the aptly named InterPlanta services company – to an American "Receiver".

According to the term of his contract, he and his immediate family (his wife Jaya, who is forced by the contract to pretend to be his sister, his brother Jeetu, and his mother, Ma) will enjoy a First World standard of living and lifestyle –they will be clean, well-fed, entertained, and wealthy – until such time as his Receiver demands Om's organs for his own survival. As the play develops however, the economic motives driving Om's sacrifice are gradually inflected by the mediatized relations of global culture. His family is consulted (on a giant-screen Contact Module that drops from the ceiling) by the Receiver, Virginia – or "Ginni," whose name recalls the demonic djinni, or "genies" of Indian folktales- a "blonde and white –skinned epitome of an American style youth goddess" whose image floats above the room, and increasingly demands obedience from the family. Ma comes nearly to worship Ginni, but truly idolizes her new television, finally choosing to entomb herself inside a video sarcophagus –called the Video Paradise –where she will remain for the rest of her "life". When the InterPlanta agents come to take Om, however, they mistakenly take his wastrel brother Jeetu, removing his eyes and replacing them with a contraption that project Ginni's sexy image, directly into his brain. Although Jeetu had been the most critical of the organ -donation schemes, now all he can see is the Ginni's sultry image; he is seduced, and this virtual relationship leads him finally to "donate "his entire body.The play's brilliant satire fully takes in First World attitudes toward India, its fear of diseases, its anxiety about sanitation, its incomprehension of family and social life, its ignorance of third world reality altogether. Replacing the family's food with "goat -shit" pellets, installing a toilet in the middle of its one -room apartment, dumping the family's possessions and replacing them with Western clothes and house wares, InterPlanta at once appears to improve the family's standard of living which cutting it off from real life altogether. Yet the final scenes seem to suggest a strategy of resistance. Once Ginni has harvested Jeetu's body, she reveals that "Ginni" had only been a computer- animation after all: Jeetu had been seduced to give up his body by the empty image of youthful, sexy America, an image projected to the world to conceal that the First World paradise is aging and impotent, supporting "the poorer sections of the world, while gaining fresh bodies for ourselves". Virgil - the real Ginni - proposes that he (in the body of Jeetu) and Jaya have children to repopulate the First World; he even makes an insemination gadget appears outside the apartment while he is trying to close the deal. But if the body is, finally, what the Third World has to sell; it may still be possible to withhold it, to insist on a real rather than a meditated relationship with First World power. At the play's close Jaya seals herself inside the apartment, with its endless food supply and television, telling Virgil that if he wants to repopulate the first world, he will have to come to her, in the flesh.

### **Harvest and the Evils of Globalization**

Globalization is evil because it does not foster the humanity of things in the world. What it drives towards is for the greater benefit of the developed or the First World countries. Khor (2005:1) opines that:

The reasons for the changing perception of and attitude towards globalization are many. Among the important factors is the lack of tangible benefits to most developing countries from opening their economies, despite the well -publicized claims of export and income gains....

The economic losses and social dislocation that are being caused to many developing countries by rapid financial and trade liberalization, the growing inequalities of wealth and opportunities arising from globalization; and the perception that environmental, social and cultural problems have been made worse by the workings of the global free-market economy and the soaring degree of attack by elements of terrorism are some of what have characterized globalization today. It means developing nations have faced more problems than ever as a result of the phenomenon of globalization.

In his very sublime analysis of *Harvest*, Rajkumar (2012:50) explains:

*Harvest* is an ironic examination of the relations between developing and developed countries. The play is set in the imminent future, it imagines a grisly pact between the first and third world desperate (sic) people who can sell their body parts to wealthy clients in return for food, water, shelter and riches for themselves and their families.

He further describes it as a "dystopian play" because nothing is good in the lives of Om and his immediate family. You sell your body organs in order to improve your standard of living, only for you to lose it all in the end. The play indicts America which is the greatest promoter of globalization and liberalization because Ginni –the Receiver of the body parts is American. She controls the family in the play until toward the end of the play. The play exposes the true extent of psychological coercion that abounds in the globalization world. It also shows the patterns of seduction and policing the developed world ensures on the developing world. Globalization deceives a lot that is why Om becomes ecstatic: "We'll have more money than you and I have named for! "He says to Ma "who'd believe there is so much money in the world?" (P.219). When Jaya expresses her

reservations for what he has done he becomes defensive: "You think I did it lightly. But ... we will be rich! Insanely rich! But you'd rather live in this one small room I suppose! Think it such as a fine thing. Like monkeys in a hot case lulled to sleep out by our neighbors rhythmic farting! ... And starving (P.223). When Jaya accuses him of making the wrong choice he says:

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 is nothing left for people like us! Don't you know that? This is, of course, what the computer age makes us to believe that there are no jobs for less skilled people. But this is how Jaya responds:

Jaya: you are wrong, there are choices, there must be choices. Om: Huh! I stood in queue and was chosen! And if not this queue, there would have been other queues (p.238).

Padmanabhan goes to the extreme of the unholy relations between the Third World and the First World where the basic commodities of exchange are the body organs. This is on the basis of individual autonomy. Om's last statement confirms the aghast state: "How could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I? ( P.238).Om's mother, Ma, expresses no such regret, she is mesmerized: "What kind of job pays a man to sit at home?" The "new" mass culture engineered by globalization encourages consumption and a life of "abundance".The InterPlanta services can be seen as some of the international organizations that aid in exploiting the developing nations of the world whether in terms of global politics, justice and economics. Organization such as the World Bank, IMF, International Court of Justice, etc have come to mean almost nothing to the Third World because of the 'little' that is realized from them in terms of benefits and justice. Now Ginni represents the developed world and she appears to control everything that Om and his family do including the time they eat: Om: You know how Ginni hates it when we were late to eat" (p.228). Ginni ensures this control through her Contact Module which can also be seen as the hi-tech media gadgets used by advanced nations to mystify the Third World and further attract the latter on to itself Ginni keeps telling Om that he should make sure he smiles. This is because if he smiles, it means his body from which organs are going to be removed for the survival of Ginni is healthy. It means you should not complain when you are being exploited.

Now Jaya, the only surviving character of the play, becomes the glimpse of hope of the Third World nations who opposes Om's decision in the final scene of the play, comes to the moment of no surrender. Om has abandoned Jaya having willfully chosen to seek out Ginni and give up his body to her. Ma is plugged into her Video Coach; Jaya faces Virgil, the unfamiliar voice on the Contact Module. She chooses to win by losing. This portends a lot for the developing nations. Globalization through its evils is pushing the developing nations to the brink, perhaps, to the moment where, like Jaya, it must threaten total annihilation.It would be wrong to say that it is inappropriate the way Padmanabhan portrays how the First World cannibalizes the Third World to fulfill its own desires. Like Padmanabhan, artists in the developing world must rise to the occasion of salvaging their traditions and stick to what gives them identity, and guard their economies for their own survival.

### **The Artist in the Age of Globalization**

Padmanabhan has written *Harvest* to remind us that the situation we are in is not comfortable for all of us in the age that we are in. Since this phenomenon is the defining process of this age, then artists must rise to the occasion to make sure that people do not neglect what has helped humanity right from time.

A peep in to the prevailing socio-economic atmosphere of both the developed and the developing nations would reveal that the whole world is at a moment of unease. It cannot be a surprise if some one wonders whether we are happy or not. It is like what is said in the first paragraph to the masterpiece of the novel by Dickens (1859:1):

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us....

This is an apt description of the moment of this age. Everything works with its opposite. As paradoxical as it may be, but it is true.

The artist must remind humanity of where it was, where it is and where it is heading towards. This is because things are bad and shaky.

Rodney expounds that:

Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being ... At the level of social groups, therefore, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. (1972:1-2).

The playwright should guide his/her society towards the path of true impendence in production and utilization of what is produced. This is because every people have shown a capacity for independently increasing their ability to live a more satisfactory life through exploiting the resources of nature. Every continent independently participated in the early epochs of the extension of man's control over his environment-which means in effect that every continent can point to a period of economic development. So Asia, Africa and Latin America are not exceptions to this fundamental truth of existence.

The playwright's role in the polity may not be piquant as he or she can invoke a moment of unease and make the audience to feel quite uncomfortable as in the case of Padmanabhan who creates a situation in the play that is really not palatable for a reader or an audience that is seeking pleasure. Padmanabhan confirms this fact in an interview when says that:

I knew at the time I wrote it that there would be no question of writing it for its own sake\_ I had no doubt that a play of its type would find no takers in India\_ and even after the publicity it got, the play has certainly not been popular in any form. It does not surprise me in the least. It presents a harsh view of reality and has very little comfort to offer the average reader (2006).

It is really a play that elicits the description that is somewhat rough as in crass obscenity. This is because it deals with the sale of human parts - macabre like. She paints the picture of the Third World populace caught in the brackets of the exploitative First World who leave no chance of survival for the former. This scenario is really not comfortable to the reader/audience.

In Nigeria, the situation is a little bit different; women are hired and gathered somewhere hidden to be impregnated by men. When those women deliver their babies, they are paid to leave the babies to the buyers. Those places are known in Nigeria as 'Baby Factories'. Most Nigerians believe that those babies are used for ritual or occultism.

There is no practice or hegemony that is really beyond the probing pertinence of art. A lot of negative myths and stereotypes have been created about the Southern parts of the globe, though most countries in Asia and South America are getting their development efforts very correct, China, India, Malaysia, and Brazil among others are dominating the global economy today. It is also said that India has not really defined its position and policies in global politics that is if the praises it receives are not mere shibboleths. Pant (2008:1) states that:

In its seventh decade after independence, India today stands at a crossroad in its relations with the rest of the world. Being one of the most powerful economies in the world today gives India clout on the global stage matched only by a few other states.

Padmanabhan portrays India as a very vulnerable and helpless country in the hands of America which is representing other advanced world, while Pant sees India as capable of 'shifting the global balance of power'. This is why India's traditional view of world affairs has to change because of its growing stature in international system. Now India is expected to move to the centre of operation in global politics when it had always viewed such a system with suspicion and in solidarity with other Third World nations. This can be seen through its years of "sloganeering" position. India still sees other world powers as imperial powers who perpetrate nothing but hegemony in the global markets, arts and politics.

But African countries are taking very little to the globalization table; they are more or less consumer nations and a dumping ground for all kinds of worn out and fairly used articles and materials including cars and clothes. Corruption, nepotism, tribalism, embezzlement of public funds, disregard for constituted authorities and the tension occasioned by terrorist attacks are the trappings that accompany the imperialistic tendencies in the continent. The duty of the playwright has long gone beyond what Achebe (2012:53) felt was the task in the hands of African writers toward the political independence of many African countries:

What I can say is that it was clear to many of us that an indigenous African literary renaissance was overdue. A major objective was to challenge stereotypes, myths, and the image of ourselves and our continent, and to recast them through stories - prose, poetry, essays, and books for our children. That was my overall goal.

African writers have more herculean task now than when they were about to gain their political independence. They must clear off the remaining vestiges of imperialism in their countries and use their tool of trade (pen) to attack through writing the socio-economic, cultural and political problems that are antithetical to their development.

Also important is fact that the artist should charge his/her country men and women not to continue to blame foreigners for their slow development and progress. But they should clear off corruption, laziness, lack of foresight and forthrightness and they should continue to expose the good endowments that they have, whether cultural or natural.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Padmanabhan has futuristically exposed the macabre that may likely befall the developing world if critical attention is not given to the phenomenon of globalization. This is what is expected of a visionary playwright of her own class and clout. Other writers have also exposed their fear and reservations for this generation that is highly disillusioned. Martin (2007:7), in this book, 'the Meaning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' "warns us that we are living in a "make-or-break century". We are traveling at a "breakneck" speed into an age of extremes –extremes in wealth and poverty, extremes in technology and the experiments that scientists want to perform, extreme forces of globalism, weapons of mass destruction and terrorists acting in the name of religion. If we must survive, then we are expected to manage this situation. It is the frank position of the paper that the humanity in us should continue to be encouraged ahead of the globalization of the world. This means that humanity should be put first before inventions, profits, politics, etc. People should uphold what fosters the humanity in the world and not how much we connect in the world. Humanity of things will mean shaping a new global system that will manage globalization and post-unipolar world. This will mean the need for a genuine reform of our political and economic institutions so as to make them fit for a new age. Also, it should also mean that concerted effort is channeled toward solving the political and environmental problems that will fit into the interconnected and highly complex global age. There should be the reconstitution of the membership of United Nations Security Council to include emerging powers like India, Japan, Brazil, Nigeria etc. because of their current level of development. This should be corroborated with deliberate effort to always seek the consent of both major and minor powers as decisions are taken on global issues. There should be more drama on globalization and its impact and effects on cultures and social life of nations. It is in the spirit of trying to change the fortunes of the developing countries that Padmanabhan wrote her play. This is because developing nations are the ones that are badly affected by the phenomenon.

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