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**THE (EYE) FACTOR: EVALUATING THE DENOUEMENTS OF TECHNOLOGICAL  
ADVANCEMENT ON THE THIRD WORLD RESIDENTS IN MANJULA  
PADMANABHAN'S PLAY *HARVEST***

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**Sohini Chakraborty**

M.A in English University of Kalyani,  
Kalyani, Nadia, Pin- 741235, West Bengal, India.

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**Abstract:**

The technological advancement in later half of 20<sup>th</sup> century has successfully enticed the entire world with its usage besides paving its way into the world of literature eventually, bridging the gap. Undeniably, India has also been impacted by such overreaching power of globalization leading to an increase in Science Fiction readership. Its unity and diversity in all spheres of life coupled with its colonial past, creates a milieu for the majority to accept the western culture unquestionably. The idea of the 'western' or 'modern' continues to excite them even in the present times and they tend to overlook the menace it might bring forth. Moreover, with India hosting a remarkable percentage of population from the economically challenged background, besides richer ones, it is an ideal space for the masters. In a way, the impoverished mass becomes susceptible to both physical and mental manipulation which is normally implemented with the usage of scientific tropes. This paper would hence, try to estimate the denouement such technological advancement brings forth. So as to limit the purview of my paper, I would like to concentrate my research specifically on the consequence and impact of vigilance on the identity of oneself besides analysing the futuristic aspect.

**Keywords:** Science fiction, Vigilance, Othering, Futurism, Technology.

**Introduction:**

This has resulted to our greater dependence on the use of technology for our everyday chores of life than our forefathers. This inclination has indirectly contributed towards the production and popularity of various science fiction works. To analyse the trajectory of science in fiction, it can be noted that it presumably dates back to the 'Before Christ' era as there have been evidences of "fantastic voyages" in Greek literature. Adam Roberts in his book *The History of Science Fiction* also argues in favour of the above- mentioned statement

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that science had made its way in literature back in the times of the “Ancient Greek” when SF was a part of the *Fantastic Fiction* genre. He also noted that there had been a void in the production of the then called *fantasy* works after that period which eventually resumed in later centuries. Bruno and Galileo who had to sacrifice their lives trying to make the world aware with their scientific inventions also contributed to the emergence of the independent genre of Science fiction.

Though, there have been debate over the first SF work ever produced yet, most consider Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to be the first SF work ever produced. After the emergence of the SF genre, the successful voyages beyond the space in the year 1961 lead to the ultimate rise in curiosity of the general mass. This has contributed towards an increase in SF readership and production. As a result of this, several SF films like *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), *Star Wars* series (1977), *The Blade Runner* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), *A Space Odyssey* (1986) besides eminent SF works of Jules Verne, H G Wells, Margaret Atwood to name a few have contributed towards enriching the genre. With the introduction of the genre of SF to the Indian readers by Dr. Jagadish Chandra Bose back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the remarkable scientific achievements happening throughout the world, Indian Science Fiction had also witnessed a gradual increase in the consumption. As a result, there had been a subsequent increase in production of SF works through the hands of eminent Indian writers like Manjula Padmanabhan, Amitava Ghosh, Samit Basu to name a few.

SF critics throughout the years attempting to defining the genre had to experience immense difficulties. Despite the debates and difficulties, eminent critic like Darko Suvin have come up with the definition. He defined SF as:

A literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient condition are the *presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment.* (Suvin 37)

Again, Damien Broderick, writer and critic attempted to add to the existing definition of SF by Suvin and expounded:

SF is that species of storytelling native to a culture undergoing the epistemic changes implicated in the rise and supersession of technical-industrial modes of production, distribution, consumption and disposal. It is marked by (i) metaphoric strategies and metonymic tactics, (ii) the foregrounding of icons

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and interpretive schemata from a collectively constituted generic ‘mega-text’ [i.e. all previously published SF] and the concomitant de-emphasis of ‘fine writing’ and characterization, and (iii) certain priorities more often found in scientific and postmodern texts than in literary models (Broderick 155)

On the contrary, Samuel Delany was not in agreement with Suvin’s definition and claimed that SF cannot be defined by analysing the subject matter. It is the “reading strategy” that makes it a SF (Roberts 2). He notes, most of our specific SF expectations will be organized around the question: what in the portrayed world of the story, by statement or implication, must be different from ours in order for this sentence to be normally uttered? (Delany 27–8, 31). I would rather define Science Fiction as a cultural production portraying a virtual, unrealistic world with a potential to represent a futuristic world where the unrealistic facet is converted into a probable realistic and futuristic element by the use of a logically constituted scientific trope which has a predominant presence throughout the piece of writing. The facet of SF that it has the potential to be the ‘present’ in future times have proved itself unquestionably true considering the present situation the world is witnessing. It is as if we are living a life out of a SF work.

The confinement, social distancing and claustrophobic condition that the human lives are inflicted to in the ‘real’ world is analogous to the circumstances experienced by the inmates of Padmanabhan’s *Harvest*. Perhaps, the only discernible difference between the play and the real world at present is that the agent of manipulation which is ‘Ginny’ for the former case and the ‘virus’ in our scenario. *Harvest* gives an account of the mental and physical captivation of a third world middle class family to the wealth of the first world masters through the usage of certain scientific tropes. The cover blurb describes the theme of organ trade as nothing but "a dark, bitter, savagely funny vision of the cannibalistic future that awaits the human race a parable of what will happen when the rich denizens of the First World begin to devour bits and pieces of the Third World poor..." describing this phenomenon as a case of ‘neo-cannibalism’, anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1998 14). Pravinchandra in her essay notes that “wealthy but ailing patients in the first-world are increasingly turning towards healthy poverty-stricken populations of the third-world in order to procure ‘spare’ body parts.

It is tempting, at first glance, to read this illicit global economy as yet another example of the exploitation of third-world bodies that global capitalism gives rise to” (Pravinchandra 1). Scheper-Hughes herself suggests that the trade in human organs is best understood in the context of global capitalism when she points out that the global circuit of

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organ mirrors the circuit of capital flows in the era of globalisation: ‘from South to North, from Third to First world, from poor to rich, from black and brown to white’(2002 197).

Padmanabhan attempts to emphasise on the gradual loss of identity of the impoverished mass due to their inclination towards imitating the western masters. The futuristic appeal of the play can never be overlooked considering the fact that it was written in the year 1997 and is set in Mumbai in the year 2010. In reality the theme of the play might take another ten decades to be in action when there would be nothing left other than spectrality and humanism will eventually delude. Helen Gilbert incisively analyses Harvest’s critique of transnational capitalism through its topical inclusion of both digital and medical technologies (Gilbert 2006). The plot revolves around how a middleclass man named Om was convinced to sell his organs to a wealthy western buyer in exchange of a lifetime of luxury cajoling him and his family to capitulate into the reverie of wealth.

The play is set in a one room small tenement in Mumbai where Om, a middleclass jobless family man stays with his wife Jaya, his mother and his brother named Jeetu. Jaya and Om being in an insecure, unhealthy relationship led to Jaya’s extramarital relationship with her brother-in-law Jeetu. The four characters being entangled in a claustrophobic relationship were naturally a great catch for the purpose. As a result, the entire family was under the constant vigilance of the masters. The vigilance was accomplished by the help of a scientifically constructed module meant to record the entire proceedings. The structure could be compared to that of a “panopticon.” Pertaining to this scenario, the masters superseded the traditional ‘panopticon’ structure by replacing the human vigilance with the ‘contact module,’ allowing them to establish a line of vigilance from a distance with the use of technologically advanced machine or the scientific trope.

**Panopticon and the ‘Self’:**

The tenement in which the family used to reside was fitted with a ‘contact module.’ The module acted as an agent of the master’s team of vigilance, keeping an omnipresent watch on the movement of the entire family. The structure can thus be compared to that of Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the “Panopticon”. Roshni Prabhakaran further observes that Bentham’s concept of “Panopticon” could be associated with "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind" (Prabhakaran 2). The panopticon can hence be defined as an institutionalised building whose inmates are under the continuous vigil of the masters who remain invisible to the inmate’s eyes. The inmates in the structure were deprived from the

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sense of vision. Michel Foucault, further throws light to the question of invisibility and compares it to the ubiquitous nature of social vigilance responsible for framing our self-identity. He comments that “the invisibility of the masters works similar to the way the social vigilance works (Foucault 77). It makes the people internalize the vigilance in a similar fashion to the inmates of the panopticon hence, making them disciplined and in the process the ‘self’ is converted into the ‘other’.

In regards to the process of othering, Hoagland and Sarwal further notes that “the *other* is one of the most well-known markers that science fiction and postcolonial literature share in common” (Hoagland and Sarwal 10). Again, Adam Roberts is of the opinion that “... the key symbolic function of the SF novum is precisely the representation of the encounter with difference, Otherness, alterity” (Roberts 25). In *Harvest* a similar observation can be deduced when Om’s family is made to internalise the idea of vigilance as a regular phenomenon as a result of which the ‘self’ is lost. Scientific technology played a major role in the play highlighting the dystopian world within. The ‘contact module’ which was installed by the InterPlanta Services under the direction of the ‘angel’ Ginni marks the beginning of their unknown captivation. Their innocence, ignorance and the urge to satisfy the masters had left them blind to an extent which lead them to refer Ginni as an ‘angel’ instead of a monster who was ready to engulf and disintegrate the whole family. The surreal beauty of nothing but a phantom made them surrender to the masters without any resistance. The contact-module had allowed Padmanabhan to establish a structure of gazing and surveillance that mirrors the role of the audience similar to the Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacanian psychoanalysis hints at the fact that in the process of gazing, the person who is being looked at and being looked over tends to lose the self-autonomy and in turn mirrors the action of each other resulting in the ‘othering’. For, like the receiver, the audience too, gazes at the only physical bodies on stage: the donors.

The InterPlanta Services under the continual instruction of Ginni tries to bring the sense of luxury and modernity into the clumsy apartment of Om by installing a modern toilet, air conditioner et cetera. The make-believe world of luxury had a tremendous effect on the minds of Om and the old mother who was even not worried after knowing the real truth of the source of money. It reminds me of the famous song “...it all makes perfect sense, expressed in dollar and cents, pounds shillings and pence, can’t you see it all makes perfect sense” (Waters, *Amused to Death*). Unlike Om, Jeetu was rational enough to have said “No. I don’t mind being bought – but I won’t be owned!” (*Harvest* 227) but, was victimised in the end and as a result of which he had lost his self-identity. Embarking on Foucault’s idea of vigilance and the present scenario we could perhaps classify vigilance broadly into two types firstly,

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Foucault's internalised vigilance or the modern day self-invited vigilance, one where the person without realising presents his where about in a platform which can be easily traced by others. Secondly, the 'omnipresent vigilance' that occurs through the use of particular scientific tropes or the by the society. Thus, the 'panopticon' or the third-eye of vigilance unfortunately, results in the formation of body–mind dichotomy. The free-flowing interaction between the mind and the brain is hampered due to the external act of vigilance leaving the person perplexed. This body- mind dichotomy results in the formation of the "full body" in Deleuze and Guattari's term. In their work *Anti-Oedipus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, they claim that the "full body" is incapable of expressing the spontaneous flow of desire since they are pre-ordained with societal norms unlike the "Body without Organ" who is free of all entanglements and have the power to exercise the spontaneous flow of desire (Deleuze and Guattari 10). He also notes that it is an ideal condition that is far from achieving (Deleuze and Guattari 18-21).

**Loss of Identity:**

The phenomenon of internalised or omnipresent vigilance, eventually leads to a condition where the word 'private' loses its meaning. There is hardly anything that could escape the vigil of the 'third-eye'. The level of vigilance has reached such an extent that it can be easily confused to that of 'God'. The different scientific tropes act as the vigilante to keep a check on the activities of the people. The process of internalisation of vigilance started at very onset of the installation of the contact module. The InterPlanta Services were responsible to perform the act of constant watch or surveillance on Om's family on behalf of the first world colonizer, Ginni or Virgil. The members of the family, Om, his mother and Jaya were made to believe that the module was only active when they could see Ginni in it but, was unaware of the fact that was later on revealed by Virgil "...I listened to you, Zhaya. I heard every word said in the room – even when the Module was off, it recorded – "(Harvest 246). Their ignorance and greed for mimicking the western world luxuries made them accept the process of vigilance without question.

Even the action of gaze at play ultimately takes over the mental independency resulting in mirroring or mimicking the actions of the masters. This act of colonial mimicry as Bhaba observes "is a desire for a reformed recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha 126). With this tendency of being "almost the same" as the masters they, eventually end up disciplining oneself or internalised the process exactly in the manner the master has asked them to in a quest to be almost similar to the *other*. Furthermore, Lacan observes "the effect of mimicry is camouflage" which excels in

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converting the 'self' to the 'other' resulting in the loss of self-identity (125). The final step in the process of *othering* had occurred when Jaya's kitchen was taken over by the colourful pellets served by the agents of the colonizer. Even their diet, the time of consumption of pellets and all the tiny activities were scrutinized and guided by Ginni. They were literally cut off from the outer world and the one room apartment represented the simulation of the entire world. Baudrillard in his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, highlights the *hyperreal* world we live in where the 'sings of the real' is being substituted for the 'real'. He also notes that our affinity towards the 'hyperreal' world has resulted in an increased affinity towards viewing the television which portrays the simulations of reality (Poster 167). The masters took immense caution on what was featured ensuring a complete control on the minds of the inmates. Undoubtedly, the television also acted as a medium of manipulation. It is predominant that the Module had bridged the gap between the real and the virtual world.

Coming back to the present-day condition, the easy access to smartphones in everyone's hand has made tracking extremely convenient with the presence of technologies like the Global Positioning System. Though, *Harvest* envisioned the year 2010 yet, Padmanabhan did not mention the presence of smart phones. Instead, she used the scientific trope, the 'contact module' which resembles the modern-day phones once again hinting at the futuristic appeal of the play. It could be analysed that these scientific advancements had proved beneficial for the western masters and detrimental to the ignorant postcolonial residents. Padmanabhan crafted the play in such a manner that it stands relevant even in the present time. It beautifully warns us of the negative implications such want of modernization may cause. In the present times, the social media and Smartphone's function could undoubtedly be compared to that of the contact module.

This hints at our internalization of the process of vigilance knowingly or unknowingly. The act of mimicking the western world could perhaps be blamed for such situations. Nowadays, it has become a trend for people to give their whereabouts in such social media profile by using features like 'check in' et cetera as a result of which the world comes to know about them. With colonial hangover still at play and the impact of globalisation, 'rehearsing' and 'mimicking' the western culture is ever present. India has now become a beautiful amalgamation both 'tradition' and 'modern', which has an integral connection with the western culture since it originated in the west.

*Harvest* excels in depicting a situation where the family or the third world subjects are reminded of their actual position. They are in a way mentally conditioned to believe that the regime they are forced to follow are actually for their own benefit. Here, Ginni makes it a

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point to remind the family that, she is only fulfilling her own contractual obligations: ‘I get to give you things you’d never get in your lifetime, and you get to give me, well... maybe my life’ (Harvest 230). Ginni’s casual sentence serves as a jolting and disturbing reminder that receivers and donors hardly trade in equivalents: Ginni provides ‘things’ for which the donors pay her back with their own lives. Unfortunately, the family lacks to understand that they are being forced to succumb to the first world manipulation. In fact, Ginny’s continual gifts amount to little more than mere investment. As she says to the family, warping the pronunciation of Om’s name:

The Most Important Thing is to keep Auwm smiling. Coz if Auwm’s smiling, it means his body is smiling and if his body is smiling it means his organs are smiling. And that’s the kind of organs that’ll survive a transplant best, smiling organs... (Harvest 229)

Reading the receiver’s actions as an investment permits us to return, once again, to the parallels between the human body and land that the play’s title, *Harvest*, alludes to. The term effectively assimilates the whole human body, from which the part is extracted, to a crop-producing plot of land, and thus, by extension, to the possibility that land harbours of generating life. The extractable human body part is accordingly assimilated to the yield or crop; this is the commodity with genuine use-value, the part that it is profitable to detach from the whole. In order to obtain the best possible harvest, as Ginny is well-aware, one must not only select the best possible site in which to invest: one must maintain a continued investment in this site. Quality input will produce quality output: namely, a healthy harvest. The organ, once extracted, is irreclaimable. This, however, matters little to the receiver, who sees the bodies of the donor world as disposable bodies comprised of spare-parts she can use to prolong her own life.

**The Conversion:**

Besides the process of third world physical and mental captivation by the first world masters, the internalisation of forcefully imposed rules, the process of disciplining oneself, the ignorance towards manipulation, the addiction towards modernisation, the play also manages to capture the conversion of a human into a ‘living-dead’. Donna Haraway in her book *The Cyborg Manifesto* terms these living-dead as ‘Cyborg’. She defines “Cyborg” in several ways throughout the essay. On occasions, a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of human being and machine which is a creature of both a social reality as well as an element of fiction (Haraway 58-64). Jeetu can be considered as an excellent example of a cyborg. His eyes

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were extracted and could only get his vision on wearing a special kind of prosthetic that too was made available on Ginny's wish. His individuality had lost in due course. Haraway foresees that the 20th century humans would ultimately succumb to the domain of cyborg by breaking down the three main boundaries among – human & animal, organism & machine and physical & non-physical substance for example: light. It would eventually accept that a lot of ideas do overlap and intersect marking the absence of binaries (58-64). This highlights that the masters managed to get a full control over the lives of the third world poverty-stricken population without much obstruction with their ultimate weapon of vigilance. As in all cases there are some exceptions and here Jaya was the only exception.

While all the donors fall prey to Ginni's tactics, Padmanabhan uses Jaya, the only character in the play who is virulently opposed to Om's decision, to reclaim a human dignity of sorts, a dignity that allows Jaya to resist the lure of money and the seductive escapism of technology. It is a dignity that is predicated, I contend, on the very limitations of the physical body that the receivers are so desperate to overcome. The final scene of the play sees only Jaya on stage. Om has abandoned her, having wilfully chosen to seek out Ginni and give up his body to her. Ma being plugged into her Video Couch, oblivious to her surroundings. Jaya awakes to an unfamiliar, disembodied voice coming from the contact module. This is Virgil, yet another receiver with designs to prey upon Jaya's body. Jaya, however, refuses to negotiate with Virgil as long as he attempts to pull the strings from his safe, disease-free environment in the first-world. She is determined to lay down her own conditions. If Virgil wants her body, he must come to her in person. 'I know you're stronger than me, you're richer than me. But if you want me,' she insists, 'you must risk your skin for me' (Harvest 248). Bragging that she cannot win against him, Virgil sends his InterPlanta employees to break down Jaya's door. But Jaya has discovered 'a new definition for winning, 'Winning by losing' (248). She announces to Virgil that she plans to reclaim the 'only thing [she] ha[s] which is still [her] own: [her] death' (Harvest 248).

Thus, Jaya resists Virgil's advances and retains her own dignity in one swift stroke: she embraces the very mortality that Virgil and his fellow receivers seek to eradicate from their own bodies. 'I'm holding a piece of glass against my throat', she warns an increasingly frustrated Virgil (248). The play concludes on this unresolved note mirroring the famous line "Eternal spirit of the chainless mind "(Byron, Castle of Chillon) where even captivation cannot stop the mind to think. It is evident that she cannot resist the first world power structure through nothing but death, when she says, "I've discovered a new definition for

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winning, winning by losing. I win if you lose (Harvest 247)... If you want to play games with people, you should be careful not to push them off the board. You pushed me too far. Now there's nothing left for me to lose. (101)... I am not willing to care take my body for your sake! The only thing I have left which is still mine is death. My death and my pride." (248).

**An Escapade to the Future World:**

Perhaps the most fascinating facet of SF is its ability to portray a world that might turn to be the present in future times. As claimed by Suvin in his definition of SF that the "main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Suvin 37). It can be noted here that Suvin, cannot eventually rule out the potential of SF to be a representation of the 'future present' world. The claustrophobic condition of the humans in present day world due to the invasion of the deadly world mirrors the condition of poor destitute family in the play *Harvest*. Similar to our present-day condition, the family was denied access to move freely out of their apartment and was forced to practice self-isolation. The only mode of connection between the fragile apartment and the outside world were the 'contact module' and the video couch with its control in the hands of the masters. On the contrary, internet and television is our only mode of connection with the outer world. Padmanabhan could foresee the ultimate condition the humans would have to succumb to. Though, we can note here that the reason for the confinement is divergent yet, the situation is extremely identical. It can be observed here that the aspect of 'health' is the principal concern is both the cases. Om's family is trying to keep themselves, especially Om healthy so that he can take part in Ginny's project similar to our intention to stay healthy and to finally overcome the deadly virus.

**Conclusion:**

Science Fiction works like *Harvest* is a potential critique of the first world exploitation which eventually results in the captivation of the third world citizens. It also makes us aware of what we should in the fullness of time expect the future world to have in store for us. The inmates being confined and under the continuous gaze and vigilance, ends up losing the 'self- identity' in a quest to satisfy their masters besides involuntarily indulging in the act of mimicking. As a result of such tendency to mimic, a majority of people unconsciously take extra precaution to discipline oneself according to the rules inflicted upon them. They eventually lose the power to interrogate what is right or wrong. They become mentally conditioned to accept vigilance as natural phenomenon. The 'otherness' and loss of self- identity is ultimately an outcome inflicted upon us by the use of 'technological advancement'. Therefore, allowing the masters to manipulate themselves. The only way one

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can salvage one's sense of pride and self-esteem is through a willingness to die if the need arises- and through great courage and self-control.

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