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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FAMILIAL BONDING IN MANJULA PADMANABHAN'S *HARVEST*.

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Abstract

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Introduction:-

Indian Theatre's is a medium through which many women dramatist used the platform as an easy way to express their voices and sufferings. Indian drama is an ancient art and that has its folk drama performed and enjoyed in all Indian languages and dialects. Characters come from a variety of classes of people and the story content was also of various kinds: mythological, social, ethical, absorbing human stories and all-embracing rituals and traditions, etc. Likewise, Indian drama entertained all sections of the society. Of all the other forms in literature drama is the best and most powerful form through which many Indian women dramatists speak disparagingly of the crimes perpetrated against women in the name of tradition and culture in a male-dominated society. In Indian plays, many women dramatists discuss and criticize the crimes perpetrated against women in the name of tradition and culture.

In the present era, the genre of drama has also attracted women dramatists to try their hands in the field of the theatrical art. In Feminist studies the women is always portrayed with a quest for freedom from the urban abusive society. Some of these writers have achieved worldwide fame; some national and other perhaps have to be content with a more constricted circle.

Among the women dramatists, Manjula Padmanabhan is the great dramatic figure that demands special attention. She is the doyen woman playwright in field of Indian Drama in English and a distinguished playwright of competent art and craft. Besides Indian English Drama, her contribution in the field of art and fiction is highly commendable. It is attributed:

Very recently Indian English Drama shot into prominence.

Younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have infused new life into this branch of writing.

The other women playwrights who have also contributed to the development of tradition of Indian English Drama in contemporary era are those of Dina Mehta, P. Sengupta, Mahasewta Devi, Uma Parameswaran and others.

Manjula Padmanabhan is a playwright of high dramatic caliber. She was born in 1953 and went to a boarding school. She was born in Delhi and grew up in Sweden, Pakistan and Thailand. After passing out from Bombay University, she began writing in the publishing and media industry. Apart from writing newspaper columns she also

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created comic strips such as Suki, an Indian female comic character. She has received the most prestigious Onassis award for her pioneering play "Harvest". This is the first time that an Indian English dramatist has won an honour abroad.³⁷ Her play, *Harvest*, was selected from 1470 entries in 76 countries for the Onassis Prize in 1997. She has worked as a playwright, cartoonist, journalist, novelist and a children's book author. Her comic cartoon strips have appeared in *The Pioneer* newspaper and *Sunday Observer*. She was known as a cartoonist before her play *Harvest* was staged. She has also written the plays entitled *Lights Out!* (1984), *Hidden Fires* (2003), *The Artist's Model* (1995) and *Sextet* (1996). *Escape* (2008) is her first novel for adults and is one of the few works of modern Indian science fiction. Prof B. Parvathi remarks:

"Manjula Padmanabhan belongs to that generation of Indian women writers in English who have boldly stepped out of conventions that define respectability to address issues of gender, woman, her body and its behavior, its exploitation in a family and social setting... Manjula Padmanabhan has opened a fresh dialogue on a new angle of feminist concerns".³⁸

The problems of alienation and marginalization are the most repeated themes in her plays of Manjula Padmanabhan. She depicts a very dirty decaying world in her plays, in which mothers are seen bargaining their kids for the 'price of rice'. The play *Harvest*, which puts its playwright on international stage, is a gruesome tale of despondent and dilapidated family living in a chawl of metropolitan, Mumbai. Forced by the ill and adverse circumstances, a twenty year young lad namely Om Prakash decides to be an organ donor. Eventually, he is compelled to bargain his own body to a white 'First World buyer'. This incident reminds us the scene in which Dr. Faustus bargains his soul to Mephistopheles, chieftain of evil power. In Padmanabhan's plays, we can also see gradual change in the female character. In other words, the character does not remain the same as they appear to be in the beginning. She focuses on every aspect of the problem and exposes the follies and response of the people towards the existing problem.

The action of the play revolves around two groups of people the donors and the recipients of organs transplant. The play is set in Mumbai, though not specifically mentioned. The play shows how poverty can compel a man to go to any extent to earn his livelihood. Om, the main character in the play signs up to the organ selling company Interplanta in order to earn money for his poverty stricken family because the character Om is willing to exploit himself as well as his own people in order to live a comfortable life. He has no job but is married to Jaya, may be in her late teens. Jaya with her passion for life is a contrast to her husband Om a man of self-pity. The romantic angle of the play is provided in terms of a clandestine relationship that Jaya carries on with the husband's younger brother Jeetu, a gigolo who considers life as a joke. Another character introduced is Ginni who is an American blonde, who signs up an organ donation agreement with Om. Ginni pays him to live a healthy life, so that during the donating organ time there is no difficulty. Jaya was evidently distressed about Om's decision on signing himself to Ginni, because he is made to believe that he is the chosen one, to receive a technologically advanced life style provided by the unknown recipient through interplanta services. It is the duty of interplanta services to provide all the material needs of Om so that he maintains perfect health. Everything in that one room tenement where Om and his family was living got replaced, from food to toilets. As the eligibility criterion of the donor is that he or she should be unattached, Jaya is forced to take up the role of Om's sister so that the recipient who keeps twenty four hours Virgil over Om's activity is assured of Om's unattached status.

The play takes a turn when Om and Ma get disgusted with Jeetu comes home with unkempt hair and his body full of dirt and disease. They fear what Ginni might say anything seeing him in that condition. Though Jeetu appears to be on the verge of death, Om tries to drive him out, lest an unhygienic and diseased human being should be spotted by Ginni. Either the mother or Om has any soft corner for Jeetu. In a quick anticlimax, in spite of several protests the guards lead the infected Jeetu away as the prospective donor, mistaking him for Om who remains a fattened goose back home. Jeetu's returning home completely blind, It is only when he is taken away for the second phase of transplantation that we come to know that the donor is made to surrender his whole body to the recipient and that he has no more claims on it. However, Jeetu under the spell of a prospective sexual enchantment with Ginni turns blind to the fact that he will be deprived of his body piece by piece, organ after organ. Nobody bothers about Jeetu's plight, not even his mother Ma who gets enchanted with the sudden twist in her fortunes and watching T.V becomes her major activity of the day. Om the coward escapes from action leaving Jaya alone to face Ginni. The lonely Jaya is shocked to realize that Ginni is only an animated wet dream produced by a computer and in fact it is the old Virgil who is the real recipient. Virgil who is hungry to regain his youth is not satisfied with the transplants from Jeetu's body and he sets out to seduce Jaya, for now the old man with youthful transplants craves for youthful female flesh. Jaya who could not tolerate the very idea of being a wife to Om who is going to be deprived of his vital organs

wants her man to be real. But Virgil refuses to take any risk of physically entering the disease-infected world of Jaya. She is even prepared to die instead of bearing a child to a computer image.

Though organ transplantation is the main theme of the play, it also deals with delicate interpersonal relationships between a man and a woman revealing the inherent tensions and violence in human relationships. In places like, the opening scene shows a conversation between Jaya and Ma which depicts a normal familial conversation between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law with usual complaints and chidings to each other but the scene is full of warm familial relationship. Firstly, Jaya has been shown as an anxious and devoted housewife waiting for her husband at lunch but she does not want her husband to get the job that clearly shows her awareness of the type of interview Om has gone for. And she is the only person to survive the power play between the First World and Third World countries. While her husband and brother-in-law give up the fight soon and her mother-in-law succumbs to the material charms offered, Jaya alone maintains her identity and established her right to be thought of as a human being. She was the only one bold enough to ask questions during the metallation of the contact module and the food supply. She puts up a resistance as her kitchen utensils are thrown away. Being dissatisfied with her marital life, she seeks distraction with Jeetu. She is aware of her sexual urges and finds fulfilment with him. Her compassion for him makes her take care of him when he comes back sick and covered with sores. Again, she is the only one to protect when Jeetu is taken away instead of Om.

Secondly, Ma's warm affection and concerns for the well-being of her son as well as a irritable mother-in-law character is portrayed in the play throughout. At the same time mother's longing for more stable social and projected ideal harmonious familial bonding is reflected through her arguments with Jaya when Ma accuses Jaya for not cooperating with her: "Alone, alone! Have you seen your neighbours? Ten in that room, twenty in the other! And harmonious, my dear! Harmonious as a TV show! But you? An empty room would be too crowded for you!" (Padmanabhan 218). Though Ma is self-complacent with her present economically condition of the family but at the same time her desire as well as behaviour has been moulded in terms of outlined consumerism in society which prompts her to take the liberty to condemn Jaya for waiting at the window for her husband instead of pressing her legs. While Om (the earning member) is addressed with endearments such as "my only delight", Jaya and Jeetu is most often abused as there are unemployed. "ho- you", "barren dog", "pimping rascal", "soul's disgrace" are some of the words she uses for them.

By the end of the play Ma is "though caring for or about anything". Even when the guards drag Jeetu away for his organs, she is interested only in watching T. V. The distaste which women feel for their restricted life is well dramatized in the method that Ma chooses to escape from this kind of life. She buys a Super Deluxe Video Coach. Once she lies down in the Couch tubes are attached to a recycling and bio-feeding processor that takes care of all her needs. Ma, who appears a tyrant but is herself a victim of a repressive patriarchal society chooses to cut herself off mentally and physically from it. She chooses total silence as a route of escape.

Next, Om the central character of the play in quest of a better living condition unknowingly, puts the whole family and familial relationship at stake. Overpowered by the glittering world of consumer culture, he endlessly remains in materialistic lifestyle that eludes him till the end. Initially after getting job, he forgets his own position in society and becomes hauteurb in dealing with other people; which is evident in the episode of Bidyut-bai and his disapproval in mother's initial generosity with neighbours. Even he is not ready to allow Jeetu at home as he returns with diseases. He is only concerned about money and Ginni: "Here I am, willing to give my whole body to improve our lives – and what're you doing? Endangering the whole project by feeling up your brother-in-law—" (Padmanabhan 232). His pride for proving himself having better exchange value in the market of commodity widens the gap between husband and wife. To gain that job Om has to be unmarried for which he turns his wife into his sister and Jeetu as his brother-in-law. For Om changing the relationship on paper does not change the relationship in reality as he has been left with no option but to grab this job for which he has to forsake the husband-wife relation.

The only character who has suffered a lot in the alteration of relationship in family is Jaya as she drifts between Om and Jeetu. Unable to get support and dignity of a wife from her husband, she turns to Jeetu and she is the only one who cares about Jeetu in the family whereas Om and Ma are concerned about the reaction of Ginni. When she is not able to reverse the imposed relationship of brother-sister with her husband, she retorts to Om:

JAYA: I'm still your wife. OM: On paper, you're my sister. In reality, you're worse than nothing to me. If not for Ginni I'd throw you out onto the streets. To be hunted. What do I care? You betrayed me. Slept with my

brother. JAYA: You never . . . wanted me – OM: Wanting – not wanting – what meaning do these words have? (Padmanabhan 238)

But on realizing the nature of despairing act he has been involved to, he turns into a pathetic subject and his contrition and lamentation for escape from the hopeless situation is heartrending:

How could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I? [. . .] Whoever opens that door is my murderer, my assassin – [. . .] No!! I beg of you – please! Please! Leave that cursed door alone! [. . .] (sinks to the floor) I'll hide in the fridge. I'll just crawl along here, all the way to the fridge and I'll sit there, yes – (Padmanabhan 234)

Having lost all relationships within the family because of this materialistic pursuit and consumer culture, she now hopes to start a new bonding with Ginni from developed countries which symbolically reflects to ponder over the present relationship between developed countries and developing countries like India and seeks to begin a fresh relationship with new perspective after discarding the detrimental neo-capitalist attitude of developed countries.

Manjula Padmanabhan is usually known as a social critic through all her plays, she portrays the reality of society in a new perspective and *Harvest* is a step ahead than all of her other plays as it is not only an assessment of social reality but also goes beyond the boundaries of nation to delve with the relationship of human beings from different countries. On the one hand, this play depicts the crumbling of societal and familial relationship due to the increasing consumption of consumer products and endless materialistic pursuits of human beings; on the other hand, it also projects the operative of developed countries in the developing countries to propagate the notion of consumerism for mercenary purposes. Though the play is full of desolate images of humanity but at the end it shows a ray of hope with a hint to start every relationship again.

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