

# Impact of Technology Dominance in the Play *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan

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## Abstract

*In the contemporary world, technology has progressed from a calming human aid into a foremost force shaping lives, ethics, and relationships. Manjula Padmanabhan's Harvest (1997) forestalls the ethical dilemmas of advanced technology and artificial intelligence (AI), especially in the context of organ trade, surveillance, and economic disparity. In this paper, we will consider the case of Harvest in the context of the Theory of Technology Supremacy and AI ethics, and the ways, in which technological discontinuity influences the life of Om Prakash, Jaya, Ma, Jeetu, and Virgil. Using the primary textual analysis and the secondary literature, the paper claims that technology in Harvest is not a neutral tool but rather a driving force that infringes privacy, capitalizes on vulnerability, and consumes the human self-sufficiency. The vision that Padmanabhan depicts is very terrifyingly relevant in the era of global reconnaissance capitalism, as a warning of an unquestioning faith in technology.*

**Keywords:** Technology Dominance, Artificial Intelligence, Surveillance, Organ Trade, Privacy, Harvest

## Introduction

It is quite a common fact that technological progress has become a universal good, which promotes the sense of competence, connectivity and expediency. However, as Shoshana Zuboff cautions, the digital future is the one, which tries to proclaim human experience as the free raw material that can be translated into behavioral data (8). Such renovations have been long debated in literature where the darker side of innovation is revealed. Staged by Harvest in 1997, the groundbreaking Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan preempts the twenty-first-century concerns about AI, bioethics, and surveillance of privacy.

The play is staged in a congested Mumbai chawl, where main protagonist, Om Prakash is an unemployed man who agrees to sell his organs to a rich American. His wife, Jaya, resists the deal, while his mother, Ma, welcomes it for monetary gain. Through the character of Virgil an organ receiver disguised as the fashionable "Ginni" the household becomes subject to constant remote investigation via a device called the "Contact Module." This apparatus, while offering

material comfort, strips the family of privacy, autonomy, and dignity, embodying the concept of technology domination.

### **This Paper Seeks to**

- Examine how Harvest exposes the psychological and social impacts of technological control.
- Analyze the methods through which AI and surveillance weaken autonomy and privacy.
- Explore whether technological corruption cuts across class lines or reinforces discrimination.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The research is deeply grounded in the Theory of Technology Dominance, which proposes that “technology can have a dominant influence on behavior, decision-making, and performance” (“Theory of Technology Dominance”). This framework accentuates that technological systems, once rooted in daily life, can subtly but powerfully determine patterns of thought and social relations, often beyond the user’s conscious cognizance.

AI ethics scholarship reinforces this concern. Kate Crawford observes that AI “is neither artificial nor intelligent it is made from natural resources and human labor, structured to serve particular interests” (15). This claim demystifies AI as a neutral innovation, framing it instead as a product of power relations that privilege certain actors frequently corporations or states while it marginalize others.

Shoshana Zuboff’s idea of surveillance capitalism where human life becomes commoditized data finds dramaturgical embodiment in Harvest’s Contact Module. Here the valued space of the family is a surveilled area, and isolated life has been transformed into corporate property. The play predicts the biometric surveillance in the twenty-first century, digital interference and bio-surveillance measures that have become the norm today.

Posthumanist critics like Donna Haraway argue that technology is destroying the lines between human and machine, establishing cyborg identities that disrupt the outdated ideas of autonomy and quintessence. In Harvest, the loss of the bodily sovereignty of Jeetu, who loses his eyes and gets artificial ones, is the embodiment of such a loss of sovereignty, which places the donor in the role of a half-human, half-technological machine.

Foucauldianly, the Contact Module is a panoptic machine that subjects itself to self-restraint by being visible at all times. The theory of the panopticon by Michel Foucault explains the functionality of the surveillance as a mode of observing as well as regularizing, regulating behavior. In Harvest, the family of Om is able to self-regulate their food, hygiene and behavior under the unseen yet omnipresent scrutiny of Ginni/Virgil, which points to the fact that surveillance incinerates control.

Critical globalization studies is a counter-signatory to this framework as well. The idea of body as commodity in the global cultural flows provided by Arjun Appadurai sheds light on the fact that in a neoliberal market, the parts of the human body, the labour and the reproductive measures can be exchanged across the margins in the context of technological mediation. In Harvest, biomedical technology helps the First World to reach geographic barriers, deprive the Third World of its resources without a physical presence.

Conjoining these theoretical lenses technology supremacy, AI ethics, posthumanism, Foucauldian scrutiny theory, and globalization studies this research pairs Harvest as a constructed product of its late-twentieth-century context and a futuristic text of bios-political and economic entangles of our own present.

### **Technology as Surveillance and Control**

Virgil's use of the "Contact Module" to observe Om's family mirrors modern AI-driven surveillance tools. Ginni enthuses: "Even if I didn't need transplants... I'd get the kick of my life from these conversations!... Better than CyberNet. Coz this is Real Life..." (Padmanabhan 43).

This ghoulishness turns human grief into entertainment, echoing Yuval Noah Harari's cautions that "Dataism reduces humans to algorithms to be optimized for profit" (12). The native space is rationalized into a bio-factory: separate toilets for hygiene, food pellets for measured nutrition, and a "video couch" that seduces Ma into a intermediated, disconnected existence. This is because the home is shown to develop a monitored lab, in which the appearance of comfort is the veil of control.

### **Addiction, Dependency, Dispossession, Economic Inequality and Technological Exploitation**

Ma's mania with the video couch demonstrates technological dependence; she prefers facilitated contact over real family communication. Jaya complains: "You sit there all day... Do you even know what's happening to us?" (Padmanabhan 52). Here, technology relocates closeness, rendering the human body secondary to its organs' utility. Donor autonomy is erased, and virtual closeness replaces touch—Ginni's plans into Jeetu's mind blur reality and fantasy.

Om's extreme anxiety reflects the global divide between technological "haves" and "have-nots." Virgil enjoys cutting edge medical involvements while Jeetu misguided for the donor returns blinded a victim of ruthless utilization. The contract is not class-neutral; it commodifies insufficiency for the profit of the wealthy.

The use of technology in Harvest makes multinational organ trade without physical contact qualitative, protecting the lucky and placing the vulnerable under violent domination. This is similar to what Zuboff refers to as the extraction imperative where extraction of value is mined out in life.

### **Illusion, Manipulation, and Virtual Identity**

Among the most garbling revelations of Harvest is the fact that, Ginni, is a fictitious prediction disguising the present buyer, Virgil. This deceit spills over the power of technology to create false identities, work emotions, and hide exploitative reasons.

Jaya does not have any more to say to Virgil in his technological advances: the real man is wanted, not the conception of a machine (Padmanabhan 87). Her nullification is the statement by Crawford that to oppose technical determinism is to proclaim the human agency to the technocratic power (202).

### **Dehumanization and Cannibal Capitalism**

Padmanabhan uses organ gathering as a metaphor for global capitalism's cannibalistic tendencies where the rich "consume" the poor. Technocratic simplifies this "digestion" by depersonalizing communications, turning bodies into spare-part storehouses. Jeetu's change into a cyborg figure, and Ma's retreat into a tech-induced stupor, illustrates the ultimate cost of technological command.

### **Resistance and Agency**

Even though the play is primarily portraying technology as a manipulation instrument, the fact that Jaya did not comply means that resistance is a possibility. She does not want to be commoditized, artificially inseminated or reduced to a virtual sexual spouse. Her position recovers corporeal presence into an increasingly disembodied world.

## Discussion

Harvest sees this as a dystopian allegory of unchecked technological control in communion with economic exploitation. The Contact Module is the predecessor of the modern intensive care systems of smart-homes, biometric bracelets, and corporate-monitored wellness applications. The conflicting responses of the character, Ma being addicted, Om being compliant, Jaya being confrontational are illustrations of the variability of the nature of people to technological intrusion.

Padmanabhan cautions that unless technology is regulated through ethics, it is not only going to redefine human behavior but it will also redefine human value. The play connects technological ethics to economic justice, which points out that such questions of AI and surveillance cannot be dissociated with global inequality.

## Conclusion

Harvest by Padmanabhan is still painfully incisive in the way it shows the control of technology on human existence. By using its depiction of surveillance, virtual identity and organ commodification, the play shows how AI, global capitalism can intrude on privacy, act of heroism in vulnerable, and destroy human dignity. Padmanabhan is right in seeing the danger of a world where intelligent devices are observing our every move. The reason why Jayasays no is not a personal protest but a manifesto: technology needs to be of service, not substitute humanity.

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