

CHAPTER –IV

BRUTALITY OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY

“A Specter is haunting the world today that is globalisation. it is the buzz word of the movement, as it is used almost in every field of Human Endeavour. Globalization as a concept is breaking into different discourses. It has changed the patterns and dynamics of viewing other social, economics, political, culture and psychological happenings around the world”.¹

Uma Parameswaran and Manjula Padmanabhan took to dethearticalizing the theatre, meaning stripping away all the technological and scenic encumbrances of the early century and replacing them with humanism. It came from the text and the acting. The texts were full of symbolic imagery not easily constructed rather suggestive. The intention was to evoke an unconscious response and an intellectual one, to depict the rational aspects of characters and events. Uma Parameswaran and Manjula Padmanabhan are new generation as playwrights. Their plays were very similar to the plays of Chekhov and the late works of Ibsen and Strindberg. Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Harold Pinter, propounder of *theatre of silence*, also inspired Uma Parameswaran and Manjula Padmanabhan.

In 1896 a symbolist theatre in Paris, produced Alfred Jarr's *Ubu roi*, a shocking bizarre play. It was based vaguely on Macbeth, the play had puppet like character in a world devoid of decency. The play is filled with scatological humour and language. It was perhaps most significant for its shock value and its destruction of virtually all contemporaneous theatrical norms and taboos. *Hidden Fires* by Manjula Padmanabhan followed same norms and taboos. *Ubu roi* freed the theatre from inhibition of direction. It also served as the model and

inspiration for future avant-garde dramatic movements and the absurdist drama of the 1950s.

The violent grotesque aspect of the human psyche created the world on stage. Manjula Padmanabhan has the expressionism of society typified by distortion and exaggeration. It had a suggestive use of light and shadow. The plays by writers such as Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller had been episodic and had used staccato like language with intense imagery. Individualized characters had been replaced by stock types or allegorical figures, much as in the morality plays. The plots often revolved around the redemption of humankind. Probably, Manjula Padmanabhan also went ahead using similar language and imagery in plays like *Lights Out! Hidden Fires*, *Artistic Model* and *Harvest*.

The above mentioned playwrights took up themes to free the society of various taboos; to remove the facade from the faces ; to unveil the civilized society.

In fact the playwrights took bold initiatives and began to reflect, how brutal can the society be ? Can the inhuman side of civilization be revealed ? Why is middle class living with dual personality ? Manjula Padmanabhan had no issues in reflecting the darker side of society. Many movements of the first half of the century, such as futurism and surrealism theatre, she sought to bring new artistic and scientific forms.

Manjula Padmanabhan has used different modes of literature, to delineate her views and attitudes about brutality of civilized society. Not only in plays but also through shorts stories and various sketches. Be it women exploitation, communal aspects or scientifically developed genres.

Among the various theatre tools used by the playwrights to depict *brutality of civilized society*, naming is a powerful ideological tool. It is also and accurate pointer to the ideology of the name. Different names for the

objects represent different ways of perceiving it. For instance how do we refer to a person who seeks political aims using aggression ? Is he a terrorist, guerilla freedom fighter, rebel or resistance fighter. Different labels are carried for different immoral deeds or purposes.

“Written in the lineage of plays of Vacla V. Marvel's. The *Memorandom* or Slawomer Mrozek's *Tango*, Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* develops an absurd narrative of the structure of presentation and power in the contemporary globalised culture.”²

Harvest however presents an empowering scenario of the naming process. Throughout the duration of the play, Virgil, the foreigner buying Jaya's husband's organs, persists in pronouncing her name as *zhaya*. But at the end of the play when Jaya finally confronts him and realizes that it is in her power to decide the further implementation of his plans she refuses to go any further until he pronounces her name properly. In the face of her adamancy he is forced to bow to her wishes and says it correctly.

“For *Harvest* brilliantly allegorizes the relationship between the first and the third worlds, literalizing the fundamental practice of globalisation and its central situation : the third world provides the raw material that the first world consumes for its own survival and expansion.”³

Manjula Padmanabhan's dystopian play *Harvest* (1997) examines “the trade in human organs and the commoditization of the third world body where trade is predicated upon. Manjula Padmanabhan's play, shows an unemployed man selling the rights of his body parts to a buyer in the United States, This is the commoditization of the healthy third-world body.”⁴ Therefore in the third world there has been significant advances in transplant medicine, has now become a bank of spare parts for ailing bodies in the first world.

Anthropologist Nancy Scheper notes that wealthy but ailing patients in the first-world are increasingly turning to 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.”⁵ 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 organs mirrors the circuit of capital flows in the era of globalization: *from South to North, from Third to First world, from poor to rich, from black and brown to white*. It is very difficult to presume such a world.

“It is a well known fact that many theorists writing about global capitalism have pointed out that first-world economies are increasingly dependent on consumption.”⁶

The economy of the world has changed with the industrialization, Urbanization and Modernization. The first world countries have developed their own economy of labour force management.

“The workforce of the first world is not engaged as industrial labour. With the technological advances, labour is carried out by non-human means and human labour is obtained elsewhere. It is a drive to multiply, to make a profits, that first -world economies depend upon production sites, where labour is *cheaper, less assertive, less taxed*, more feminised (and) less protected by states and unions”⁷. In the third-world, production sites actually displace human labour to remote geographical cities, to enable the industrial production to grow less visible in the first world.

Jean and John Comaroff explains this transformation that is Capitalism presents “a gospel of salvation; [as] a capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is

invested with the capacity, wholly to transform the universe of the marginalised and the disempowered.”⁸

United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and other countries in Western Europe have not legalised the sale and purchase of human body tissues, this is because most politicians and bioethicists in these countries understand that the human body is 'the locus of absolute dignity. Kant's distinction between dignity and price.

“In the kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent ,has a dignity.”⁹

Manjula Padmanabhan in harvest portrays the brutal admixture of hope and despair that has motivated Om's actions. At first, he exclaims with excitement. “We'll have more money than you and I have names for! informs Ma, boastfully. *Who'd believe there's so much money in the world?* [219]”¹⁰. He further clears :

“You think I did it lightly. But [...] we'll be rich! Very rich! Insanely rich! But you 'd rather live in this one small room, I suppose! Think it's such a fine thing - living day in, day out, like monkeys in a hot-case - lulled to sleep by our neighbours' rhythmic farting! [...] And starving [223].”¹¹

Jaya blames him of making the wrong decision, but he is adamant that his decision was not made of his own free will:

“Jaya: You're wrong, there are choices - there must be choices -Om: Huh! I didn't choose. I stood in queue and was chosen! And if not this queue, there would have been other queues.[238]”¹².

Manjula Padmanabhan crudely suggests that the first world has created the economic structure of brutal capitalism and the selling of organs becomes an *option* for the third-world poor souls. As Om's final reaction confirms that, his judgment was cruelly impaired by the glare of materialistic accomplishment. When the reality hits him he is terrified: *How could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I?* [234]¹³.

The character of Om's mother is portrayed to be selfish and self centered. She is surprised “*What kind of job pays a man to sit at home?*” [220]¹⁴. As she begins to understand what Om's 'job' requires, she resumes her conversation pretending “Tell me again: all you have to do is sit at home and stay healthy? [...] And they'll pay you? Even if you do nothing but pick your nose all day?” [222]¹⁵. Surrendering to the joys of technologically-induced bliss, Ma is thrilled that, for literally performing no labour at all, “they will be rich for ever and ever” [235]¹⁶.

The colonial powers are replaced by machines. It is observed that the entire family is under imperialistic pressure of science and technology.

The entire decision and the empowerment lies with the contact Module. Which is a device that hangs from the ceiling and which looks, Padmanabhan tell us, like a “white, faceted globe” [221]¹⁷.

For like the receiver's own body, the donor's body too is vulnerable to the encroachment of diseases and degeneration that must be kept at bay at all costs.

At the opening of Act II of the play, we see how well the strategy of Ginni/Virgil is working. Two months have elapsed, and Om is panicking because they are late for lunch. (Lunch , consists of the multi-coloured nutritional pellets provided for them by Interplanta Services). “You know how [Ginny] hates it when we're late to eat', Om says, worriedly” [228]¹⁸.

Commercialisation is at its best. Manjula Padmanabhan is very clear about the first world exploiting the third world.

“The Most Important Thing is to keep Awwm smiling. Coz if Awuwm'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...” [229]¹⁹.

An ideal agrarian economy is sustainable. 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. And yet, while all the donors fall prey to the plans of Virgin.

Manjula Padmanabhan uses Jaya, the only character in the play who is virulently opposed to Om's decision, to reclaim human dignity that allows Jaya to resist the lure of money. This is escapism from technology. It is a dignity that is predicated.

As Virgil realized his options, Jaya was threatening (promises?) to reclaim her own body through suicide. Padmanabhan thus leaves us to think of a dilemma : probably victory means death of the target of millennial capitalism. Is it really worthy of being termed an act of resistance ?

Hidden Fires, addresses the February 2002 Gujarat massacres in India, perpetuated by Hindu extremists and resulting in the killing of approximately 2000 Muslims, the burning of thousands of Muslim houses, the rape of hundreds of women and the displacement of more than 2,00,000 Muslims, many of whom are still living in refugee camps.

To further prove the brutalities in the demeanour of the civilized Indian society Ruth Margaff reported “In research conducted with the support of

Anjum Katyal, it was found that National and Local governments, the media and the police both subtly and overtly nurtured prejudice and hatred before the riots.”²⁰ These riots were addressed as *ethnic cleaning*. Ruth states, what is in the hearts of audience and readers was scripted by Manjula Padmanabhan. “With the subtle inversions of dramaturgical structure first boldly embodying the antagonist figure of the Hindu extremist, then satirizing the dominant forces of power in media and government and then turning the candle of enlightenment towards the audience and herself, as she used the spectacles of theatre to create live invocation acknowledging injustice and commemorating the unspeakable losses of Gujarat.”²¹

In solo performance by Rashi Bunny directed by Arvind Gour the following monologue excerpt is a condemnation of the communal disharmony:

“YOU say you're a lion, but your great grandmother,
three generations ago,
she was a deer—
some one told us —
and that makes
you a deer!
And that's your Hidden Fire.
So we have got to put you out.”²²

The play *Hidden Fires* by Manjula Padmanabhan is the revelation that within the hearts of man burns the individualistic violence. In the name of communalism many are killed. It is a pain to realise that civilization has not been able to extinguish *the fire* that flare up at the pretext of caste ridden existence or racism aggression. If the educated can not save their woman from *Nirbhaya Violence* it is a brutal society.

It is not the crime of the society that needs to be condemned. There is law and order to take care of it. Yet many crimes occur in dark corners and

chambers, known to many but no one has the courage to stand and raise a voice. The corruption in the government is a free play. "To get a job done at the Government Organisation, one has to face *Q this way* to the group rhythm..... asthmatics had a bad time and smokers were not tolerated some one was finally ushered into the presence of an officer, registrar or file clerk..... a few half hearted queries and tongue clicking's...".²³ The government of a country represents its people civilized or uncivilized. What does it compromise ? There can be seen 'false lead' insolent peons and bureaucratic vagrants..... is this what is called civilization.

Can the brutality of the society i.e. civilized infrastructure of the 21st Century be denoted ? It is rather difficult as *Harvest* has posed a powerful critique of the first world's exploration of the *Third World countable*.

The brutality of the society is further highlighted by Manjula Padmanabhan in *Escape*, the novel. The extermination of the girl child is condemned. The beautiful baby girl dies before birth. In the no women land, the survival of man through cloning is scripted. Unfortunately, even in the educated family women are snubbed and made to feel humiliated. The novel *Escape* is futuristic envision a society, comprising robot like man. The government is instrumental in no girl policy.

The message of Manjula Padmanabhan is save girl child. The woman is the life to the shadow, a breath to the dead or counter part of man. She needs to be respected and uplifted socially.

Kleptomania is another literary work by Manjula Padmanabhan in which the monster of corruption is openly discussed. The typical style of Manjula Padmanabhan is to uproot the evil of society. The powerful bureaucrats are

Compulsive looters and thieves and corruption is reflected as *Institutionalized Kleptomania*.

The theme of *partition* and mental preparedness of women to sacrifice their sons or the pains of being uprooted in Indo-Canadian population is effectively presented by Uma Parameswaran.

Uma Parmeswaran's *Sons Must Die* portrays, the theme that mothers are prepared for the deaths of their son, this is a brutal society. Here there is no meaning of political boundaries ? The sons are being sacrificed for the motherland year after year. Can such a society be considered humane. After the Kargil war, the implication of Uma Parameswarn's play *Sons must Die* became very relevant. It is really strange that Kargil war is considered *Albatross* around the neck of the government. But the deaths of the sons for the country is mother's pride.

The strength of Uma Parameswaran is in her narratives. Establishment in the foreign soil is a challenging process. Most of the characters of her play , novel or short story live through the pangs of being accepted in Canada. They live a multifaceted personality.

The characters of Uma Parameswaran acknowledge what Salman Rushdie states in his essay *Imaginary Homelands*.

“If we do look back, we must do it in the knowledge [...] that we will [...] the thing that was lost : that we will in short , create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind”.²⁴

Uma Parameswaran has dealt with some themes as “The News spread quickly as such Mayura had come to her parents' house and was adamantly

refusing to return to her husband ...”.²⁵ Simple homely issues that can churn members of the households.

Literature is considered as the reflection of the society. The Brutalities are presently focused on by the various writers. Uma Parameswaran and Manjula Padmanabhan in their own unique pattern of writing shake up the moralities of the readers or audience of their plays.

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