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The Science-Fictionalisation of Globalisation and Image Advertising in *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan

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Abstract: This article examines the first Indian science-fictional play: *Harvest* (1998) by Manjula Padmanabhan. It suggests that this dystopic play renders globalisation and image advertisements as novums through new and imagined technologies, and points out that Indian SF has begun to engage with these novums and the associated media technologies, using *Harvest* as an example of how the novums are used to transform and build fictional worlds.

Keywords: Indian science fiction, novum, globalisation, advertisements

Science fiction in India, particularly that written in English, has experienced a steady growth over the past few decades. A careful survey indicates that the genre in English displays a comprehensive engagement with socio-cultural issues and concerns pertinent to the Indian subcontinent. This differs significantly from regional SF; Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay suggests that these SF texts are often didactic in tone, and that the texts (especially those written in Bengali and Marathi) are heavily influenced by the Nehruvian project of modernisation, which sought to inculcate a scientific attitude and temperament amongst the citizens (447–48). I suggest that the difference in emphasis between SF written in English and that written in regional languages may reflect their different markets and areas of publication: English-language works are generally initially published internationally and regional works are exclusively published in India. These differences require closer inspection. I use *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan to illustrate the differences and present an additional approach for analysing Indian SF. I suggest a modification to Darko

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Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement through the definition of the novum, associating it with corresponding developments occurring in contemporary reality. I suggest that imagined devices like the Contact Module, VideoCouch, and globalisation all function as novums, which then contribute towards world-building.

Indian SF in English is an emerging phenomenon, particularly post-millennium. Despite a robust tradition of SF in regional languages, the genre's popularity in English has historically been extremely limited, especially during the first decades after independence. Works like *The Memory of Elephants* (1988), *The Mothers of Mayadiip* (1989), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), and *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* (1998) were initially published abroad and released in India a few years later[1]. The international acclaim and recognition gained by the success of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* had provided tremendous boost to Indian Writing in English (IWE). This recognition translated into more attention from international publishers willing to invest in the India, leading to more experimentation with form and content (Paranjpe 1052–54). For Indian SF in English, this boost was further aided by *The Calcutta Chromosome*'s receipt of the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1997. The increased attention from publishers in conjunction with the international acclaim garnered by *The Calcutta Chromosome* may have significantly contributed towards reintroducing the genre in English to Indian readers. Moreover, these works actively engaged with issues informed by India's colonial legacy. I suggest that they paved the way for post-millennial Indian SF in starting to turn their gaze inward, towards the Indian subcontinent, and adopting a more somber approach in their discussions of socio-cultural issues. Additionally, the diversity in authorial backgrounds created and highlighted differences in content and style[2]. In contrast, regional works, especially those written in Bengali and Marathi, displayed different themes. Hans Harder's analysis of Marathi SF suggests that these stories usually portrayed an intertwined exploration of both Hindu religious themes and science (114), with common tropes including Indian scientists saving the world from an approaching disaster (and thereby exhibiting India's supremacy) (115) and a fairly harmonious relationship between science, society, and culture, in which superstitions are non-existent (117–18). Chattopadhyay conceptualises these early stories (in Marathi and Bangla) as *kalpavigyan*. He breaks down the term into "vigyan", or scientific knowledge, which helps to capture the "accuracy and reality of experience", ultimately leading towards the formation of "real, perfect knowledge" (436), and "kalpa", which refers to both imagination and time. "Vigyan" is placed in a hierarchy above "gyan" – spiritual or transcendental knowledge. Such texts do not rigidly differentiate between the scientific and the fantastic; instead, they are noticeable for their tendency to "rework the history of science" by reactivating indigenous knowledge to subvert established histories of scientific knowledge or explore alternate systems from the past, against a background of the mythic called the "mythologerm" ("Mythologerm"

[1] The publication in India for *The Memory of Elephants*, *Mothers of Mayadiip*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh* came in 2000, 1998, 1997, and 2002, respectively.

[2] This shift is noticeable even in *Lusooma* and *The Embroidered Newspaper*, which display the same qualities as regional-language science-fiction stories.

437–38). The enthusiasm for incredible inventions and adventures through fantastic innovations is notably missing in these intermediary novels. I will exemplify this difference using Padmanabhan's *Harvest*. The work's serves as an "intermediary" between regional works (often didactic in tone and conservative in outlook) and post-millennial SF (actively engaged in earnestly discussing issues pertinent to the Indian subcontinent). They signify the shift in authorship and content discussed above**.** The work should also be understood with reference to the larger shifts that were taking place in IWE. Therefore, it is important to investigate its links with postcolonial theory.

Postcolonial criticism of SF has identified the Self and Other in the figure of the human and the alien by constructing the Other through a perspective that privileges the Self (Western outlook) (Reid 256–57). Its affinity with thought experiments has been hailed as the perfect conduit to explore the "notion of power formed within the construct of empire" (Kerslake 3). John Rieder further adds that emergent SF addresses the ideological basis of colonial practices through ideological fantasies that manifest through the coloniser "discovering" and attributing meaning to the alien population; through the introduction of a new religion and way of living into an indigenous culture through the figure of the missionary; or through the "anthropologist's fantasy", in which the indigenous population is portrayed to be at a developmental stage analogous to an early stage of human development (31-2). More importantly, Rieder's emphasis on the impossibility of tracing the origin of the genre to a single text (17–18) enables Chattopadhyay to suggest that SF can be considered to be a shared tradition between the colonising and colonised nations ("Kalpavigyan" 106–07).

Therefore, SF emerging from colonised societies needs to be culturally and historically contextualised. I suggest that Suvin's theory of the novum and the idea of cognitive estrangement will provide an additional approach to understand the play as well as postcolonial SF in general. Suvin suggests that SF can be distinguished from other genres through the presence of a novum and cognitive estrangement. The novum refers to a new/imagined/invented element that is based on a scientific or a pseudo-scientific premise. It is this element that engineers the fictional break from reality and leads to cognitive estrangement. "Cognitive" refers to the conscious act that readers undertake as they comprehend the alternate environment of the story; estrangement refers to the effect that occurs when readers recognise that the alternate environment differs from their own empirical world. The interaction between cognition and estrangement, aided by the novum, allows the reader to build and understand the fictional world. For example, in *The War of The Worlds* (1898), the description of Martians as evolved beings who have overcome the need to ingest solid food and rely only on blood for sustenance classifies them as the "novum" that leads to cognitive estrangement. Similarly, in *The Memory of Elephants*, the memo-scan is an invented device that enables Homi to access the memories of his immediate family, dead ancestors, and other members of his community, which enables him to chart the history of the Parsi community. The memo-scan is therefore a novum. Suvin's conceptualisation suggests that the novum "totalizes" all aspects of the work in such a way that it is "able to effect a change in the whole universe of the tale, or at least crucially important aspects of it" (Metamorphosis 64). In this case, the novum's presence is a hegemonic, cohesive current that is the driving force behind the narrative. However, Istvan

Csicsery-Ronay Jr. suggests that an increasing number of texts have started employing more novums due to "inter-layered narrative arcs" (*Seven Beauties* 62). Suvin's theory has also been adopted by Suparno Banerjee to examine Anglophone Indian SF. He focuses on the dialectical processes involved in the definition of cognitive estrangement, suggesting that this estranging function reveals its affinity for the "concepts of authority and subversion" ("Other Tomorrows" 10). He proposes that this function allows it to explore alternate systems that might have the potential to subvert dominant systems, thereby effecting a dialectic approach (12). Banerjee's postcolonial engagement with Suvin's theory also validates its utility. My attempt to understand SF through the element of the novum is meant to approach SF with respect to changes in contemporary reality. This will provide another method to understand the genre in India.

The link between contemporary reality and the genre must be understood against a cultural and social background. I use Damien Broderick's conception of the "mega-text" – a repository of themes, icons, and tropes – to suggest that these are essentially novums that function as intertext to help readers negotiate the various elements present in the novel (143–46). In addition to drawing its strength from the mega-text, the novum also has a cultural aspect, drawn from the emerging techno-scientific culture. David Bell suggests that "culture"

> can refer to *products* (sometimes called texts, even when they're paintings, cakes or personal stereos), *practices* (singing, gardening, texting, sometimes called lived cultures), *institutions* (museums, broadcasters, governments – bodies that produce and regulate what counts as culture) and *theories* (ways of understanding the other three; we might also include methods here, in terms of ways of finding things out about culture). (3)

This definition includes all practices that emerged with the inclusion of technology in daily life. Science and technology are not insular forces that determine reality; they have become part of reality (8–10).

Therefore, George Slusser's proposition that "all SFs are not equal" is significant, as each culture has reacted to scientific thought and advances in different ways (28). Since scientific thought has an indelible influence on SF, it follows that its degree of integration in a culture would have also exerted a considerable influence upon the genre. Similarly, Csicsery-Ronay suggests that there can be as many SFs as there are "theories of culture" ("SF" 388). This implies that scientific advancements, understanding, and temperament have an indelible influence on culture and society and, by extension, SF. I propose that *Harvest* meets at the intersection of these aspects, exploring how a culture interacts with invasive technological changes. I use *Harvest* as an example of the intermediary novels that turn their gaze inward to redirect attention and engage with Indian society and culture. This point of intersection and inwardness provides the cultural aspect to the novum. Csicsery-Ronay suggests that there is a need to broaden the scope of the genre, as different cultures also precipitate different ways of perceiving, conceptualising, and representing. This ensures that the determining properties of the genre will also need regeneration ("What Do We" 481). Thus, researchers and critics need to revise their

understanding of the novum to competently assess how Indian science fiction perceives and portrays the changes taking place in society.

The above discussion provides a background of postcolonialism in SF, the importance of Suvin's theory, the need to include corresponding scientific and technological changes, and the need to reassess approaches to the genre. I suggest a revision of the definition of the novum against this background. I propose that the novum can refer to the inclusion of those new elements, either invented, innovated, modified, or adapted, different from the reader's empirical reality, that may or may not be supplied with a logical explanation. The implication is that the processes and phenomena occurring in the "zero world" may be altered in the fictional universe, but this alteration would be rationally treated. I propose that the novums exist along a spectrum, based on the presence or absence of a supplementary explanation. This new interpretation of the novum also includes the ways that social, cultural, and political forces have been substantially altered in the text. These elements are naturalised – that is, portrayed as organic entities of the textual landscape – but are defamiliarising for readers because those elements differ from their reality. Thus, these are the "new" elements operating, and functioning as units of world-building, in Indian SF. These novums exist along a spectrum in terms of integration with other elements of the narrative, helping to transform the atmosphere of the fictional universe.

I exemplify these claims using Harvest, a dystopic play set in a futuristic Mumbai, in the year 2010. Globalisation instituted by the first world has enabled systematic, sanctioned, and legal exploitation of people and resources from third-world countries. Padmanabhan projects universal patterns of exploitation that have gradually ossified due to globalisation. The play opens with Om finally securing a job with InterPlanta, as a live Donor who will "sell" his organs to a Receiver in the first world. This organisation controls not just Om's lifestyle but also his family's. They install a Contact Module, which enables communication with the Receiver, Ginni. Ginni's concerns about the health of the Donor propels her to issue dictates about Om's nutrition and sanitation. The relationship between the Donor and the Receiver represents the skewed economic relationship of every third-world country with the first world, especially the United States. When the Guards from InterPlanta arrive to take Om for the operation to donate his organs, he loses his nerve and instead allows the Guards to mistake his brother, Jeetu, as the Donor. Jaya, his wife, is agonised by this horrendous error but is unable to convince Om and Ma of the consequences. Om's arguments with Jaya after this are not because of his guilt but because of his jealousy over Jeetu's ability to mentally experience Ginni's images exclusively. Ma, on the other hand, seems to have dissociated herself from reality by choosing to physically immerse herself in the SuperDeluxe VideoCouch. In the final act, Jaya's listless existence is interrupted by Virgil, the real Receiver, who adopts Jeetu's body to convince Jaya to be impregnated by his sperm. The play ends with Jaya's refusal to comply with Virgil's demands.

The play brings together a wide variety of "challenges facing mankind in the 21st century", the theme of the Onassis Award it received in 1996. It presents a frightening scenario wherein people are forced either to sell their organs or to sell their bodies for sexual services. Shital Pravinchandra also notes how the play explores the relationship between first-world and third-world countries wrought by the process of globalisation, in which the "digital and biomedical

technologies of late capitalism" (88) can lure the poor and deprived into "making money" from organ harvesting (as opposed to earning it through labour). Pravinchandra suggests that globalisation has engaged the third world in multiple areas of production, including reproduction, to satisfy the consumption needs of the first world. Moreover, the contractual agreement between the two parties is enforced through the Contact Module, which functions as both a communication device and a surveillance system. The presence of the global multinational corporation and the merging of the human and the machine through Jeetu, Ma, Ginni, and Jaya has led critics to suggest that *Harvest* shares overlapping concerns with cyberpunk theory and culture. In a similar vein, Suchitra Mathur examines how *Harvest* reworks and rewrites the differential experience of the "cyborg" between the first and the third world by exposing how power differences produce a "disjointed experience" that, rather than highlight the latter's concerns, aggravates their subordination (128). She suggests that there is a difference between the cyborg Virgil and the cyborg Jeetu, as the former has chosen to be this way while the latter is forced and then seduced to fulfil Virgil's needs.

Banerjee raises similar concerns by proposing that Indian SF has a contradictory stance with respect to the subversive potential embodied by the cyborg ("Ruptured" 58–59). He proposes that the transformation of Ma and Jeetu into cyborgs indicates the bioviolence stemming from the use of technologies that "condemns them within an ideology of submission and commoditization, not much different from earlier modern forms" 63). Banerjee echoes this proposition in an in-depth study of cyberpunk in India wherein he suggests that the cyberpunk ethos espoused by the West undergoes several transformations in Indian SF in the form of "subaltern discourses, sometimes as humanistic condemnation of the post-human, and sometimes as postmodern mimicry of western cyberpunk" ("India" 408). He suggests that *Harvest* opposes the cyborg, and therefore the "cyber" aspect, through Jaya, who uses her own body to resist being artificially impregnated (410–11). These studies suggest that *Harvest* replicates the coloniser-colonised relationship between the first and the third world, albeit using a different set of tools. These studies reveal the futility of simply adopting Western outlooks and theories into an Indian setting. They also expose the multilayered thematic concerns in the play and vividly detail the implications of Padmanabhan's vision. This paper suggests that the play does not just discuss globalisation as it would any other theme; instead, Padmanabhan renders globalisation as a novum through the lens of organ trade and medical tourism. Globalisation is purported to be an economic force brought into the third world by the first world, especially the United States. The all-encompassing phenomenon affects all spheres of life – i.e., social, cultural, environmental, political, and economic – and especially hurts the poor.

Harvest tracks globalisation through new and advanced medical technologies developed and used to profit from marginalised sections. In the empirical world, the onset of globalisation introduced numerous advanced medical technologies. However, these medical technologies, unevenly distributed between the public and private sectors, harmed the poor and marginalised the most. India used these opportunities to promote medical tourism, with the active support and encouragement of both the government and the private sector. Thus, better health care, affordable mainly to the

corporate, private sector, led to an increase in the overall cost of health care; *Harvest* illustrates this phenomenon. As a result, only a specific section of the elite population could take advantage of these services; public health care systems lagged, but medical tourism prospered (Godwin 3981). "Medical tourism" is a controversial term and has invited much skepticism from professionals in the medical field, because the "romantic" packaging conceals the anxieties and worries of the patients and their families (Godwin 3981). Nevertheless, effective marketing and advertising, as well as effective enforcing agents of globalisation, ensured the promotion of medical tourism. Several third-world countries had started using their medical facilities to attract foreign patients who found the health care in their own countries to be unacceptably expensive (Reddy and Qadeer 70; Godwin 3981). Although India began these marketing efforts later than several other Asian countries, it did not lag in its efforts to promote itself as the newest and best medical-tourism destination. The Indian government began promoting itself in 2004, formulating laws, rules, and regulations that enabled the expansion of medical tourism as a trade practice (Reddy and Qadeer 70–71).

In Padmanabhan's introduction to *Harvest,* she remarks that the idea for *Harvest* came from reports she had read about organ trade in India. She envisions a scenario in which globalisation has led to extreme inequalities in the distribution of wealth and the uneven development of the country. She demonstrates how pre-existing inequalities have interacted with the capital infused from the first world to generate more inequalities. She chooses medical tourism, demonstrated through legally sanctioned organ trade, to illustrate one of the impacts of globalisation. In this portrayal, globalisation is not very different from India's experience of British imperialism. The organ trade in the play has become a well-regulated and thriving industry. InterPlanta is an organisation that specialises in organ trade by mediating between the Donors from the third world and the Receivers from the first world. The organisation's infrastructure can assess "six thousand" candidates simultaneously: Om says, "We were standing all together in that line. And the line went on and on – not just on one floor, but slanting up, forever. All in iron bars and grills. It was like being in a cage shaped like a tunnel. All around, up, down, sideways, there were men" (Padmanabhan 1). The mechanised recruitment process has been refined to eliminate "unhealthy" candidates. Om reveals that at the end of this process, the organisation selected only a few people. This indicates both the stringency of the process and the miniscule population of healthy individuals. The organisation regulates not just Om's lifestyle but also his family's. Ginni's insistence on the installation of a private washroom, the control over nutrition, and most importantly, the access to decent clothes and health care indicate how globalisation forces its way into people's lives. It is portrayed as indirectly controlling an individual's choices, including choices related to the individual's family.

Padmanabhan envisions a highly exploitative and intrusive form of medical tourism. The scenario envisioned here corresponds to the authentic situation of organ transplantation in India since the 1970s. This unregulated industry flouted norms and resorted to practices so unhealthy that they generated a huge international outcry (Shroff 348–49). As a result, in 1994 the Government of India passed the Transplantation of Human Organ Act, which limited organ donation amongst family members and made deceased donation a legal option only with the

registration of brain death[3]. Padmanabhan's conception of organ trade through medical tourism suggests that globalisation has started exploiting not just natural but also human resources. Medical tourism as envisioned in the play is tailored to meet the expectations and demands of the foreign consumer. First-world Receivers do not need to travel to avail themselves of the necessary resources. There is an implicit assumption that scientific advancement has enabled organ storage and transportation over extremely long distances.

The extrapolation of this kind of globalisation of the health-care sector serves as a novum. It has been normalised in the fictional universe as a naturally ensuing phenomenon. This kind of characterisation of the phenomenon leads to defamiliarisation for readers because it differs from their corresponding empirical reality. Here, the "new" is not an invented device, but the naturalising of this intensified phenomenon in the text. The kind of scenario envisioned by Padmanabhan is an exacerbation of an extant occurrence/event/incident in the "zero world"[4]. Padmanabhan's treatment of globalisation suggests that organ trade through medical tourism can transform all aspects of life. The rational treatment of this phenomenon makes it more plausible for the reader. Om's frustration over a lack of jobs implies rapidly changing economic conditions. His enrolment as a Donor is a reason that manifests these changing conditions. Thus, organ trade through medical tourism (a result of globalisation) can be considered one of the building blocks in the alternate reality of the fictional universe.

Another novum in the play is the Contact Module, a device suspended from the ceiling that enables communication and surveillance. This Contact Module fulfills all the criteria of a novum described above. It is a new element that is rationally treated but is not supplied with an explanation, and it is used to build the fictional universe in the play. This device displays the face of the Receiver, Ginni, who is described as having a "young woman's face, beautiful in a youthful, glamorous, First World manner" (Padmanabhan 1.2). Padmanabhan states that she had made a conscious attempt to withhold "cultural signifiers" in the play to make it more representational of the skewed relationship between third-world and first-world countries that enforces globalisation. She also observes in her introduction to *Harvest* that whereas Om and his family are often appropriated to suit the location and culture where the play is being performed, Ginni's image always remains the same.

I suggest that the Contact Module signifies more than communication between different parts of the world and a mode of surveillance (as noted by several researchers discussed above). I suggest that the manner of this communication replicates a television screening an advertisement. The Contact Module functions like a television screen, switched on with a remote: "GUARD 2 moves over to the CONTACT MODULE and points a remote at it. There are musical notes and clicks. The polygon stirs and lights up" (Padmanabhan 1.1). This novum symbolises the seductive power of images, which help to enforce globalisation in third-world countries. The image has emerged as a powerful force in contemporary, post-modern culture. In India, the advertising industry

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[3] As quoted in Shroff's essay.

[4] Suvin uses the term "zero world" to refer to the author's empirical reality, which serves as a reference point for the author to construct new worlds and for the reader to comprehend these worlds.

boomed after the recession of 1991, leading to increased competition amongst multinational corporations (Ciochetto 159). Clients and advertising agencies preferred to advertise on television rather than in print due to the low literacy rate in the country (160); this indicates the importance of advertising in the form of images. It also reflects a gradual turn towards the formation of a more obvious visual culture. Judith Williamson suggests that visual imagery in advertisements was used to communicate specific values, attitudes, and ideas, and that the messages attached to the commodities played a significant role for consumers (Preface). This indicates that products are sold based on not only on use value but also on brand value (beyond the product's utilitarian function). Several case studies demonstrate that brands like McDonalds, SunSilk, and Lux had also started using cultural messages to make economic gains (see especially O'Barr, 8–25).

Leiss, Kline, and Jhally suggest that advertising is an "integral part of modern culture" as advertisements are attached with social meanings that help the consumer to navigate through society and social relationships (7). The embedding of social meanings within commodities helps individuals to mediate relationships in society and construct their own identity. Thus, advertisements manufacture their own "systems of meaning" that percolate in society and manifest in different aspects of interpersonal relationships. David Harvey echoes this proposition by suggesting that the acceleration in consumption patterns due to acceleration in turnover time has led to the commodification of the image in the post-modern world. The image, like any other commodity, develops its systems of meanings and represents certain notions, which are used to manipulates tastes and desires (287–90).

In the play, Ginni's appearance as a "first-world woman" is associated with certain representations not just of glamour, but of riches, security, and stability in a world overrun by instabilities. Jeetu is ready to give up parts of his body to be a part of Ginni because the images projected in his mind are bright and seductive: "JEETU: (*behaving as if he is standing very close to someone, following her around as she moves out of his reach*) You need some more parts of me?" (Padmanabhan 3.1). The brief glimpse of her image as "so young! And beautiful" and "wearing almost nothing!" (3.1) convinces Jeetu to "see" her again, as the image signifies treasures. Om, Ma, and Jeetu are seduced because the image provides a break from their dreary existence; moreover, Ginni's promises of a better standard of living are inherent in her image. Douglas Crimp suggests that "mass advertising wants to disguise the directorial mode as a form of the documentary" in order to resemble reality (179). The image projects this reality as both enticing and accessible. Graham Murphy and Lars Schmeink suggest that the emergence of a new visual culture in the postmodern age that is drawn from new media technologies lent itself to a "literary cyberpunk imaginary" that took on a variety of forms such as the computer (24). Even Scott Bukatman suggests that cyberpunk uses the visual medium to understand cyberspace, performs "an act of abstraction and intensification" that captures the fluidity and fragmentation of the new "corporate, physical, cyberspatial space", and incorporates and signifies the unequal "world orders" (18–19). Therefore, the imagery invoked in cyberpunk seems to circulate between visuality and virtuality, observed in Ginni's interaction with Jeetu.

Jean Baudrillard suggests that meanings disappear in images due to the heavy weight accorded to representation. Ideally, images represent a referential

object, but as simulacra, they "invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction" to such an extent that they precede reality ("Evil" 13). Thus, images blur the boundaries between the real and the imaginary. In the play, Ginni is revealed to be a simulation, a "computer-generated wet-dream" that is meant to disguise the real Receiver, Virgil. This deceit allows the computer to cross-check details and build a relationship with the Donor and the family so that the Receiver does not have to tax himself emotionally. The hidden vantage point also accords a privileged position to the Receiver, enabling him to observe silently and manipulate the situation to his advantage later. Virgil's appearance as Jeetu towards the end of the play is a case in point. Additionally, this appearance leads not just to the images bleeding into each other but to the identities merging as well; even reality is suspect here. Om, Ma, and Jeetu mistake the imaginary for the real because it leads to tangible results in the form of benefits like a personal washroom, better clothes, and a steady supply of food. Ginni's image masks the absence of basic reality and projects the imaginary as real. This is a simulation of reality, which Baudrillard describes as the realm of the hyper-real. Thus, in addition, Ginni's image also regulates their experience of reality. Veronica Hollinger suggests that cyberpunk's attention to the "outside", rather than the "inside", indicates its awareness about the "era of hyperreality" (37–38). The careful construction of Ginni's image is a simulacrum that conceals the grim reality of globalisation.

Padmanabhan seems to subscribe to Baudrillard's vision of this realm of hyper-reality, wherein the reality principle has disappeared and things merely simulate reality ("Evil Demon" 196–97). In this hyper-real world, seduction and easy compliance reach their apotheosis when Ma physically immerses herself in the SuperDeluxe VideoCouch, another novum. This device enables viewers to completely immerse themselves into the container that flashes video images while taking care of all bodily functions. Baudrillard proposes that consumers give themselves up to the seductive power of the mass media – television, advertisements, films, magazines, and newspapers – and allow the messages of the medium to invade all aspects of their lives, dismissing the boundaries between the public and private spheres ("Ecstasy of" 126–29). Ma's immersion and Om's jealousy over Jeetu's ability to participate in Ginni's private life, through the images beamed inside his mind illustrate the attractive power of this realm of hyper-reality.

In such a situation, Jaya's demand for Virgil to leave the simulation is her weapon to wrestle back power. She demands his presence to reinject realness and referentiality in the social world and return to the reality principle, saying that she wants "real hands touching me. I want to feel a real weight upon me!" (Padmanabhan 3.2). Her subsequent commands are nothing less than directives, commanding Virgil to say her name correctly and meet her only through the real world.

The use of a cyberpunk ethos and the notion of hyper-reality, created by the proliferation of simulacra, sheds light on how the image (through advertising) has begun to broker cultural and social meanings. The analysis of Ginni's image indicates this development in contemporary reality. *Harvest* is a prime example of how these "intermediary" science-fiction works had begun to establish an independent tradition by negotiating between old and new hierarchies, a result first of imperialism and then of globalisation (sometimes referred to as "neo-imperialism"). Each novum in the play adds an extra layer

that helps to build the fictional world. Additionally, this fictional world intensifies the echoes of problematic scenarios in the empirical world. The integration and cohesiveness of various elements in the play signify one of the ways that world-building takes place in Indian SF; each of these novums presents open-ended implications while successfully altering the socio-cultural atmosphere in the play by creating a comprehensive, alternative reality.

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