

## **An Eco-anarchism analysis of Manjula Padmanabhan's *The Island of Lost Girls***

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### **Abstract**

Manjula Padmanabhan is a science fiction writer who started a new trend in Indian English novels writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She is a distinguished playwright, artist and fiction writer. She is known as India's first woman cartoonist. *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015) is one of the most beautiful creations of Manjula Padmanabhan. The novelist writes in the tradition of dystopia of H G Wells and Aldous Huxley. The novel, *The Island of Lost Girls*, reflects many imaginary enclaves where gender based identities have been created on the basis of power play and sex ratio: male only and female only. Such enclaves are gendered in their construction: and define the identities, gender, sex and sexuality of the residents. Both of such enclaves are technologically equipped and have controlled natural means of production and development. All natural phenomena have been denaturalized and regulated with technologically produced artificial body organs and elements. In these enclaves all that is natural and ecological has been made artificial. Technology has destroyed ecological system of the enclaves where no natural growth takes place. Here, power politics defines pleasure, manners of dressing, development of body organs, sexual preference (most of the times, compulsive or forced), masculinity and femininity, homosexuality and heterosexuality, pervasiveness and alike.

**Keywords-** Anarchism, Transvestite, Patriarchal

Eco-anarchism is a theory which deals with environmental destruction in this materialistic world. It is a branch of anarchist idea which argues that culture, with domestication, is responsible for ecological extermination and human degradation. Several strands of green thinking maintain that technology is incapable of a sustainable relationship with non-human Nature because technology has a growth imperative while the earth is finite. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century where the whole world is facing a huge problem of globalization, people started to demolish the beauty of nature. We are doing it because we want to extend our domination on

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the whole world. We want to control the whole universe by using technology that has become the cause of destruction. As we know that Nature that gives us pleasant surroundings to lead our lives ease and comforts is one of the most beautiful creation of the Almighty.

Manjula Padmanabhan's *The Island of Lost Girls* is a sequel to her first novel *Escape* (2008). It follows Meiji and her uncle, Youngest, out of the Forbidden Country twenty years later. Eco-anarchists have denoted nuclear devices and now the Red Sea has become Poisoned Sea. Ice caps have melted. It is a highly imagined world, profuse with drones, sentient animals and technological marvels and built around the twin helix of violence and sexual identity. Here, women suffer unspeakable mutilation and violation. Only the Island, run by a group of powerful women, is a place of refuge-off-limits for everyone except women and transsexuals. The island represents the struggle to find solutions, via technology, in a world that has been brought to the edge of destruction by technology. The women of the island are revolutionaries in their own right: powerful, creative and idealistic. But it is far from a perfect place. Manjula Padmanabhan has depicted the place that is known as the female zone. It is a place where female refugees come for their treatment. Padmanabhan does not depict the Island as an ideal place. It is a place where girls are protected by the Mentor of the island. She has created these luminous and mysterious enclaves that are beyond the conventional scene. Youngest, a male character of the novel, wants to escape his daughter Meiji from the misogynistic zone. Meiji, the female protagonist of the novel, has been brought up as a boy and given artificial male organs. She has to hide her identity in the misogynistic zone. Youngest also has to perform himself as a transvestite to protect the life of Meiji. He has to fulfill sexual desire of General who made him a sex slave. The General is pleased because he has power over the transvestite. Padmanabham depicts power of General as following:

Yasmine is my own private creation, my personal sex-machine. His private parts were restructured to suit my needs. He was perfect as a man, gorgeously muscled, tall, dense, powerful. But now he is a man who, while relating his masculine nature, nevertheless has the body-parts of a Vermin and-ah!-now he is beyond superb... You cannot know what delight it brings to me to be able to bend another being such as myself- my equal in physique, in performance, in intellect- to bend such a being to perform as a Vermin, within the body of a Vermin. (*The Island of Lost Girls* 82)

It can be said that Padmanabhan has created such a world where gender or gender relationship can be transformed in the absence of women. By using his power, General tries get sadistic pleasure by sexually exploiting Youngest as well as other transvestites. Youngest is compelled to do so because he wants to save the life of his daughter. When Meiji reaches to the Island, she doesn't feel comfortable because she is very anxious to see more such places which are luminous and advanced in technology. She tries to search her own identity whether she is male or female because she is grown with feelings and sensibility of

masculinity. She finds that this new Island is more dreadful and mysterious place. The Mentor of the Island was conditioning the minds and physical structures of females' bodies. In this female zone, women are able to discard the social code and patriarchal rules from the mind of those females who unfortunately spent their time in misogynistic zone. The Island is scientifically so advanced that it has capability to make female bodies stronger both physically and mentally.

Manjula Padmanabhan has described that the advancement of science and technology has brought destruction with them. Places are being destroyed by eco-anarchists. Padmanabhan has depicted environmental degradation as follow:

Twenty-two years had passed since eco-anarchists had denoted underground nuclear devices at the mouth of the Suez Canal. Their aim had been to hasten the collapse of the petroleum industry. But the explosions punctured the Earth's mantle, spewing molten magma in a furious, untamable geyser that, when it subsided, became the glowering crack now known as the Peace Gorge. In the course of three years for which the geyser had spewed, the Suez Canal vanished into oblivion and the erstwhile Red sea was renamed the Poisoned Sea...The world's nation had melted away, too, to be reborn as the Whole World union, the WWU. International travel had trickled to a halt prior to the collapse of the oil industry, but under the WWU the planet was split into four exclusive enclaves. No trade, no travel arrangements, no direct communications, no relocation were possible between the enclaves. Youngest already knew this. Which was why, he could not afford to reveal his origin. (11)

Padmanabhan has described how nations have been replaced by the Whole World Union and the whole planet has been divided into four enclaves. People are unable to communicate from the people of one zone to the people of another. General has spread out the clones to collect information from one place to another and one person to another. The dominating place of these enclaves is known as 'The Zone' which patriarchal society comprising of the General and his Clones want to make a womanless zone. Women have been replaced by transvestites. Youngest as well as other powerless men has become sex slave of the General, who is the ruler of the misogynistic zone and compels others to behave like Vermin.

In this novel, Padmanabhan has presented some of the most disturbing analyses of masculinity, gender inequality and gender hierarchies. Meiji is very anxious to know her gender. Youngest is compelled to change his gender to save the life of Meiji. In this novel, there is only one person who is certain about his gender that is General who thinks that women are not human. He considers women as 'Vermin' not more than that. The novel also deals with feminine perspective. Here Meiji is seen as a helpless girl who wants to be relocated from this misogynistic zone to the Island by her father. The life of Meiji has

become so complex that she is not able to talk, think, communicate, and even breathe openly. Every person is considered as weak as women who are related to Meiji. She is forced to live her life as an insect. Padmanabhan has depicted a cruel or tyrannical misogynistic zone where patriarchy is at the peak. The world where clones, tansies, and drones perform elaborate transaction. Meiji thinks that the place is like a prison and she is known as a monster in the misogynistic zone. Youngest with Aila, another transie, faces a lot of problems while travelling unfamiliar territory to transport Meiji to haven i.e. the Island.

In the novel *The Island of Lost Girls*, Manjula Padmanabhan wants to represent how environment has collapsed by using technology. The lap of nature is disfigured by creating artificial things which have taken the place of human. Places are traced or controlled by creating artificial clones and drones. The soul of human beings is exterminating while non-human governs the whole community. People are controlled by inserting chip inside their bodies. In the beginning of the novel, we find that Youngest is strolling an unknown place which is surrounded by clones. He cannot communicate anyone because of the domination of clones and drones. He is surrounded by other people who are not certain about their destination and their identity. People are treated as prisoners and replaced from one place to another. They are compelled to follow the direction which is given by authority. They are compelled to lose their identity and behave like sex slaves. They are living their lives like a machine which is controlled and directed by General. Padmanabhan depicts General's domination in the following words:

Announcements were made in three languages following one after the other in strict rotation: Unida, Arabic and ModKung. As they advanced up from one floor to the next, advertising jingles began squawking from floating speaker: cloning services, prosthetic advice, beast management. Bright holograms flashed on and off offering the latest in swords, spears, double-handed axes and steel-tipped whips. Images from the playing fields of the area known as the Zone flickered on the walls: severed heads, twitching limbs, slimy mounds of gut. (05)

In the novel, we find not only human beings are controlled but animals are also operated by technology. In the female zone, we see that Meiji is replaced from one place to other riding on the lizards which are operated by the Mentor. In the Island, the domination of technology has benumbed the females as well as animals. We see the domination of technology as follow:

There was no question of sharing air with these animals. Their brain functions, however, were malleable. They thought in simple patterns, with short decision-trees. The challenge for the riders lay in maintaining control over the animal's brain without losing sight of their own mission. That was why there were two riders. The Primary controlled the lizard, while the Backer controlled the Primary. (332)

On the basis of above allusions, one can say that the novel, *The Island of Lost Girls*, deals with the theme of gender identity, trans-sexuality, identity crisis, feminism, eco-feminism etc. All these burning concepts have been incorporated by the novelist in this novel. Manjula Padmanabhan has depicted that those who are oppressed, tortured, and exploited by sexism and misogyny, will be afraid with the world of Youngest, Meiji, and Aila. She has created a doubtful world where Meiji searches her existence as well as identity. Youngest and Aila are compelled to live their lives as transvestites. General, the most powerful person of the misogynist zone, starts to control the whole zone by creating clones and drones. He uses power to demonize over transvestites, females and the whole environment. The development of technology has become the destruction of environment. Places are disfigured by Whole World Union. The world which is created by Padmanabhan is terrible, repulsive and strange. It is like a prison where nobody has freedom to think, live, and even breathe freely.

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