



Call for Papers

Two-Day National Seminar

on

“The Posthuman Turn: Trajectories and Possibilities”

(4-5 March, 2024)

Organized by

Department of English, University of Kashmir



“We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism.” Ihab Hassan’s proclamation of the inevitable end of humanism and the birth of the posthuman subject points to the staggering pace at which the idea of the human has been transformed and is in need of redefinition. As a form of contemporary critical discourse, posthumanism rejects the notion of human exceptionalism and autonomy and replaces it with a deeper sense of ‘entanglement and relationality with the systemic processes of socialnature.’ It also stresses that the singularity of humanity is a dangerous trope which prevents multi-species eco-justice. Secondly, in posthumanist discourse, the de-centering of the human is necessitated by a critique of the term ‘human’ itself. As Rosi Braidotti reminds us, “humanism’s restricted notion of what counts as the human is one of the keys to understand how we got to a post-human turn at all.” As a legacy of post-Enlightenment thought, traditional Western humanism’s ideological bias has come under attack from manifold perspectives. In fact, from a philosophical point of view, posthumanism can be seen as humanism becoming more self-conscious of its ideological underpinnings. Posthumanism also branches out into transhumanism, the blurring of boundaries between the human and the non-human accelerated by the modification of human bodies. Cloning, robotics and genetic modification raise questions of an epistemological rethink of human subjectivity and agency. Reformulating and repositioning the human, posthumanism pleads for a paradigmatic shift in the way we know and understand ourselves by positing an anti-humanistic and anti-Anthropocene world order.

In her acclaimed work *The Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) Donna Haraway argues from a critical posthumanist-feminist framework, and draws attention to the human-machine interface which further complicates the boundaries of the human subject. She states ‘by the late twentieth century, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism, in short, we are cyborgs, the cyborg is our ontology, it gives us our politics.’ Francis Fukuyama in *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnological Revolution* (2002) highlighted the threat that biotechnology poses to human nature. Arguing from a liberal humanist position against the culture of uninhibited individualism and capitalism driven technoscience, Fukuyama warned that the future advances in science would be exploited by those in power to such an extent that would spell disaster for a large

part of humanity. Jurgen Habermas in *The Future of Human Nature* (2003) points out the near future possibility where humans can control the genetic makeup of their offspring. Similarly, Yuval Noah Harari in his popular book *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2017) argues that AI will soon take over the reins of control and the human species will be transformed beyond recognition. Theorists also point out the nexus between state, technology and capitalism which in turn breeds the 'Capitalocene' and a Necropolitical world order which not only makes radical transformation but hastens global extinction risk. However, since technological advancement is asymmetrical, how does the global South fit in within this paradigm? What strategies are required to pluralize the posthumanist discourse by including perspectives from non-first world cultures? Can posthumanism benefit from a decolonial approach?

Further, how has artistic production responded to this crisis in the human? Since the last three decades, literature, film and other media have grappled intensely with themes of human-engineered catastrophe, genetic mutation, species extinction etc. Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy* (2013) deals with the theme of complete extinction of the human race and creation of a new posthuman race named 'the children of Crakes' or 'Crakers', after the scientist who engineers its production. Similarly, contemporary dystopian science fiction and films deal with the themes of mutated human species, environmental catastrophe, post-nuclear annihilation etc. Octavia Butler's fiction has been acclaimed for its transformative vision of a "post-humanity", altered earth. Pleading from an anti-capitalist and anti-racist perspective, she posits "Symbiogenesis" in which human evolution is reliant on other species and the environment-the destruction of humanity is not the millennial end but the beginning in evolutionary teleology of inter-species becoming.

More importantly, how are the humanities to respond to this radically changed scenario? Is it viable or even possible to go back to or revive a literary humanism as a counterfoil to the disintegrating forces of posthuman culture? If, as Katherine Hayles says, 'the posthuman subject is also a post conscious subject,' what would be the implications of such a view for literary studies which have traditionally been seen as most intimately connected to human consciousness? It can be argued that although posthumanism has challenged the notions of universal, transcendental human reason and literature is no longer viewed as a repository of timeless moral goodness, the need for an ethical perspective can never become irrelevant to the

humanities. Since posthumanism also challenges disciplinary boundaries, it opens up new possibilities of interaction between sciences and the arts. How can new critical perspectives such as ecocriticism, ecofeminism, ethical criticism, environmental humanities, digital humanities contribute to redefining the role of literary studies in a posthuman era?

The present seminar aims to explore the manifold dimensions of posthumanism in order to foster dialogue and debate around this crucial academic discourse. Papers are invited on – but not restricted to – the following areas:

- Posthumanism vs Humanism
- Posthumanism and the Anthropocene
- Posthumanism and Literary Representation
- Posthumanism and the Global South
- Posthumanism and Ecocriticism
- Posthumanism and the Digital Humanities
- Posthumanism and Feminism
- Posthumanism and Dystopia
- Posthumanism and Apocalypse
- Posthumanism and Theology

Venue

The two-day in-person seminar will be held at the University of Kashmir which is situated at Hazratbal, Srinagar. The campus is flanked by the beautiful Dal Lake and offers a breathtaking view of the Zabarwan hills. The university is around 9 kms away from Lal Chowk – the city center and 15 kms away from the Sheik-ul-Alam International Airport, Srinagar. Srinagar is well connected by air and road and participants are requested to book their tickets well in advance to reach Srinagar on 3rd March and leave by 6th March.

Accommodation

As far as possible, the department will try to accommodate the participants in the university guest house on shared basis. Breakfast, lunch and dinner will be provided at the guest house.

Weather

Srinagar can be slightly cold in early March. Outstation participants are requested to carry warm clothing.

Guidelines for Paper presentations

Original and unpublished research papers are solicited from academicians, research scholars and other professionals. Abstracts (with title) not exceeding 250 words should be sent at iffatmaqbool@uok.edu.in by the 1st of February, 2024. The full paper (approximately 3000 words) can be mailed by 26th of February, 2024. All submissions should have a certificate attached, stating that the article has neither been published nor presented in any seminar before. Each participant will get around 20 minutes for presentation which will be followed by 10 minutes of Q&A. The discretion for paper selection lies entirely with the organizing committee. Certificates of participation will be provided only to paper presenters.

Registration

On acceptance of the abstract, each participant will have to pay a registration fee in order to complete the registration process. Payment can be made via online transfer/NEFT. The details are as under:

Faculty: Rs 2000

Research Scholars: Rs 1000

Bank Account in the name of Department of English, University of Kashmir

Bank Account No: 0007040100057714

Bank Name: Jammu and Kashmir Bank

Branch: Hazratbal

IFSC Code: JAKA0NASEEM

MICR: 190051042

SWIFT Code: JAKAINBBSRI

Participants are required to send a screen shot of the payment transaction via WhatsApp on 9596651205.

Important dates

Deadline for abstract submission: 1st February, 2024

Intimation for paper acceptance: 5th February, 2024

Registration fee deadline: 10th February, 2024

Deadline for full paper submission: 26th February, 2024

For further queries contact

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Organizing Committee

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