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Articles

Posthumanist Possibilities: Rabindranath Tagore and Mahasweta Devi

Radha Chakravarty

In his poem "The World of Insects", Rabindranath Tagore admits that while admiring the beauty of leaves and flowers, he has been guilty of ignoring the insect life around him during his daily perambulations outdoors:

On one side, on the kamini bough,

The spider has hung its dewy fringe

On the other, in the garden at the road's edge,

Strewn with specks of red earth,

Is the ants' nest

Between them I make my way,

Morning and evening. …

In the midst of the universe, the little human world

Appears tiny, but it's not tiny after all.

Such, too, is that world of insects.

It doesn't really catch the eye,

Yet they exist at the heart of the created world. …

Through their midst I come and go,

Without hearing the sound of their ever-flowing

Stream of consciousness— …

In their silent sky, at this very moment,

Do tunes arise from touch, music from smell,

Unheard dialogues from mouths,

Unexpressed agony in movements?

I am human—

In my heart I know I have access to the whole world,

to the outer space of planets and comets.

No barriers remain.

But that spider world remained forever barred

to me,

The hearts of those ants remained veiled

forever from my view,

at the very edge of my world …[1]

Tagore's poem, published in 24 Bhadra 1339 BE (8 September 1932), records his profound recognition that the human gaze seeks out only those elements in our surroundings that appear attractive or useful, ignoring other forms of life that do not seem to have a direct bearing on our own. The lines articulate his anguish and guilt about the great disconnect between humans and the larger universe we inhabit. In acknowledging the urgent need to develop greater awareness of the environment of which we are an integral part, Tagore anticipates the ideas of posthumanist theorists such as Rosi Braidotti, who argues that we need to think beyond the *Anthropos* as a point of departure, to develop a post-anthropocentric vision, where "animals, insects, plants and the environment, in fact the planet and the cosmos as a whole are called into play" (66).

In this paper, with reference to two stories— "Bolai" (1928) by Tagore and "Salt" (1981) by Mahasweta Devi— I argue that these two narratives, rooted in specific South Asian contexts, can offer a potential source of inspiration for contemporary posthumanist thought. Focusing on the false division between the human and non-human, these stories express a worldview privileging relationality, responsibility and connectivity, embracing the non-human, but without eschewing the idea of human subjectivity and agency. The stories inspire us to consider that accepting the versions of

posthumanism that potentially neutralise the ethical, intellectual, social and agential role of the 'human' can also mean giving up our sense of history, values, judgement and critical faculty. The narratives also highlight that 'human' is not a singular term but one that contains heterogeneous multitudes.

Bolai

Tagore's discomfort with the anthropocentric view is evident in his story "Bolai", which he read out to the assembly at the first *briksharopan* (tree-planting) festival held in Santiniketan on 14 July 1928. Published in the Bengali journal *Prabasi* the same year, the story is about a motherless boy brought up by his Kaka and Kakima, his paternal uncle and aunt. Little Bolai feels an intuitive affinity with the natural world. There is a primal quality to this awareness: "This boy's age really goes back to that era, ten million years ago, when the future forests of this world had raised their birth-cry from the landmasses newly arisen from the womb of the sea" (Tagore, "Bolai" 180). Bolai's consciousness seems attuned to the voice of the universe: "The cry of the tree still resounds, in forest, mountain and field; in the branches and foliage of the tree, the mother earth's incessant refrain is heard: 'I will remain! I will continue to exist!' … Somehow, Bolai alone heard the utterance of that universal spirit, felt its resonance within his own bloodstream" (181). The boy finds joy in his contact with trees, plants, the soil and changing seasons, but socially he remains a quiet loner, a misfit, and an object of ridicule. His kaki treats him with sympathy and affection, but his kaka, the narrator of the story, fails to understand his nature.

The story centres upon Bolai's tender love for a *Shimul* sapling that sprouts unexpectedly in the garden. The presence of the sapling exasperates his kaka, who threatens to remove it: "'It's growing right in the middle of the pathway. When it's fully grown, it will create a nuisance, scattering cotton-fluff all around" (182). But Bolai's kaki pleads with her husband to spare the red silk cotton plant, which begins to flourish under the boy's loving care. Two

years later, Bolai is suddenly uprooted from his surroundings, when his father decides move him to a boarding school in Shimla before sending him away to study in England. After Bolai's departure, his beloved sapling, now growing into a *Shimul* tree, is uprooted too. It is his kaki who feels anguished at this double uprooting. When Bolai writes a letter requesting a recent photograph of the growing tree, she realizes with grief "[t]hat tree was the very image of Bolai after all. It was his twin spirit, his double" (184).

"Bolai" is replete with ideas that resonate with some versions of contemporary posthumanist theory. In *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019), for instance, Francesca Ferrando argues that there is a link between posthumanism, which ushers in plurality through the inclusion of subjugated human voices, and post anthropocentrism, which involves the inclusion of non-human voices. Tagore anticipates this idea in the figure of Bolai, the human "other" who also communicates with the non-human other. For Bolai talks to plants: "He is intensely eager to see new seedlings emerge into the light, raising their curled heads. … They are his ever-unfinished story. Those new-grown tender leaves—how can he express his sense of affinity with them? They seem eager to ask him some unknown question. Perhaps they ask, 'What is your name?' Or perhaps, 'Where has your mother gone?' 'But I don't have a mother,' Bolai answers silently." (179). Saikat Chakraborty argues that Bolai's conversation with the grass displaces the supremacy of logocentric language, and "de-centres this juggernaut of humanistic logos that entails universalized right over language".

Bolai not only talks to the grass, he identifies with it. "To him the grass cover did not seem like an immobile substance; he felt that this expanse of grass was a game that rolled on, rolled on for ever. Often he too would roll down that slope – becoming the grass, surrendering his whole body – rolling and rolling, the grass tips would tickle his neck and he would burst into peals of laughter" (178). According to Saikat Chakraborty, Bolai exemplifies Bruno

Latour's idea of the "sociology of associations" between humans and non-humans. In fact, Bolai seems to recognize a quality of sentience in the so-called inanimate world, "as if he could see the human beings within these giant trees. They said nothing, yet seemed to know everything. As if they were ancient dadamoshais, grandfathers from the age of 'once upon a time'" (179). The passage has an autobiographical ring. In his memoir *Jibansmriti*, Tagore recalls accompanying his father to the Himalayas as a little boy who roamed, fascinated, amongst the giant trees at Dalhousie, feeling the touch of their primordial spirit, and communing with them (Tagore, *Jibansmriti* 455). In 1926, Tagore wrote to Tejeschandra Sen: "My mute friends around my house are raising their hands to the sky, intoxicated with the love of light: their call has entered my heart … The stirrings of my heart are in the same tree-language: they have no defined meaning, yet many ages throb in them".[2]

The story of Bolai and the Shimul tree points to the false sense of disjunction that humans harbour in relation to the rest of the natural world. In his other writings too, Tagore insists that we exist as part of the natural world, hence our sense of morality is also ultimately derived from it: "We criticise Nature from outside when we separate it in our mind from human nature, and blame it for being devoid of pity and justice. … Nature appears as inimical to the idea of morality. But if that were absolutely true, moral life could never come to exist" (Tagore, *Thoughts* 36).

For Tagore, Nature is premised on what he calls reciprocity: "With the struggle for existence in Nature there is reciprocity. There is the love for children and for comrades; there is the sacrifice of self, which springs from love; and this love is the positive element in life" (Tagore 65). Bolai's plight, and the plight of the Shimul tree, suggest what can be lost when this reciprocity is gone. The responsibility for this, the story implies, rests with human beings. The key figure embodying this responsibility is the story's narrator, Bolai's kaka, who feels contempt for his nephew's uncommon

affinity with plants and trees, and callously threatens to destroy the Shimul sapling. It is his voice that describes to the reader Bolai's communion with trees and grass and his loving nurture of the growing sapling, yet he fails to comprehend the reality that he narrates. As Tapobrata Ghosh points out, "Outwardly the story of a boy in harmony with nature, 'Bolai' actually presents the adult man's ambiguous relationship with her" (28).

Through its explicit critique of the disjunction between humans and the natural world, the story implicitly advocates a worldview that has remarkable consonance with the ideas of contemporary posthumanists such as Francesca Ferrando, who argues that "Posthumanism is a philosophy which provides a suitable way of departure to think in relational and multi-layered ways, expanding the focus to the non-human realm in post-dualistic, post-hierarchical modes, thus allowing one to envision post-human futures which will radically stretch the boundaries of human imagination" (Ferrando, "Posthumanism" 30).

Salt

"Love" is the term used by Tagore to speak of reciprocity between human and non-human worlds. In *Imaginary Maps*, Mahasweta Devi also asserts the need for "a tremendous, excruciating, explosive love" for mainstream society to reach out to the tribal communities to understand and address their predicament in a changing world where their habitat and way of life has come under threat of extinction (Devi, *Imaginary* 196). "Salt" (1981) by Mahasweta Devi exemplifies this "explosive love."

The story is set in the tribal village Jhujhar next to the Palamau Reserve Forest, during the post-Emergency period. It focuses on the predicament of the tribals, who are forced into unpaid labour by the landowner Uttamchand, until the arrival of a new minister after the 1977 elections.[3] Led by the altruistic "youth workers" and Purti Munda, the tribals now challenge Uttamchand

and demand their rightful compensation. Uttamchand retaliates by blocking their supply of salt, a basic commodity essential for human health and survival. "Not by hand, or by bread, *nimak se marega*—I'll kill you by salt" (Devi, "Salt" 126). But salt, the text reminds us, is vital for the human body:

> Salt controls the fluids in the body and in the blood. If there's no salt the blood coagulation will increase and the blood will become thick. The heart will have trouble pumping this thickened blood, putting a pressure on the respiratory processes. Muscles will develop cramps. Moving about will become a strain. The bones and teeth will definitely rot. There'll be a general decay of the body. (135)

Deprived of salt, the tribals struggle for survival. In desperation, the tribal Purti Munda starts stealing salt from the salt lick meant for wild elephants in the forest. The story tracks Purti's encounter with Ekoa, the mighty, clever loner in a herd of elephants, as the two become rivals in the theft of salt. In the tragic ending of the story, Purti is trampled to death by the vengeful elephant. Ekoa in turn is declared a rogue elephant and shot by the authorities.

The language of the text sets up a parallel between Ekoa's plight and that of Purti, pitching their struggle for survival at a primordial, elemental level. There is an elemental quality in this representation of Ekoa, who stands for the forces of nature, stronger than humans, yet, in the present day, under threat from humans. The elephant appears as an almost mythical figure, larger than life. Seen silhouetted against the ancient Palamau fort in the heart of the forest at the dead of night, the figure of the menacing elephant seems to present a reductive view of human history in relation to the primordial landscape:

> [H]e would stand and wait on the white sand, in the dark, staring towards Jhujhar. The scene is symbolic. River, sands, sky, night, Palamau fort in the background, a lonely elephant. An immortal and peaceful picture. But the only difference is that the schemes

that were twisting about in the above elephant's brain did not leave much scope for releasing white doves. (142)

When outraged, Ekoa becomes an agent of primitive violence, vengefulness and retribution.

For both Purti and Ekoa, transgression comes at a price; for in human society, the loner is singled out for elimination because he doesn't fit in. Through the double tragedy of Purti Munda and the elephant, the story problematizes the question of justice, suggesting that man-made laws are not necessarily more just than the law of the jungle. The text uses satire, irony, history, science and myth to construct a scathing critique of social irresponsibility, suggesting that both animals and the tribal community have fallen victim to the forces of modernization and a market-driven economy. According to the official narrative, "it is proved finally that the inhabitants of Jhujhar can by no means be trusted" (Devi1 46). In 1871, the colonial Criminal Tribes Act had labelled certain tribes as criminal by nature. Even after Independence, this mindset continued to influence the attitude of the government, expressed in the 1959 'Habitual Offender Act' which marked tribals as potential criminals (Rangarajan 142).

The text also critiques certain forms of shallow environmentalism for relying on double standards masked by a fake idealism. The rhetoric of wildlife conservation suggests that in the official scale of things, animals are more important than tribals:

> The herbivorous animal needs salt, and now man steals even that! This unnatural act reminds them once more of how difficult it is to protect wild animals from the greed of humans. (Devi, "Salt" 146)

But when the animal fails to conform, he too is liquidated. "Without his knowing it, the *ekoa* is declared a '*rogue*', and because his death will not anger the herd, as he is a loner, a *commissioned* hunter shoots him dead" (146).

At the end of the story, the village headman reflects on the deaths of Purti and Ekowa, sensing, but unable to put into words, the injustices that have been meted out to the tribals and animals: "All this because of mere salt! They couldn't get salt. If they could buy salt, three men and one elephant would still be alive" (146). Uttamchand is cast as the "villain" of this story, but the rhetoric of the text indicates that the real blame lies in the system rather than any individual. "Someone else was responsible, someone else. The person who would not sell the salt? Or some other law? Some other system? The law and the system under whose aegis Uttamchand's refusal to sell salt is not counted as a crime?" (146). "This is not right" is all the tribal headman can say to the babus, before he and his people turn their backs and walk away from the scene (146). Through the reactions of the headman, who is unable to put his thoughts into words, the text highlights the dangers of oversimplifying such layered and complex issues. Likewise, through Purti's ambivalent relationship with the landscape and the animal world, the narrative interrogates the false stereotyping of the tribals as people who live in pure harmony with the world of nature. The altruistic idealism of the well-meaning youth worker is also satirised because of its inadequacy and shallowness in the face of these complex realities.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reads Mahasweta Devi through the prism of planetarity, which suggests that we are aliens on this planet, and only have it on loan. Spivak describes planetarity, as "an imperative to reimagine the subject as planetary accident … rather than global agents" (Spivak 339). Readers like Sneja Gunew (2015), Mary Louisa Cappelli (2023) and Auritro Majumdar (2017) draw on this idea of planetarity in their analytical reflections on posthumanism. According to Auritro Majumder, "planetarity conceptualizes the inseparability of human and natural history and offers an alternative to the anti-historicism, and misanthropy that has come to characterize posthuman thinking on the 'nature' question"

(Majumder 24). Cappelli points out, "Devi forces her readers to question humanity's place in our multispecies world— to question centuries of exploitative cultivation, political corruption and capitalism's subjugation of nature" (Cappelli 177). Sneja Gnew (85) says that planetarity gestures, not towards rights but towards *haq*, a constitutive birth right that confers responsibility to care for others. According to Gnew, the idea of rights implies a gulf between those who have rights and those who don't, but responsibility implies an ethics of care.[4] It is the failure of this ethics of care and responsibility that Mahasweta critiques in stories such as "Salt".

Devi's story can be read in relation to other writings from South Asia that critique the artificial divide between human and natural worlds that European imperialism has fostered. Swarnalatha Rangarajan (136) for instance compares Devi's forest narratives with those of Anita Agnihotri, arguing: "Ecocritical practices from the Global South interrogate the 'construction of ourselves *against* nature' (Huggan and Tiffin 6) and the material and ideological aspects of 'ecological imperialism' (Crosby 1986) that subalternise certain groups of people on account of their perceived closeness to 'nature' in addition to displacing local species and ecosystems".

In contrast to this contemporary scenario, Mahasweta's own memoir *Our Santiniketan* (2022) speaks of the legacy of Rabindranath Tagore, and his vision of harmonious co-existence of human and natural worlds as expressed in his educational institution Santiniketan during his own lifetime. Recalling with deep nostalgia the idyllic environment and educational values of Santiniketan where she studied as a little girl in the 1930s, and subsequently as a university student, she says: "[T]hey would plant in our minds the seeds of great philosophical ideals, like trees". The methods of teaching were unorthodox to say the least: "A work schedule, indeed! Identifying trees, raiding fruit trees, and in the rains, running towards the Kopai … all of us getting soaked together, learning how to swim as we plunged about in those red, muddy waters" (Devi,

Our 47). Contrasting this with the present day, Mahasweta laments: "Now, with every passing day, I see how humans destroy everything. Through the agency of humans, so many species of trees, vines, shrubs and grasses have vanished from the face of the earth – so many species of forest life! Aquatic creatures and fish, so many species of birds, have become extinct, lost forever. …[A] great calamity has befallen the natural world, at every level – in the world, in India, in every region of India. Today, using science and technology, it may be possible to build an edifice three hundred stories high. But the balance of nature cannot be restored" (Devi 93).

Conclusion

The ideas of Tagore live on through his inheritors, such as Mahasweta Devi. Both Tagore's "Bolai" and Mahasweta Devi's "Salt" use a dystopian narrative mode to make a plea for greater connectedness with our environment. Behind their sharp critique of human callousness, though, lies a utopian hope for redemptive transformation. In their creative practice, we can find the inspiration to think of alternative versions of posthumanism that do not posit the demise of the human but instead locate the human at the heart of our evolving reality. Some notions of the posthuman, especially theories of transhumanism, have proved controversial for their apparent privileging of the technological and mechanical above the human, but the writings of Tagore and Mahasweta suggest that literary posthumanism can also hold out the possibility of a more non-hierarchical, inclusive vision that regards materiality as well as language and semiotics as sources of discursive meaning. The materiality of trees, grass and the Shimul plant in "Bolai" and of salt in Mahasweta's story are instances of this possibility.

In "The Religion of the Forest" published in 1922, Tagore says: "We stand before this great world. The truth of our life depends upon our attitude of mind towards it … It guides our attempts to establish relations with the universe either by conquest or by union, either through the cultivation of power or through that of sympathy"

(Tagore 2007). He argues that when we are alienated from our world, we develop a mechanistic and exploitative attitude. "And not only this material universe, but human beings also, may be used as machines and made to yield powerful results" (Tagore, 2007). Tagore feels this attitude has been perfected by Western cultures. In contrast he speaks of the Indian concept of *Sachidananda*, which refers to three aspects of Reality that connect us with all that is around us: *sat*, the simple fact that things are, the relationship of common existence; *chit*, the fact that we know, the relationship of knowledge; and *Ananda*, the fact that we feel joy, the relationship of love. Unlike European imperialism, he says, "For us the highest purpose of this world is not merely living in it, knowing it and making use of it, but realizing our own selves in it through expansion of sympathy; not alienating ourselves from it and dominating it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect union" (Tagore 2007).

For both Tagore and Mahasweta Devi, as their creative practice demonstrates, the path to such realization lies through the human imagination and affect, or "expansion of sympathy". And therein, for readers like us, may lie some clues to the transformative, redemptive possibility of a reimagined posthumanism for our times.

Notes

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, "Keeter Sansar", *Punashcha*, Rabindra Rachanabali Vol.8, 273-4. Translation mine.

[2] Tagore, Preface to *Banabani*, p. 87, cited by Ghosh 2000, p. 4.

[3] The tribals' right to arable land in the forest had been taken away by Hindu traders following the Kole Revolt of 1831.

[4] Gunew (p.85) says that Spivak's argument suggests it is not up to the human subject to imagine the Other, for then a hierarchy immediately slides into place.

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Exiled Pativrata: Dynamics of Female Banishment in North Indian Folk Theatre *Saang*

Karan Singh and Jyoti Yadav

Pativrata

Pativrata, a Sanskrit compound comprising *pati*—a husband and *vrata*—a religious obligation, in its etymology, denotes a religious injunction upon a wife to be devotedly faithful to her husband. The references to *pativrata* as a divinely ordained condition of wife are markedly absent from Vedic literature, which portrays females as ritual companions and mistresses of the house. Shalini Shah, while asserting that the Vedic texts do not refer to the ideal figure of the *pativrata*, points out that there are multiple epithets used in the Vedic texts for wives such as "*patijusta* (wife loved by husband), *parivrkta* (forsaken wife), *patyanutta* (expelled wife), *patidvis* (hated by husband), *patirip* (wife who cheats on her husband) and *patighni* (who is the death of her husband)" (Shah 79). She further notes that "these earlier Vedic conceptions of wife, especially her conception as a *patighni*, were to be jettisoned forever, and replaced by the benign *pativatsala.* It is only in the epics that a systematic ideology of *pativrata dharma* was enunciated" (Shah 79-80).

The idea and ideals of *pativrata* seems to have germinated and fructified in puranic age, with allusions to it found in abundance in various puranas[1] and epics.[2] The expansion of settled life and a shift to agrarian society from an earlier nomadic one created a suitable socio-economic background for its inception in the society with a consequent rise of monogamy as an ideal condition of *grahstha*. While on the level of family, the ideals of *pativrata* ensured reservation of female labor for the benefit of family by making it a productive, cohesive unit; on the social level, the injunctions of *pativrata* helped in maintaining the purity of lineage. The concerns related to female as a gateway to caste purity and the

fears of *varna-sankara* offspring led to the creation of a normative religio-moral structure of *pativrata*[3]

The concept of *pativrata* was initially primarily located in the Brahmanic priestly class as a kind of safety mechanism. It ensured that women of priestly classes, who had access to powerful, governing classes of *kshtriyas* and rich *vaishyas* due to the essential ritualistic and teaching functions of their husbands, remained out of temptation. The strong injunctions against relation of a student with the teacher's wife[4] and the plethora of tales in which a sage's wife is seduced by a deity in the form of a king[5] attest to the real danger posed by attractive young *kshtriya* men to the wives of their priests/teachers, most of them old. Thus, initially used as a wedge against the ever-present dangers of these liaisons, the tenets of *pativrata* slowly percolated to those classes that came under the influence of Brahmanism. That is how there is a slow permeation of *pativrata* philosophy to *kshtriyas* and to *vaishyas*, as is found in later age stories about them.[6] The concept of monogamy, which is connected to the *pativrata* philosophy, attained a new orientation when it was applied to kings, as kings had traditionally more than one wife. The idea of *Pativrata* got further mutations when it became part of the *sudras*, the working classes, who had little time or use for the idea for long. The following proverb prevalent in the agricultural castes of Haryana presents a model completely antithetical to that of *pativrata*:

> aja beti lele phere, yoh margya to aur bhotere

> Come daughter, get married, if this husband dies there are many more.

> (Purser and Fanshawe 53)

The rigors of *pativrata* thus can be seen as a product of a socio-economic system in which elaborate rituals and moral injunctions were developed by upper caste ritual classes to ensure the loyalty of a female to her husband so as to control her fertility,

to limit her sexuality, to ensure caste purity, and to use her physical labor for the benefit of the family unit. A common thread binds the value systems represented by *pativrata* and *sati*, as both emphasize attachment to a husband as part of the exclusive identity of females and the devastation caused by his loss. That is why, despite the nineteenth-century social reformers' attempts to accept the former as an integral part of Hinduism and later an evil custom, *sati* continues to be worshipped throughout the length and breadth of India.

It is important to note that two of the most important social implications of *pativrata* philosophy—rejection of widows and their immolation—were mostly caste specific. While the rigors of widowhood as social and religious death were mostly part of the Brahmin caste, the satihood, in the form of self-immolation after the death of the husband, was mostly practiced by the *kshtriya* caste. In contrast, the *vaishyas*, the trading classes, and the *sudras*, the working classes, remained largely free from these customs. At the same time, it would not be correct to assume that the lower two castes remained totally free from the *pativrata* philosophy. Though they resisted the tenets of *pativrata* on the level of its rigid application, the idea was adopted in its nebulous form and became part of these classes in the form of cultural repertoire, myths, etc., which these classes accepted as an abstract concept while resisting it in practice. Further, alternative pathways such as *karewa*[7] were considered equally valid by lower castes in circumventing the application of *pativrata* philosophy.

It is apparent that the concept of *pativrata* functions on the twin basis of reward and punishment. While its promises, such as the attainment of heaven and bestowing of virtue, are well known, the punishments to the transgressors, which are well elaborated in many of the tales of *pativrata*s, need more critical scrutiny. For the purpose of examining the inhibitions laid upon the transgressors and the meaning they relate, the paper proposes to first examine cases of

some well-known classical heroines considered as emblems of *pativrata* philosophy and then compare and contrast their cases with their explication in *saang*s of Haryana to examine how the philosophy of *pativrata* has undergone mutations temporally in its journey to diverse castes/classes with what consequences.

Classical heroines: Sita, Savitri, Shakuntala and Ahilya

One of the best-known examples of a *pativrata* female[8] who faces multiple banishments within classical literature is Sita of the *Ramayana*. Sita is an epitome of husband worship who faces three banishments: a fire banishment in Chapter VI of the Yuddha Kanda after the killing of Ravana by Rama, a forest banishment in Chapter VII of the Uttara Kanda after Rama regains his throne of Ayodhya, and an earth banishment when Rama asks Sita for proof of her chastity after his encounter with Luv and Kush. These three banishments to Sita reveal three processes. While the first banishment is purported to clear Rama of the romantic attachment as the cause of the destruction of Lanka, the second one establishes him as a king who gives more importance to his subjects than his family, and the third banishment reveals him as a king who can accept his sons but not his wife.

Against Sita's multiple banishments, which carry an unmistakable stamp of unjustifiable rationales, Savitri, another iconic figure of *pativrata*, presents a seemingly picture of voluntary banishment. Savitri chooses to wed Satyavan knowing fully well that he is going to die soon after marriage and rescues him from his death through her reasoning with Yama. What makes Savitri an iconic *pativrata* is her readiness to follow her husband to the afterworld. If Sita represented the surrender of will to that of her husband, Savitri symbolizes the will to save her husband through self-sacrifice. Savitri undertakes multiple journeys as referred to by Lavanya Vemsani: "Each of the five stages of her life is marked by a journey and a specific goal. Her first journey is taken in search of finding her husband, while her last journey is marked by her quest

to win life back from Yama for her husband." (Vemsani 139). Despite outward divergences, there are some common patterns between the tales of Sita and Savitri. In both their lives, forests represent a sanctuary and a place of repose. The husbands of both Sita and Savitri come from royal backgrounds but have to live in the forest for long. Both Sita and Savitri themselves belong to royal lineages, have supernatural births, have fathers without sons, and both choose their own husbands. It is further pertinent to mention that out of the four boons Savitri asks from Yama, two are about a hundred sons for both her father and her husband, while the other two are about the regaining of the eyesight of her father-in-law and his kingdom. The idea of voluntary banishment undertaken by Savitri, first to the forest to live with her woodcutter husband and later to plead with Yama, is used to create an idea of a *pativrata* as essentially reward-based and merit-giving.

If the banishment of Sita raises the specter of people's censure as the motive for her banishment and does not explicitly explore the masculine doubts onto the lineage of Luv and Kusha, another classical tale makes this connection more apparent. Though Shakuntala is not often counted as one of the classical *pativrata* heroines, her story reveals some startling resemblances with those of Sita. The two distinct versions of the story of Shakuntala as found in the *Mahabharata* and Kalidas's *Abhijnanashakuntalam* seem to be part of a single tale with multiple growth points. As the Mahabharata version seems to be the older one, it reveals elements that are more ancient. In the *Mahabharata* version, Duhshanta refuses to accept Shakuntala as his wife in the court and casts aspersions on her child. Due to the suspect nature of her progeny, Shakuntala is banished from the palaces. There are many convergences between Sita and Shakuntala: both are supernaturally born and are adopted daughters; both are banished to the forest by a male figure due to suspicion on their chastity; both are given shelter by kindly ascetics who unconditionally take them within their

protection and later on vouch for their purity and legitimacy of the progeny. Despite some obvious divergences between these two tales, such as Sita's refusal to be part of her husband's family after the ordeal and Shakuntala's acceptance within the kingly and domestic sphere through a deus ex machina, as well as the lack of an obvious male antagonist in the story of Shakuntala, it is clear that both the stories reveal some fundamental patterns, and their superimposition over each other provides some interesting qualifications. There is a clear element of conflict in these stories and an attempt to legitimize the offspring born within unusual circumstances. The banishment of both Sita and Shakuntala is part of a structure in which concerns of the progeny are rarefied through consolidation of patriarchal values. In both of the texts, these structures are curtained through the operation of the public figure of the king, whose prestige as a model king gets threatened through the public insinuation about his progeny, thus endangering the sanctity of kingship as part of the hallowed lineage.

Ahilya is another classical heroine who faces banishment from her husband, Gautam, when she makes love to Indra, the king of the Gods. These are multiple versions of the story in which she is seen as a victim of rape, a partner in crime[9], and even a neglected wife. What is common in all these tales is that post-deed, she is punished by her husband, who curses her to become a stone. This curse is part of her forced banishment from male-controlled privileges and rights. Ahilya suffers long from her banishment until Rama arrives and declares her free from sin. Notably, Ahilya gets freedom from her 'sin' when Rama touches her with his feet, removing her transgression and ordaining her acceptance into patriarchal social norms. Both the banishment and the readmittance of transgressive females, here, are part of the psychological and social censure that is faced by a female when norms of sexual fidelity are flouted by her, whether willingly or unwillingly. Ahilya is left alone in the wilderness as a socially ostracized one, and her

turning into stone is representative of the drying of all human passions in a person who is cut off from all social ties.

An overview of the four patterns of banishments as part of classical literature, as discussed above, sheds some light on how the vehicle of banishment was used as an example of the dangers before a transgressive woman. The banishment of females from male-controlled resources such as palaces to natural habitats of forests in classical literature was often justified with reference to the compulsions of dharma. It either laid the blame on the female herself, inflating her transgressions, or reiterated the universality of the male-as-god concept. In cases where the male was revealed as patently wrong in banishing his wife, the excuse was often found in fate or *karma*.

Treatment of Exile in *Saang*s

While the motives of banishment are often shrouded under religious and mythical garb in classical literature, the gaps between the guilt and the punishment, the impulses and rationale, become quite apparent in folk literature. Folk literature provides a valuable commentary on female banishments and often illumines them with its own version. Herein, the motives are more practical, and if there are none, their absence in itself acts as a commentary on the events.

*Saang*s, the folk dramatic performative representations popular in North Indian states of Haryana, U.P., Rajasthan, and Punjab, representing selected episodes from diverse religious and moral repertoires, are laced with moral axioms on the concept of a faithful *pativrata* wife devoted to her husband. While dramatizing episodes from classical *pativrata*s such as Savitri, Damyanti, Shakuntala, etc., they reveal a philosophy of a devoted wife through a performative medium that is essentially male-dominated. Along with the stories based on epics, there are many *saang*s that are based on popular heroes and folk tales that provide an additional dimension to understand the causes, process, and the consequences

of these exiles. Most of the *saang*s take a moralistic approach wherever a woman and her duties are mentioned during the performance. The patriarchal ideology is frequently repeated as part of the moral axioms expressed by a character during the action of the play. The precepts regarding the subservience of females to moral order are delivered by nearly all characters, transcending the limitations of sex, age, caste, and position. Along with these ethical patterns to which all females are exhorted to conform, there is an equally strong undercurrent of dire consequences to which a female becomes susceptible once she opts to violate this sanctified pattern. They frequently treat the banishment of women in North Indian rural culture as part of the assertion of patriarchal ideology. While in many of the *saang*s, the motif is borrowed from the classical texts, their treatment is bereft of the moral veneer that the epics throw upon the reason of banishment. As part of the lived life of the rural culture, *saang*s provide valuable insight into the reasons for the exile of these women.

One of the ways in which *saang*s question the dominant classical tradition of a *pativrata* woman is through an alternate rendering, which is basically through the female version of events related to the above-discussed heroines. For instance, in the *saang* Padmavat, the heroine, when wooed by Ranbir, makes it very clear that she is not going to talk to him and tells him plainly how males have treated females throughout history:

> These males are shameless, charming only in need,
>
> Devoid of integrity and dharma, they abandon you in duress.
>
> Don't you know how cruel Ravan was?, and Indra went to the home of Gautam,
>
> Ramchandra exiled Sita, and Shiva annihilated Gauri,
>
> Harishchandra called Tara witch, what was he thinking?
>
> These wretches insist in vain; Even Krishna went to the home of Kubja,

In vain he gave her ill-repute; Gautam killed her (Ahilya) at once,

Without fault, he made her of stone, she lost her life.

You never know to whom they'll love and whose boat they will sink,

Mahipal left Nihalday; never there is a suitable match!

Anusuya's husband was a leper, she still worshipped him.

(Translated by the author[10])

And again:

Leave it, don't dig up buried secrets,

These males don't feel the pain of others.

I know the deceit of males; with sweet words they kill you.

What kind of mischief king Nal did with the *sari* of his wife?

Leaving her alone, sleeping in the woods.

One shouldn't play with the child of an uncultivated, and shouldn't invite strangers,

And don't become bodily close with these males.

Ramchandra banished and mother Sita went to the forest,

When Kauravas were stripping (Draupadi), all Pandvas were there.

When they were making her nude, what was the assembly of males doing?

Still, she went to the forest with them and lived on fruits and leaves.

(Translated by the author[11])

One of the foremost examples of the exploration of the exile of women is found in the *saang* 'Shahi Lakkarhara' written by Pandit Lakhmi Chand. The *saang* describes the twelve-year exile given to Rupani, wife of Jodhnath, the king of Jodhpur, on a simple bet between the husband and wife. The *saang* begins with a reporting in prose that the king Jodhnath of Jodhpur had no child

and his wife Rupani was pregnant. One day while conversing, they listen to the voice of a jackal. While the king insists that it is a male jackal, the queen insists about it being female. They make a bet that whosoever loses the bet will have to face banishment for twelve years. The guard becomes the arbiter, and the queen loses the bet. The king asks the queen to face the consequences, blaming her fate and *hod* (competition/bet) for it:

> You were defeated in the bet, go woman into exile,
>
> Now it is not fit for you to be sorrowful, without exile it won't do,
>
> You will have to suffer, whatever deeds are written by your evil fate

(Translated by the author[12])

The same story is presented differently in its prose version in *Haryana Lokmanch ki Kahaniya* (1958) by Rajaran Shastri, which presents another sequence of events leading to the banishment of the queen. According to this version, the king avers before his queen that he has so much influence over his countrymen that whatever he says is accepted by them as true without question. The queen expresses her doubt, leading to the bet. When everyone in the kingdom agrees with the king and no one dares to tell the truth, the queen loses the bet, leading to her banishment for twelve years.

The first version of the story seems to base the banishment of the pregnant queen by the king on a lighthearted bet between the two. It is important to note that the question of bet lies on correctly identifying the sex of the jackal from its voice, with the queen betting on its being female while the king insisting on its being male. The topic of bet aligns with the king's desperation for a male heir. The fact that the betting and subsequent banishment of the queen takes place when the queen is pregnant, for which the king has been desperate for long, becomes comprehensible when seen within the story's own framework. It aligns with an important tendency of folk tales to vocalize only the outer sketch of an incident, a rough creation of hollow boundaries through its mingling of bare

minimalistic details and use of universalistic euphemisms. The motives and the psychological probing are excised in folk literature's search for a wider audience and durability. Additionally, the tale comments on the process of control of discourse by the powerful when it refers to how everyone in the kingdom agrees to whatever the king declaims. Thus, in ultimate analysis, it doesn't matter what the truth is; it is what the king says, and the king proclaims the queen guilty. Some interesting insights into the motives of the banishment can be gleaned if we consider these stories as part of a pattern in which females were banished due to suspicion about the legitimacy of the offspring. It is, however, to be noted that within the folkspace and traditional culture, what is socially suspicious, by itself, becomes immoral, not the real incident or the process. That is perhaps why Sita was banished—not because she was unchaste but because the question of her progeny became suspicious before common people. What seems to have been overshadowed in the epic *Ramayana*, viz., the banishment of Sita, as not due to affronts on her chastity but because of a suspicion on the descendants of Rama, gets immediate focus in the present *saang* due to a lack of religious and regal justifications therein. Bereft of the elaborate maneuverings on duties of a king for his subjects and the obligations of *pativrata* to justify what was a cruel act of abandonment on the whims of a populace, the *saang* simply assigns blame to the quirks of fate and *hod* of a female. Both of the banishments—those of Sita and Rupani—are equally arbitrary, based on male vulnerability for the image of a man in control, wherein the question of a pure lineage, if not real than in appearances, becomes paramount.

The *saang* 'Shahi Lakkarhara' also shares some close resemblances with the story of Savitri and Satyavan. Both Satyanvan and the eponymous lakkarhara are woodcutters, born of kings. Both of them marry princesses who are ready to share the travails of their husbands and save them from dire circumstances. Even the charges of willfulness laid on Beena, the heroine of Shahi Lakkarhara,

are not difficult to trace in Savitri, whose own father seems so much incensed by her unapproachable demeanor that he finally sent her to find her own husband[13]. If religious and moral superstructure imposed on the tale of Savitri is removed, it is not difficult to trace into the story of Savitri a tale about a woman who was banished and who used her resources of cajoling, wit, and faithfulness to outmaneuver mortal risks to her husband in the forest and get a better future for him and her in-laws. The banishment of Savitri in this case would not be voluntary but a consequence of two intermingled impulses: the willfulness of a monarch and a psychological resentment for a daughter born against his wishes for a male heir.

*Saang*s often portray kings as whimsical so as to underline the operations of fate. What is noticeable is that underlying all these apparently incomprehensible decisions, there is a strong desire for a male heir. This theme occurs in the *saang* 'Suhagan ko *Duhag*' by Chanderlal Badi, and 'Raja Bhoj: Sarande' by Pandit Lakhmichand. In the *saang* 'Suhagan ko *Duhag*,' the king Chatarsain of Magadh goes to see his future wife Sukai and gets vindictive when he overhears Sukai's friend telling her that the king who is going to marry her is ill-fated as he has no sons even after marrying six times. Chatarsain gives her '*duhag*' after marrying her. When the king needs to take one of his wives with him for penance to get a child and is refused by his other wives, he goes to Sukai, and the conver*sati*on between them sheds light on the reasons for the banishment:

> Duhagi: Without fault, why abandoned a married woman?
>
> King: Leaving the love of your husband, why behaved roguishly in your natal home?
>
> Duhagi: On the words of a friend, why abandoned your wife?
>
> King: Forgetting me, why praise other men?
>
> (Translated by the author[14])

A similar situation occurs in the *saang* 'Raja Bhoj: Sarande' in which Sarande is spotted by the king's spies making a declaration

before her friends that she would not allow the king even to wash her feet. The king takes affront at it and after marrying her, gives her a *duhag*.

> Sarande, standing all day, you will run after crows, the palace in exile will be yours.
>
> O barber woman, you are not my queen, I am not your husband,
>
> In one instant, I shall give you sorrow; take hollow bamboo in your hand.
>
> Wear while clothes, these are your only ornaments.
>
> (Translated by the author[15])

In the *saang* 'Chapsingh', the hero gives *duhag* to his wife Somvati when she is deceived by Tara, a clever prostitute, to lend her Chapsingh's dagger and fatka:

> The evil will commit evil, and they are rather unfortunate,
>
> Take to the white clothing, Oh dear, and keep standing to scatter crows.
>
> (Translated by the author[16])

Duhag, a form of female rejection, is repeatedly mentioned in *saang*s and folk stories of the region and was a method of female banishment on the displeasure of the husband on some affront. These affronts were not essentially connected with the moral failures on the part of a married woman but with some lapses, often minor ones, such as criticizing her husband in front of her friends or even listening to such insults. The banished woman was sent to a separate house, where she lived alone and was given a task to protect saucers of curd placed on the four corners of the roof of the house from hovering crows. The woman was given a splintered stick for the task, and the amount of curd that is eaten by the crows is compensated by drawing as much blood from the unfortunate woman. A short story, 'Raja Bhoj,' popular in the Haryana region, describes this custom in the following words:

King Bhoj after reaching his palace commanded that she should be banished in the old palace. She should be made to wean black clothes and provided with a splintered stick. Four saucers filled with curd should be placed on the parapets of the palace. Extract as much blood from the queen as much the curd dries.

(Translation by the author[17])

Another name for *duhag* was *kaag udani*, which literally meant one who is assigned the job of scattering crows. In the folk tale 'Anjana,' Pawan, the hero, banishes his wife Anjana when he overhears his wife's friends criticizing his appearance.

Just after reaching his palace, Pawan Kumar took Anjana on the roof of the palace. There curd was sprinkled and Anjana was made 'scatterer of crows.' All were told in the palace that she will live a life of slaves from now on. She should be given left-over food.

(Translation by the author[18])

Conclusion

Both *saang*s and classical tales seem to celebrate the pathos of the exiled women and ignore the causes of banishment. Sita's suffering is part of a cosmic pain, and the narrative concentrates on her situation rather than on the social and religious structures responsible for her predicament. Similarly, the moralistic mythic tale of Savitri, by converting her into an iconic *pativrata*, pushes to the margins the concerns and motives related to male progeny and her eventual marriage to Satyavan. The stonification of Ahilya makes apparent the psychological transformation undergone by a woman rejected by the religio-social structure under patriarchy. In the tale of Shakuntala as given in the *Mahabharata*, the concerns of lineage are more pronounced. Kalidas' use of the ring of remembrance and the curse of Durvasa functions in the same way the religio-mythic structure has been used in other tales.

It is apparent that the banishment of wives just after marriage in the *saang*s discussed in the paper often takes place due to the

criticism of the husband, incidentally, not by the would-be wife, but by her friends, or due to misconceived doubt on the *pativrata* woman. The proportionality between the crime committed and the punishment is too stark here to miss. Both Sukai and Sarande suffer consequences of a crime in which at most they could be termed as witnesses. This situation is further compounded by the fact that in the geographical areas in which these *saang*s are played, women are often quite vocal and assertive. So how does one reconcile the philosophy preached in these dramatic presentations with the lived life experiences of the spectators, who are mostly males? One answer can be to view these *saang*s as fantasy-laden presentations in which a collective male fantasy about females is being played on the stage for rural males.[19] The banishment of females in these *saangs,* thus, becomes an outplay of desire for aggressive male control of females. Through them, the male psyche revels in the ultimate punishment of the female through her exile into a moral, political, social, and religious vacuum. In classical literature, this impulse to punish and blame is located primarily in the desire for male progeny as well as control of female sexuality. These desires, however, are layered upon by religio-moral imperatives and mythic structures in the classical tales. The *saang*s, bereft of these structures, create their own picture of a world in which kings are unpredictable and their unpredictability is part of the fate-governed universe. The stories therein take shelter under the contingent nature of fate to hide the ruthless operation of male hegemony governing gender relations.

Through a defocusing of patriarchal concerns and anchoring it to the pathos of the situation, both *saang*s and classical tales on *pativrata* achieve a blurring of real issues. Both the *pativrata* and her banishment are part of the same structure that seeks to place females strictly within the parameters of male hegemony and control. Her banishment to forests converts her supposedly illegitimate children into legitimate ones under the authority of the

forest. The forest, as an abode of sages and a primal way of living, remains free from concerns of lineage and shelters and showers legitimacy through a kind of sanctification. It also helps convert sin into pathos where, through penance, the rejected females get another chance to join the patriarchal society. If they join it, they get lost within the glory of their husbands, and if they reject it, they remain an enigma and a puzzle forever.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] In *Sivapurana*, the story of Padma and Pippalada is described in chapter XXXV, in which Padma, the young wife of an old sage, Pippalada, is courted by lord Dharma. Padma rejects his advances and curses Dharma of gradual decline in different yugas. Similarly, the Brahma Purana gives multiple references to *pativrata* women such as Gauri, Bindumati, Dhumini, Saibya, etc.

[2] The '*Pativrata* Mahatamya Parva' illustrates the story of Savitri in the *Mahabharata* to bring home the ideal of *pativrata* while the *Ramayana* molds Sita in the framework of an ideal wife.

[3] Monika Saxena obliquely refers to this alignment between caste and gender when she asserts, "The Puranic authors realised that to regulate social behaviour, Brahmanical authority had to be extended and strengthened, especially among two segments of society, viz. women and sudras." (97-98)

[4] *Manu Samhita* equates relations with the teacher's wife as equivalent to incest and enjoins various injunctions on the students to avoid their contact with their preceptors' wives. For instance, "A pupil shall not anoint the person of his preceptor's wife, nor help her in her bath, nor rub her person, nor comb her hair. (2.211) A pupil, twenty years old, (or) who has attained the age of discretion, shall not accost his preceptor's wife, if she be a youthful one, by clasping her feet. (2.212). Further, the sin of sexual relations with a teacher's wife was ordained as one of the most heinous sins: "A killer of a Brahmana, a wine-drinker, a thief, and a defiler of his preceptor's or

superior's bed should be respectively known as Mahapatakins (great sinners). (9.235)

[5] Some of the well-known examples of these liaisons are Ahilya, Renuka, and Padma, among others.

[6] In the *Kathasaritsagara*, there are many stories of such virtuous women. For instance, Upakosha, the wife of Vararuchi, successfully resists the overtures of the king's priest, city magistrate, and prince's secretary. The courtesans and divine damsels often jostle in its amoral world with merchants and kings.

[7] karewa, karawo, or chaddar andazi are basically niyog marriages in which the widow got married to the relatives of her deceased husband. According to Prem Choudhry: "Karewa, as a rule, has been and continues to be primarily a levirate marriage in which the widow is accepted as wife by one of the younger brothers of the deceased husband; failing him the husband's brother; failing him his agnatic first cousin, etc." (Choudhry 263-264)

[8] The assessment of Sita as a *pativrata* is based primarily on Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmanas* as well as her image in popular culture. There are notable divergences from her *pativrata* image in Jain *Padma Puran*, Pali *Dasaratha Jataka*, and regional folklore. For more information consult Uma Chakravarti's essay, 'The Development of the Sita Myth: A Case Study of Women in Myth and Literature'.

[9] In *Kathasaritsagara* version, Ahilya attempts to hide her lover from the angry sage by using the word 'majjao' for him, the word having the dual meaning of 'cat' as well as 'my lover.'

[10] hē, yē mard badē lajmārē ho sa, garj pdē jab pyārē ho sa ।

Bhīṅ pṅi ma nyārē ho sa, taj ka dharm imān nai ।। tēk ।।

hē dēkh kisā julmi thā Daskandar, gyā thā Gautam ka ghar Inder ।

Us Rāmchander na Sīta tāhi, Gauran śiv na jaṅ ta thāi ।

Hariscander na Tārā dāṇ btāi, kē soci beimān nai ।

Yē jlē jhūthi pīta rīs, gyā thā Kubjā ghar Jagdīś ।

Saham vo shīś burāi dhargyā, Gautam dhaṅ ta nād katargyā ।

Binā khot patthar ki kargyā, vā kho b aithi thi jān nai ।। 2 ।।

Yē jlē kiski prīt pāl dē, dbo dariyā ka bīch jhāl dē ।

Nihāldē Mahipāl na chodi, kde nahi pilaṅgā pa podhi ।

Anusuyā kā pti thā kodi, gyi baith jca ka dhyān nai ।। 3 ।। (Sharma 671-672)

[11] Jān do bas rahan do hē dabi dabāi bāt ।

Aur kē dukh ki jāṇai konyā yā mardā ki jāt ।। tēk ।।

Mai jānu mardā kē chal nai, mīthe bol kāt dē gal ṇai ।

Kisi kri thi Rājā Nal nai sāri gail khubāt ।

Sovti na chod digargyā ban mai ādhi rāt ।। 1 ।।

Phuhad kā nā lāl khilānā chāhiyē, gair nā gharā hilāna chāhiyē ।

Bhūl ka nahi milāna chāhiyē, isē mardā ta gāt ।

śri Rāmchander nai tyāg dyi ban ma Siyā māt ।। 2 ।।

Jab Kairon chīr harai thē, pāncho Pāndon udai hi marai thē ।

Jab Draupadi nai nagn karai thē dekhai thi panchāt ।

Pher bhi ban man sāth gyi thi khā kai nai phalpāt 3 ।। (Sharma 672-673)

[12] Tū gyi hoṅ ma hār chali jā nār disotē ma ।

Ib terā karnā thīk nahi sog nā, jayē bin mitai rog nā ।

Chaukas paṅegā bhognā, jo likh diyā karm tērē khotē me ।। (Sharma 169)

[13] Simon Brodbeck puts forward the argument that the lack of suitors for Savitri was not due to her brilliance but because of her status as *putrika*, a brotherless maiden: "No one wanted to marry her because,

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despite her abundant attractions, she would have seemed very unlikely to make a good patrilineal *pativrata* wife" (Brodbeck 532).

[14] Duhāgi: binā khot taksir suhāgan sati banāyi kyūn ।

Rājā: prem pti kā chod pihar ma kri anghyi kyūn ॥

Duhāgi: sakhi dūsri kē kahnē tai chodi byahi kyūn ।

Rājā: tnne mai bisrāyā gair puruś ki kri badāyi kyūn ॥ (Badgujar 584)

[15] Khṅi udāye kāg sarandē mahal duhāgi pyār tērā ।

Nēyi ki tū mēri rāni nā sa mai konyā bhartār tērā ।

Dukh dēdungā ek syāt ma, lē lē thothā bāns hāth ma ।

Dholā bānā lē gāt ma, yohē sa singār tēra । (Sharma 279)

[16] Buri karē burē ādmi, jinkē māṅē bhāg ।

Lē dholā bānā kar pari khaṅi udāye kāg । (Sharma 356)

[17] "Rājā Bhoj nē apnē mahal mē ākar Bhānumati kē liye ādeś diyā ki isko purānē mahal mē chod diyā jāyē. Isko kālē kapdē pehnākar hāth mē khokhlā bāns dē diyā jāye. Dahi kē chār sakorē mahal kē konē ki munderon par rakh diyē jāyē. Jitnā dahi sukkhe, rāni kā utnā kh ū n nikāl lēna" (Nisha 15).

[18] "Apnē mahal mē jātē hi Pawan kumār Anjnā ko mahal ki chat par lē gyā. Vahān dahi kā chiṅkāv kar diyā aur anjnā ko kāg udāni bnā diyā. Mahal mē sabko kah diyā ki āj sē yē dāsiyon kā sā jiwan jiyegi. Usko bachā khuchā khānā diyā jāyē"(Nisha 32).

[19] Singh 123-137.

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A Brave New World: Posthuman(ist) Feminist Ethics for Planetary Co-Existence

Paromita Bhattacharya Chakrabarti

Not in Utopia — subterranean fields

Or in some secret island, Heaven knows where!

But in the very world, which is the world

Of all of us — the place where in the end

We find our happiness, or not at all!

The Prelude (1805)

Introduction

The trajectory of transition from human to posthuman has been deeply entangled with social and material processes that define life on earth. The current categorization of human species is undergoing radical transformation and a new kind of human is emerging as a result of such transitions. Posthumanism asserts that the human can no longer be central to our understanding of the world, nor can be the centre of our universe. By rejecting the view of the autonomous, enlightened, exceptional, and rational subject who occupies the highest position among all other species/life forms, posthumanism refashions the human not as superior to all other species/life forms, but as one who exists only in relation to others and gives a clarion call for multi-species co-existence.

What is to be a human in today's world? This is a question that has acquired increased urgency given the current technological developments that challenge the traditional humanist approaches and understanding of our shared world. Human exceptionalism that has always put humans at the centre of the universe, in control of and separate from all other species is now debated and challenged. Theories that break from this pervasive assumption of humanity as a centre for orientation are referred to as postanthropocentrism

and/or posthumanism. Stefan Herbrechter in the preface to *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (2013) provides a detailed history of the how the term Posthumanism gained academic currency and started to receive critical attention in contemporary theory and philosophy in the last two decades where they have produced an entirely new way of thinking and theorizing. The first academic publications that deal systematically with the idea of the posthuman and posthumanism appeared at the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s (these are, in particular, works by N. Katherine Hayles, Cary Wolfe, Neil Badmington and Elaine L. Graham) (Herbrechter vii). In conjunction with this theoretical debate, Francis Fukuyama's book *Our Posthuman Future* (1999) about the importance of new biotechnologies for a return to the debate on eugenics opened up a more general philosophical and political discussion on the subject (Herbrechter vii). Alongside the anxieties of a dystopian future that technology and environmental disaster signals to, there is the belief of a utopian future that rides on the promises of hyper/super/nano/info technologies which can erase today's social and economic problems and usher us into a space and time where machines ease work; medicines prolong life and ensure good health; the planet is looked after and there is an utter transformation of the social, cultural and economic system. Within the field of posthumanism studies, divergent scholarly perspectives seem to fuel a divide between 'body centred optimism and environment directed pessimism' (Rosendahl and Wamberg 2).

The new and extensive possibilities that posthumanism signal are matters of scholarly interest and debate. The systems approach is where one looks at viewing humans and objects as part of the same ecosystem, inseparable and interconnected (Reilly 273). The relativist approach, as Herbrechter points out, can also provide new insights into the study of posthumanism. In the current context in which posthumanism is discussed may seem new and singular but debating the centrality of the human subject has had a long and

chequered history (Herbrechter vii). Questions regarding Descartian and Kantian human exceptionalism, autonomy, rationality and especially their ideas of rational thought as the sole realm of human beings appear in the works of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche among others (Dolphijn 48). These influential thinkers in their own way critiqued the concept of dualism that operated through binaries such as nature vs culture, man vs woman, white vs coloured and produced hierarchies that were then internalised by members of the society and created a structure that put man on top of everything else (Dolphijn 48). Thus questioning man's centrality in relation to the universe and the excessive stress on rationality and intelligence has a long history and came to be seriously debated and critiqued by 1970's as seen in the works of Ilja Prigogine, Isabelle Stengers, Gregory Bateson and Michel Foucault. Foucault's oft cited phrase the 'end of man' points to a historical, critical and apocalyptic version of the post-realist, post-humanist world. In his influential work *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* he questions the figure of the human around which humanities was built (1980) (Asberg and Braidotti 3). This critique of the humanist ideal of man who is the universal representative of the human is what is termed anti-humanist (Banerji and Paranjape 13). By the 1990's there was a call to reject Kantianism for a new or neo materialism that was more open to other forms of rationality, other subjectivities, other forms of intelligence, individualities and taking into consideration the personhood of those who are physically or cognitively disabled, those who are termed senile, thus rewriting man's dominance over all forms of life and space on earth (Dolphijn 50). Rosi Braidotti, Manuel DeLanda, Donna Haraway all challenged the centrality of the rational man, instead furthering the idea of a relational subjectivity dismantling dualism, positing a critical naturalism and a materialist transdisciplinarity that has no interest in privileging the human being but seeing the human as a part of the larger interconnected networks of life, nature and the universe. This

critique of species hierarchy is what can be termed anti-anthropocentrism. Rejecting the hierarchy of species domination and advocating for ecological justice, anti-anthropocentrism envisions a world where all life forms and non-life forms are connected.

As lives become more entangled with technology and the rapid advances in the field outpace ordinary imagination, there is on one hand the euphoria of a tech-enabled world that promises ease of living and on the other, there is an increased fear and anxiety of a posthuman universe where technology exercises the ultimate control and human activities impinge irreparably on the ecosystem. These two extreme positions of utopia and dystopia have occupied the theoretical and philosophical spectrum of this field. However, as Herbrechter points out it is important to map the different ways in which posthumanism can be approached to find a middle ground between utopian possibilities and dystopian futures. The innovative potential of critical posthumanism must be explored and the relationship between human and technology and the role of technology in our lives needs to be vigorously debated to arrive at some form of consensus on what life on earth will be in the face of technological and environmental challenges (viii).

A powerful critique of anthropocentrism and humanism has come from feminist theorists and philosophers like Francesca Ferrando, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe. The struggle for change asserting gender as a contested category have led to challenging and moving beyond the binaries that frames and limits our experiences. Embracing a posthuman(ist) feminist ethical framework marks a shift from universalism to perspectivism; pushing for difference and plurality instead of state promoted multiculturalism. It helps acknowledge that humanity is tied up with ecology and technology and only by rejecting hierarchy in favour of interdependence can the world survive. Posthuman feminists espouse notions of empathy, care, compassion and symbiosis while

fiercely undermining the patriarchal values of hierarchy, domination and dualism and the capitalist principles of exploitation, surplus value, rampant profiteering that have failed us in preserving nature and upholding peaceful planetary co-existence.

Posthuman(ist) Feminist Critique

Philosophical posthumanism, new materialist feminism, feminist activism, Marxist feminism and intersectional feminist work have rich theoretical insights that can be extremely useful for a radical reimagining of the neoliberal, extractive, exploitative, anthropocentric society we live in today (Ferrando *Philosophical Posthumanism*). Put together to work, these theoretical insights can produce a deeper understanding of Feminist posthumanism. Feminist posthumanism as a critical position is concerned about the ways in which anthropocentrism has left the world divided and exploited; as a critical approach, feminist posthumanism is about resisting and undermining structural oppression, rampant exploitation of resources (human and non-human, natural and mechanical). Francesca Ferrando makes it very clear that feminist posthumanism is not about a utopian future where things will change only with the passage of time; instead, feminist posthumanism is about the present, to change the way things are in this very moment of our collective existence. A posthumanist, post-anthropocentric and post-dualistic ethical framework is genealogically indebted to feminism at a theoretical level and embedded in gender awareness on the level of praxis ("Posthuman Feminist Ethics"142).

If one is to adopt a posthuman feminist ethical framework the first place to start would be gender. In the context of gender, posthuman feminist position is about displacing the heteropatriarchal and heteronormative framework that govern our social and cultural lives. Adopting this position means, taking a decentralized approach to gender and sexuality where the binaries of male/female are contested and male superiority as a given is squarely rejected. As methodology, posthuman feminist work

intends to dismantle hierarchies of sexualized, racialized and naturalised differences; it challenges anthropocentrism by rejecting the centrality of the rational/virile man/masculine figure at the top of the gender and sex ladder and also embraces the sentient and non-sentient life forms/non-human life and entities. Posthuman feminist ethics demonstrate that the binary between male and female is unstable and breaking down the boundaries between categories of gender, biological sex and sexuality provides a basis to question other binaries such as human/animal, human/non-human, human/machines among others. A posthuman feminist approach would focus on the co-constitutive relationships that we have with the natural and the animal world and with organisms; with medicine and technology; with biopolitics, science and ecology and how these relationships are thoroughly imbued with political and ethical considerations.

To connect posthuman with feminism we need to first look at how the categories of gender and sex have been redefined and re-understood. Gender and biological sex have both been acknowledged to be social constructs since the late twentieth century based on the work of such theorists as Michel Foucault (1978) and Judith Butler (1990 and 1993). Butler's path breaking *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and subsequent works such as the *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993) problematizes categories of gender and sex where she argues that the alignment of gender and sex are arbitrary and binary norms that govern gender and sex are discursively shaped and often unstable. Gender is performative, maintained and perpetuated through repeated iterations and is open to contestation, disruption and interpretation. Butler posits gendered identities as pluralistic but still socially determined; individuals identify themselves as feminine, masculine, queer, trans, or another gendered identity at a particular moment based on identification with and active re-inscription of culturally established norms (Butler

Bodies That Matter). Gendered identities fall on a continuum, thus presenting individuals with greater choice although not with complete freedom as heteronormative structures still dominate. For many feminists, posthumanism offers a perspective that opens up the possibility for recognizing the multiplicity of genders (Ferrando, "Is the post-human a post-woman?"). Within a posthuman feminist framework it is easy to see how norms of gender are interconnected with similarly pluralistic understandings of sexuality. Like gender identities, sexualities are also unfixed, changing, fluid, commingled with but not tied to specific gender traits/identity. Ferrando substantiates her point with examples that show how gender and sex may align yet disrupt social expectations through strategic violations. She provides examples of a male individual exhibiting very masculine traits of conduct yet identifying as homosexual, an androgynous woman performing behaviour that is identifiably masculine preferring heterosexual interactions. The case of eunuchs or people in drag can also defy such expectations. There have been numerous studies that have demonstrated the complexity and variability that characterises the interconnections of gender and sexualities such as Theo G. M. Sandfort's work on the complex relationship between sexual orientation and gender.

Biomedical Technologies and Feminist Concerns

Biomedical technologies have shown the possibility of not only altering the natural body and replacing body parts with newer complex ones such as a bionic heart instead of a pacemaker; electronic retinas in place of a glass eye; engineered tissue to counter muscle degeneration; these are some of the examples of the continuous interface between body and technology. Technoscientific developments fuel dreams of immortality and/or control over life and death and yet generate enormous anxiety and fear of deadly disease and ultimate annihilation maybe by antibiotic resistant viruses, pandemic or other spectacular body threatening mutant creatures/monsters/bacteria. Between the euphoria of

exercising ultimate tech control over our bodies and mind and terror of being wiped out or enslaved by technology there is continuous experimentation to advance the cause of technoscience. Debates around the potential production of highly intelligent and healthier human beings through genetic engineering, nanotechnology, neurostimulation, drugs, or other highly advanced surgical procedures centre around questions of identity and personhood and the biological limits of evolutionary science. One approach to genetic engineering is that through intervention we can overcome physical and cognitive limits and live a more fulfilling life. Other approaches to the enhancement debate focus on how responsible use of technology can result in creating human beings who have a vastly greater capacity both in the body and the brain than what human beings have at present (Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values" 4). Bostrom defends what he calls ''extreme human enhancement,'' which ''could result in 'posthuman' modes of being'' ("Why I Want to Be a Posthuman When I Grow Up" 107). Others have called this project ''radical human enhancement'' (Agar 1), defining it as the substantial alteration of capacities beyond what is considered normal for the human species. Posthuman modes of being may include not just enhanced physical and intellectual capacities but also the creation of ''superintelligent machines'' that ''could profoundly alter the human condition'' (Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values" 3). The debates related to AI and bioenhancements all directly or indirectly point to the instability/dynamism of the human body and mind that can be altered and re-fashioned in order to be fabricated into a new and improved form. The euphoria of tech and AI enabled enhancements are tempered by the anxieties that biotechnological enhancements can reduce human bodies and minds into commodities that are subject to extreme manipulation and modification. This application of biotechnology may involve instrumentalization of human beings in late capitalism to be traded as objects in the market (Wannemann 259-260).

Feminist concerns with bioenhancements and technoscience range from attention to issues of whether bodily and cognitive alterations are for therapeutic use or for cosmetic needs or for compliance to the norm. Distinguishing medical treatments from enhancement is a contentious issue and feminists have called into question the boundaries between treatment and enhancement. Biomedical enhancements have been used varyingly to construct human bodies to either fall in line or oppose the dominant construction of sex-gender structure. When doctors perform sex reassignment surgeries to align sex with gender according to the prevailing norms governing gender and sex or break the established pattern of sex=gender identity, is it treatment or enhancement? Such interrogations that explode the binary definitions of sex and gender question the rigid categorization of people and their bodies and are attentive to the ways in which there is a blurring of humans and machines in biomedical technologies are in line with approaches to posthumanism.

Transitioning gender and Intersexed identities

Posthuman technoscientific studies from a feminist perspective show how intersexuality both disrupts the male/female binary and highlights the indeterminacy and constructiveness of both sex and gender. People identified as intersexual are born with varying levels of indeterminacy of biological sex because their genitalia, chromosomal makeup, and/or hormonal levels or hormonal exposure in utero do not conform to what clearly identifies sexed bodies as either female or male. The presence of these indeterminate bodies in the anthropocentric world are seen as disturbing, freak, or in some communities as a sign of curse or lack. Intersexed babies have been routinely subjected to bioenhancement through corrective surgery, hormonal treatments and other medical interventions to disambiguate biological sex and align it with gender. The objective of these procedures has in many cases been to comply with social pressures and cultural norms even when they

have not been medically necessary. They are done simply to construct the child as clearly [and visibly] belonging to a specific biological sex to help conform to cultural norms and to reduce social disruptions to the detriment of the individual's quality of life and even the individual's health (Reilly 277). Children who have undergone corrective surgery have suffered irreparable damage both physical and psychological resulting in them as adults unable to feel sexual pleasure or participate in procreation. In other words, intersexed people and many of those who have been subject to corrective surgery find themselves on the margins of an anthropocentric society.

When it comes to intersex people, posthuman feminist perspectives can be a liberating force. In the anthropocentric world to be fully human means to live in a world of binaries where intersexed people have been denied dignity and subjected to violence. Posthuman feminist approach emphasizes the fluidity of gender and sex, allowing such individuals to come unmoored from stable binaries of male/female and live a fulfilled life as intersexed. As Elizabeth Reis (2005) explains in her history of intersexuality in America, until the twentieth century, being human meant being gendered ''in a binary way'' (440), a conception that relegated intersexual persons as non-existent or even nonhuman. Liberatory approaches to biological sex, for example, make room for a continuum of physiological manifestations all of which qualify as human. The posthuman feminist approach to intersexed people asserts the fluidity and instability of bodies, contests boundaries of gender and sex and helps us reconsider human corporeality and subjectivity. This approach focuses on the connections between bodies, linkages of body parts, as pieces of a network of systems thus undermining the primacy of one corporeal, unified, ideal human body that is strictly either male or female and seriously disrupting the binary conceptions of biological sex.

There is of course another approach to bioenhancements through corrective surgery. This involves those who identify as transgenders and wish to undertake sex/gender reassignment surgeries. There is still a lot of resistance to these surgeries as they are not viewed as therapeutic but as enhancements that are not necessary. Feminist posthuman activists have been at the forefront of this struggle to recognise transgender rights to choose the body they wish to acquire and the gender identity they want to adopt. Ciswomen who wish to have body enhancements through cosmetic surgeries have easy access to medical procedures while hormone treatments or Sex Reassignment Surgeries (SRS) procedures are routinely denied to trans people or severely restricted and accessible only on grounds of mental health thereby justifying it as therapy. The ease of access to medical procedures for cis men and women seeking ideal bodies through bioenhancement or hormone therapy reveal societal support for heteronormativity. However, in recent times several high-profile examples of SRS have brought the issue of sex and gender transition not just to the fore but have also generated debates around the issue of sexual and gender identity, transgender rights, and biomedical enhancements. Bruce Jenner aka Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox, Lana Wachowski, Jan Morris, Abigail Chay, Laura Jane Grace, Amanda Lepore, Chaz Bono, Jazz Jennings and the notable and now famous Lile Elbe who was the first transgender woman to openly gender confirming surgery in 1930 are some of the celebrities who have either transitioned from male to female/female to male or have come out as bi/ non-bi/trans through SRS, hormone therapy or gender reassignment surgery. Closer home, brilliant filmmaker, the late Rituparno Ghosh came out transitioning and undergoing SRS to become a woman. He was the first Bengali director to risk stardom by openly embracing his queer identity and celebrating the journey of his transition as a woman. These coming out stories have helped generate positive discussions around the issue of SRS and gender identity with a rise in the level

of acceptance of gender disambiguates and of bodies that exceed the order of a normative subject (McCormack 158).

Cosmetic Surgeries

Cosmetic surgeries for enhancement of looks and physical/sexual performance and adopting biotechnology for medical reasons such as reproductive assistance have been at the forefront of feminist concerns. Biotechnological interventions or enhancements invariably lead to a transformation of self and subjectivity. Some of the enhancements/interventions have generated a lot of controversy while some responses have been indisputably welcome. Ethical concerns regarding bioenhancements are raised when it is a matter of voluntary choice rather than a therapeutic or medical need. However, there is a fine line separating choice and therapy. In some cases, there is a lot of social pressure to conform to an ideal body and norms of gender particularly for women. Cosmetic surgeries such as breast implants for enlargement, facial procedures, vaginal reconstruction, and other invasive procedures to arrest youth and remain beautiful are routinely undertaken by the rich and famous. This normalization of enhancement procedures through celebrity endorsements and relentless marketing of it as an aesthetic ideal have resulted in fostering deep insecurity about physical looks and vulnerability particularly among young and middle-aged women. For the upwardly mobile social class, desire to undergo enhancement procedures have acquired an aspirational quality. This desire is fuelled by the high stakes billion-dollar plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery industry which constantly peddles the idea of perpetual youth and perfect body as attainable for a hefty price. This hankering for youth and beauty is of course closely tied to market demands which creates a need and space for such interventions and then makes it impossible for the vast majority to attain the exclusive standards set for and by the privileged.

In *Pink Ribbon Blues: How Breast Cancer Culture Undermines Women's Health*, Gayle Sulik undertakes a detailed analysis of how women who undergo mastectomy are often pressured by doctors and others to have breast reconstruction procedure (2013) and reconstructive cosmetic surgery such as this is viewed as socially acceptable and even necessary. Medicalisation of women's health and emphasis on preventive cure drives the narrative. Women are pushed to accept the importance of having a natural body that confirms to the expectations of gender and accept breast reconstruction as a post-mastectomy procedure. While cancer survivors are expected to go for breast reconstruction, cosmetic surgeries such as breast implants, facial procedures, body re-shaping, postponement of aging through botox, hormonal implants, experiments with gene editing to delay menopause; a bespoke package of longevity healthcare and other forms of bioenhancements are seen as elective. Feminist scholars have presented critical readings of elective and even some therapeutic cosmetic surgeries, as they view these procedures as being used to construct and reify ideal norms of feminine beauty (Balsamo 1996; Booher 2010). Balsamo argues that ''cosmetic surgery is not then simply a discursive site for the 'construction of images of women' but is actually a material site at which the physical female body is surgically dissected, stretched, carved, and reconstructed according to cultural and eminently ideological standards of physical appearance'' (13). The plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery industry functions on these highly valued notions of youthfulness, unrealistic standards of beauty and the high stakes interests of the big pharma and cosmetics giant industry.

Breeding Grounds: ART and Science of Designer Babies

Women have for the longest time given birth to their womb babies. With the advancement of technology, several forms of Assisted reproductive technologies (ART): in-vitro fertilization, surrogacy, artificial insemination, lab grown foetuses, embryo

perfection techniques, and other forms of ectogenesis is in parts either routine or currently being developed. The web series on Amazon Prime *Dead Ringers* explores the dark side of ectogenesis: chip insertions into the womb, new birthing techniques, lab grown foetuses, experimenting with embryo perfection and perfect designer babies coming out of the test tube, are now part of a high-tech medico-commercial industrial complex. ART has generated a lot of controversy both in terms of religious censure, moral issues and ethical concerns. Biomedical procedures which allow for gestation to take place outside the womb or in a foreign womb, or genetic engineering of babies, preimplantation genetic diagnosis for sex selection, and varied other related procedures are viewed as unethical and an unnatural interference into the natural process of reproduction particularly in places where there is a preference for the male child and androcentric attitudes govern society. Medical community is understandably divided on the issue of cutting-edge ART and the public too has serious reservations about creating made-to -order babies in the lab. The argument against such ART practices and experiments always talk about the ethical ramifications of interventions that may extend to other aspects of life such as genetic engineering projects that are eugenicist in nature or exploit the reproductive labour of poor women who disproportionately bear the burden of carrying babies for the rich.

While the ethical and religious concerns regarding ART continue to impact collective attitudes towards surrogacy, IVF, and other more complex biomedical procedures; a lot of research in ectogenesis has come about as a byproduct of biomedical advancement to save premature babies outside the womb. This is seen as a positive and therapeutic measure where ART is used for not only saving lives but also rewarding parents with joy and fulfilment.

Ectogenesis for gene culture or embryo perfection and producing curated babies fall under the category of bioenhancement

that can have serious consequences on human birth and population (Bess, "Genetics and Epigenetics" 95).

Ectogenesis separates women from gestation and hence could remake motherhood as a gender-neutral activity, one open to an individual of whichever biological sex who would like to nurture and raise children (Sander-Staudt 2006). Colleen Reilly and Frida Simonstein make it clear that ectogenesis can be liberating if it frees women from complications of a difficult pregnancy and the obligation and/or burden of child bearing. Separating gestation and birth from female bodies could lead to greater equality for women; others, however, predict dire consequences, such as the forced use of artificial wombs and the devaluation of motherhood (282). Besides being ethically challenging, ectogenesis would disrupt cultural ideas of femininity and motherhood (Brassington 2009; Pence 2006). Whatever the ramifications of ART and its associated procedures for making babies be, there is no doubt this is a high-tech affair that is mostly geared to help the rich reproduce. To analyse the consequences of ART on women, family and the larger social structure, focus must be on the intersections of gender and class. ART and other biomedical technologies exacerbate existing class differences and impose a disproportionate burden of child bearing on poor female bodies. Monetizing of reproductive labour and ascribing of womb work to select bodies reveals the inextricable link between contemporary forms of capitalist exploitation of labour within a neoliberal economy and medical control of women's fertility and reproductive autonomy. Many states also to a certain extent pushes or encourages the production of fit and desirable citizens through policy, law or measures that directly or indirectly promote ART, epigenetics and other biomedical procedures. Thus, ART is deeply contested, divisive and exploitative; it signals a posthuman future where babies are born outside natural wombs, reproduction is assisted by technology and genetic engineering projects may well design the perfect offspring for those who can

afford to spend millions. ART also signals the possibility of a dystopian future where the next frontier to cross could be a leap from designer babies to robot-babies. Mothers who will no longer be seen as default child bearers may feel disconnected and distanced from their offspring as pregnancy and gestation become alienating experiences and the long-standing connection between women's bodies and reproduction is severed; motherhood/parenthood could mean never labouring to raise a child from infancy into adulthood; and human babies would be replaced with lab grown and programmed machine- made one. Thus, ART, especially ectogenesis, could radically shift the current constructions of genders that are so interconnected with static ideas revolving around the connections between females and childbirth.

ART and surrogacy are complex domains for feminist engagement. ART and other biomedical procedures have a techno-utopian as well as techno-deterministic character. In this vision of the future, technology is embraced as a liberating force that can produce enhanced humans. Thus, in other words, the human-machine interface is very intense and seemingly exists in a condition of symbiosis. However, since the medico-legal-industrial complex is so fraught with class, race, caste, sexuality and location-based discrimination, it is very difficult to secure this utopian vision of free, liberated souls who chose or not chose to become a mother. The posthuman ideal of liberating women from all forms of oppression remains limited both in the realm of material reality of capitalist exploitation of productive and reproductive labour and in the realm of biomedical technology for enhancement. As women's bodies become tethered to technology or technology dictates the terms of reproduction, posthuman feminist quest for radical change in terms of destabilization of gender ideologies continues to be a utopian ideal. Thus, though we see there is a radical potential to disrupt gender binaries and free women from the oppressive ideology of motherhood, in real terms, ART can become another

tool for exploitation, commercialization, commodification of poor female bodies in a transactional, material, capitalist universe.

Critical Veganism: Posthumanism, feminism and interspecies relations

The Descartian, Cartesian, Kantian perspectives have held the view that nature has an instrumental value and values relative to human interests. The unbridgeable gap between the human world and the non-human/animal/plant world is the result of considering physical nature as nothing more or nothing less than matter in motion or a thing to be used. This mechanistic world view foregrounds the working of nature as explicable and works according to the abstract laws of motion. The only irreducible element in this explanatory scheme is the human mind which follows its own laws/cues and escapes full and absolute interpretation. This anthropocentric worldview is squarely rejected by posthumanists as well as ecofeminists. Challenging the mechanistic and reductionist approach of anthropocentrism, posthuman ecofeminists propose new ways of approaching human and the physical world encounter and interface. An ecofeminist perspective can open up new directions in posthuman research related to animal studies and new feminist materialisms. One of the most significant interventions has been in the area of animal and food studies.

Critical ecofeminist approaches that talk about veganism propose a world where least amount of harm is done to non-human beings/planet and species. A posthuman feminist perspective conceptualises relationships between humans and animals and non-human/plants/organisms as symbiotic and necessary for survival. Challenging and undermining human exceptionalism, posthuman feminists recognize humans as equal with and necessarily interconnected with nonhuman animals, technology, and other beings. Donna Haraway (2008) argues that the process of "becoming with" is how humans relate and communicate with non-

human animals. Questioning the position of humans as the centre of life on earth, posthuman feminists recognise the interconnections and interface between humans with the animals and the natural/physical world (Birke and Holmberg 2018).

In the posthuman feminist ethical framework, systems of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism, sexism and class-based exploitation, are inextricably linked with the oppression of nonhuman animals (Dressler 2020). Thus, advocacy against exploitation of animals who labour to provide value has been a legitimate posthuman feminist concern. Posthuman feminists have been at the forefront of activism against factory farming of animals for human consumption (meat and dairy, hide for leather); relentless profiteering from land use. They have been pushing for protection of habitats and animals from exploitation; protesting against use of animals for scientific experiments and selective breeding for human entertainment; decrying the enthusiasm for blood sports such as bull fighting, cock fights, dog fights among others; discouraging genetic modification of crops; agitating against the rampant mining of natural resource; building of nuclear plants that threaten to destroy habitat, vegetation and biodiversity; continual degradation of the environment brought about by extractive capitalist policies leading to sharp decline in clean air, clean energy and clean water particularly in the global South.

Case against Factory Farming

The extractive and exploitative nature of animal use for humans is linked to the capitalist mode of production. Technology and science have led to the use of improved and advanced machinery in farming and breeding. Animals in the meat and dairy industry are bred with the objective of fulfilling human needs. The life cycle of such animals (for example a sheep) is severely curtailed from birth to death and determined by its use-value and exchange value. A sheep ready for slaughter has already provided us with milk, cream, cheese, wool before ending up on the plate as lamb. This pattern of

use value and exchange value determines the way animals are treated by the food, dairy, leather, fashion industry among others without ethical consideration for the suffering of the animal/s in question. Stephanie Jenkins (2012) provides a stringent critique of animals as food. Proposing veganism as an ethical posthuman choice she links this to feminism and calls for an end to the practice of factory farming of animals and the killing of them for mass consumption. Jenkins argues that "everyday practices, including what (or who) we eat and wear, mark nonhuman animals as killable, maintaining the last vestiges of humanism. Until we recognize the lives of all animate beings as worth protecting, the hierarchical dualisms of human/animal, mind/body, and nature/culture will remain intact. Unless we "sacrifice the sacrifice" of nonhuman animals, as Derrida would say, feminist philosophy, animal studies, and posthumanist theory will simply continue the entrenchment of the very dichotomies that they seek to undermine" (504).

Critical Veganism as an ethical choice is closely tied to the philosophy of nonviolence. It also recognises how use of animals in the food and dairy industry is also linked to other forms of oppression including sexism, and points to the connections between gender and animality and ways in which women and animals come to occupy a commodified and subordinated position (Adams 1990, Cudworth 2011, Gaard 2011). As a posthuman feminist, vegan food practice is about embracing a diet that does least harm to animals and the planet on an individual and social level. According to Dressler, critical veganism is "inherently political and thus anti-capitalist. The act of leaving something off of one's plate or out of one's shopping cart is a political statement." Those vegans who embrace a diet that is free of meat and dairy not simply because it is a healthy choice but because they are deeply concerned about the suffering of animals and the relentless profiteering by the industry are clearly political and anti-capitalist. These vegans are the ones who practice critical veganism as opposed to those vegans who

choose a plant-based diet simply because it is healthier than an animal based one. Critical veganism stands against the use of animal products in all aspects of life and pushes for a practice where human need for them is substantially reduced or where possible totally eliminated. "Critical veganism poses a challenge to the seasoned vegan to explore new and creative ways to advocate for change. For Dressler critical veganism is "an embodied act that has to do with the way bodies are treated, giving it a new materialist understanding of being. Critical veganism is not just a discursive term to describe a phenomenon, but a physical way of interacting in the world" (17). Thus, the process of becoming a critical vegan is a transformation of one's worldview. Eating meat is no longer an innocent act framed in pleasure for the critical vegan. Pork, beef, mutton, lamb, omelette, milkshake turn into pig, cow, goat, sheep, hen restoring the absent referent of the animal to the plate. The act of consumption of meat and dairy reminds the critical vegan of suffering, extraction, exploitation, death and destruction of the animal and the environment. Scientific research on climate change has been very clear about the impact of animal farming on global warming.

Jenkins reminds us that a vegan ethics of nonviolence acknowledges the making-killable of animal others as a violent act, and it necessitates the symbolic and practical rejection of such violence. Critical veganism denounces the domination and abuse of animals by humans and also fully rejects what Haraway proposes as empathy with suffering animals, companionate suffering, is completely against violence and refuses to accept better or humane treatment of animals in the farm animal sector. Critical veganism recognises the value of all life and reconceptualizes the frames through which we understand our relationship with animals and food. Thus, a posthuman feminist ethic pushes people to consider the bodily realities of nonhuman animals in the world, to respect animals and non-human others as equal partners in the world and conceives of a relationship that is not framed by violence or

structured in oppression. As Carol Adams clarifies, critical posthuman feminism is an "ethical stance based on compassion for all beings" (Adams, "Ecofeminism" 113).

Posthuman feminists who are also ecofeminists believe in the utopia of a world where the domination of humans over nature and animals shall be a thing of the past. They envision a world where people will be responsible towards the environment and their relationship with animals and the planet will be based on non-violence. Although this imaginary of interspecies, planetary co-existence is utopian and may not be fulfilled anytime soon, imagining a future where all relations are intersectional and symbiotic can help us reduce hyper consumption and carbon footprint. This posthuman feminist perspective can certainly guide us to a more peaceful and non-violent future.

Conclusion

The ethical perspective that holds the view that only human beings have moral value is anthropocentric and reductionist. This world view absolves human beings of any direct responsibility towards the planet while telling us that we have a duty of care towards animals and the natural world. This indirect responsibility springs from our need to ensure preservation of the balance in the food chain for our own survival. This mechanistic world view suggests that everything in the natural and non-human world exists only to serve humans and their values are relative to human interest. Human beings have the potential to manipulate natural resources and life on the planet in various ways. Age of the Anthropocene is the age of the capitaloscene. The natural world has value only to the extent that it contributes to capital accumulation. Thus, there is constant pressure on the earth to meet the continual expansion of capital accumulation. This is an unsustainable system and will have to be replaced with a more just, equal and equitable system that does not practice the oppression and exploitation of the many by the few.

Posthuman feminist affective practices can challenge the logic of capital accumulation by advocating for a system that is not based on ontological dualism or the division between the human and the natural world (including all animate and inanimate life forms). This would mean an acceptance of the intrinsic value of planetary species and the consideration of animals as vulnerable and valuable. According to Ferrando, posthuman feminist ethics supports a worldview where empathy, as emphasized by Edith Stein ([1917] 1989); compassion, as developed by Luce Irigaray (1993); care, as underlined by Carol Gilligan (1982); symbiosis, as proposed by Lynn Margulis (1991, 1998); and responsibility, as clarified by Hannah Arendt (1958) are foundational.

Ditching the process of stratification, posthuman feminist ethics pushes for us to move beyond realist ontology and epistemic fallacy by embracing other ways of being in the world. Living in close embrace with the natural world, accepting the gaps and fissures in our knowledge and understanding of it; being comfortable with that which exceeds our understanding of and our dependence on the planet. As Ferrando argues, these are the spaces of faith, memory, myth, fables, folklore, space of absences that can help us reassess our relationship with each other and with the planet. Ferrando asserts that any form of discrimination is an open door to other forms of discriminations, so that to achieve planetary co-existence we need to take into account all these assets of reformulation: the individual, the social, the environmental, and the technological, among others (Ferrando, "Posthuman Feminist Ethics" 160). Without being caught between the euphoric and the apocalyptic, posthuman feminist ethics calls for us to take into account the technological developments that are poised to produce new and alternate models of technorealities that will determine our future and our relationship with the world. A lot will depend on how technology will be distributed, accessed and used and that will determine its impact and influence on the planet.

Posthuman feminist ethics calls for an end to planetary destruction through violence, exploitation, commodification, rampant consumerism, hyper production and hyper consumption by proposing an alternate framework that includes and accommodates all species. There is no suggestion of a feminist utopia or a Gilead-like dystopia, but a reassessment of the present that takes its lessons from the past and looks at the future to make life more liveable, just, equal and liberating for all species. Moving away from the speculations of a technologically transformed utopian future or the utterly unsettling dystopian universe of a technological wasteland, posthuman feminist ethics provide a sturdy critique of social and political realities of the present. It also warns us against all forms of destruction and devastation wrought upon by exploitation and oppression of people, animals, plants and other species that threaten our collective existence and compromise the possibility of a peaceful planetary co-existence. In other words, posthuman feminist ethics call for a planet where every life and non-life forms are free from the circle of greed, aggression, dominance – in Raymond Williams terms – "the coarseness and vulgarity of the surface world." The posthuman feminist ethic seeks to change the current agenda and transform power relationships, expanding our collective vision to embrace a planet in all its diversity and difference; rallying for equality, equity, justice and peace for all.

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Nonhuman Agency: Reading Siddhartha Gigoo's Selected Novels within the ANT Frame

Manisha Gangahar

Posthumanistic perspectives in Cultural studies highlight the discernable patterns and designs of human experience harboured by individualized bodies —which are not humans— and, unlike the fixed proportions of a Modular Man, are in a constant flux. Latour, advocating nonhuman agency, asserts that "agency [be] decoupled from [the] criteria of intentionality, subjectivity, and freewill" since these were merely yardsticks to discriminate nonhumans from humans and outrightly deny the former any agency (Bruno, *Politics of Nature* 75). Thus, Latour maintains that agency is not a pre-given feature but a force or characteristic that "modifies other actors through" the process or passage of the act (ibid.). In this context, the paper explores how the concept of agency for nonhumans challenges the conventional human-centric prototype through the reading of Siddhartha Gigoo's novels *Mehr* and *The Lion of Kashmir*. Moreover, the aim is to study how nonhuman entities, while acquiring agency, shape the understanding of social and cultural phenomena alongside humans through the lens of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. Having agency had once been exclusively sanctioned to human consciousness and intentionality, but Latour argues that it could also be extended to nonhuman actors, as a result of which the boundary between humans and nonhumans, between mind and body, becomes blurred.

The paper, thus, illustrates how nonhuman agency becomes crucial to not only the narration of Gigoo's selected novels but also critically essential to the recognition and comprehension of the convoluted realities and human conditions in a conflict zone that the novels (re)present and reflect.

Siddhartha Gigoo's novels are a winding maze of human mindscape, exploring people's fragmented identities and conflicts

of ideologies and affiliations against a backdrop of conflict. *The Lion of Kashmir* is a daughter's account of trying to comprehend her relationship with her father within the frame of her "home", which is Kashmir. *Mehr* is a love story of Mehr, a Shia woman and social worker from Pakistan, and Firdaus, who is from Kashmir. Their love story is surreal and meant to be doomed, with rivalry, hatred, fanaticism, deception and duty all serving as an impetus. Gigoo's novels have many layers, inviting the readers to look beyond the bounds of the imaginable, suggesting the simultaneous existence of multiple truths in the context of Kashmir. An essential aspect of Gigoo's characterization is endowing nonhumans with not only an individuality of their own but also having an agency in shaping the plot and manifestation of complicated and entwined realities.

Latour's Actor-Network Theory emphasizes the inter-connectedness and agency of nonhuman actors, while recognizing the complex networks of relationships and influences that shape our world. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour brings "things, objects, beasts" (13) under the heading of nonhumans and in *Reassembling the Social*, he adds "microbes, scallops, rocks and ships" (11) to the list. Reading within this framework, the paper tries to elucidate how Gigoo conceptualizes animals as active nonhuman agents within human-animal networks, offering insights into the complex dynamics of power, relationships and identity building. Thus, the attempt here is to study how representation and characterization of animals is not merely about depicting them as objects, or as ancillary to humans, but as independent entities having agency to affect the surrounding, influence the state of mind of human characters and engage with them at their conscious and unconscious level.

In Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which seeks to describe and analyse the ways in which networks of actors—human and non-human alike—come together to produce social phenomena, all entities are considered "actants" that have the potential to

influence and shape outcomes. In other words, it challenges the notion that humans are the central or most significant beings, and instead recognizes the entanglement and interdependence of humans and nonhumans in creating social order and meaning. In Actor-Network Theory, while an "actor" —human or nonhuman— refers to any entity that has the capacity to act or influence the actions of others, the network, which is continuously in formation through interactions between actors, is regarded as heterogenous and fluid. Thus, the nonhumans, being accorded an agency, contribute to the life, to the world order that exists. As part of the Actor-Network Theory configuration, Edwin Sayes (2013) identifies certain characteristics that Latour ascribes to nonhumans in order to exhibit the working or contribution of nonhuman agency towards social life. The paper traces these attributes in nonhuman entities — animals in case of these selected novels—and show how nonhuman agency comes into play.

The first of the attributes is that nonhumans offer a condition for the possibility of a balanced human society, or in other words, nonhumans serve as necessary counterbalance for the human collective. Latour emphasizes upon the need to think of social life in terms of inter-objectivity and not merely inter-subjectivity. Social interaction can be designed with and through objects. This would usually be understood as the capacity possessed by machines and artifacts to stabilize the social life of the humans. However, extending the argument, it would refer to the ability or power of nonhumans like animals to actively bring about or facilitate a change.

In the novel *Mehr*, the relationship between Mehr and Firdaus unravels with each letter that Mehr writes to Firdaus and a less frequent reply, but along with that also develops the idea of self and the world around, as it plays out for each of them. However, it is the cat-called Ms Mishima- who is crucial to the construal and comprehension of a world that can no longer be approached as an

object but as a creation of the mind. Moreover, as a nonhuman entity, the cat seems to have the power, agency, to act alone or in juxtaposition with others, primarily humans, to continue its being on the one hand and on the other, serve as an harbour to the becoming of the characters. It is Ms Mishima who pulls most strongly at the threads of the conundrum that life seems to be in a conflict zone. Intriguing and compelling, yet with a streak of innocence, Ms Mishima might for a moment appear secondary to the plot. She is, however, the anchor, perplexingly the centre of reality, considering she is a cat: "I have Ms Mishima. She deserves my extra attention these days. I know she has taken a liking to you. Do you know how jealous I become when she looks at you?" (Gigoo, *Mehr* 142) The cat coexists with its human masters and she becomes the link between the mind games of the hacker and Major K in the novel.

On the other hand, in *The Lion of Kashmir*, vital to the conception and understanding of a world that can no longer be perceived as an object but as a formulation of the mind, it is the insects, Whitey the female dog and Rani, the pigeon, who paly a role, and more importantly their value lies in the meaning they impart to the workings of the human characters. Zooni, the daughter in *The Lion of Kashmir*, goes through a series of bizarre events, she imagines things—or are they really happening— and is struggling to find her missing father in her strife-torn homeland: "I can't take my eyes off Whitey. She doesn't take hers off mine. She seems to ne conveying something to me. This has happened to me many times… she has tried to warn me about something." (Gigoo, *The Lion* 90)

The confusion between identities, the blurring boundaries between the real and the unreal, and the conflicting narrations that reflect the entangled wires of Kashmir's history are foregrounded. Again in the novel *Mehr*, the hacker, the one employed by Major K, says:

I had only one condition that I explained to him, hoping that he would relent. It was about Ms Mishima. 'I can't abandon her,' I said to him. She will be with me always and in all circumstances. I depend on her as much as she depends on me. She eats only when I feed her. She won't interfere in my work. I assure you.

'Keep her so long as she is not a pest,' he said…. (56)

Mishima becomes crucial to a working relationship, if there is to be one, between Major K and the hacker. On the surface it just seems an animal, a cat, being present but underneath is the convoluted maze of a relation with what is real as well as fiction. It is the nonhuman here who manifests a sort of stability to the incoherent workings of Major K. In essence, Ms Mishima collaborates with human actors in a confederation rather than being subordinate in order to establish a social domain of their presence. "My bond with Ms Mishima was not one of weakness but one of strength. His approval for letting me keep her had possibly hinted at the sympathy he had felt for her and me" (57). Just as Latour has emphasized upon the active role of non-human entities, Ms Mishima and Whitey are so positioned and set to play that role.

The second quality or attribute of nonhumans within the ANT is them acting as arbitrators and going much beyond the role of being just intermediaries. As mediators, these entities have a role to play in altering, interpreting, or refashioning the course of action within a network. The actor or actant may not be the sole trigger of a change, but they actively drive or carry the action forward, while adding their own traces to it, reshaping it. The nonhuman, placed between two actors, is understood as continually modifying relations between actors, as Latour argues. For instance, in one of the episodes from the novel:

Major K calls Ms Mishima by different names, and orders me to call her Ms Mishima at all times… Mr K keeps praising her… wakes her up, takes her to her room and coaxes her into cracking the obstacle course he has set for her. It is an impossible course to

crack. A real tough task, even for an experienced cadet! There are areas Ms Mishima can't go or touch. Demarcated by markings there is an entry… and a tricky exit. (116)

…

Why's Major K testing her as though she has done some wrong? She doesn't deserve this treatment… Ms Mishima stands at the exit of the obstacle course and gives us a triumphant look. She runs all over the course and demolishes it. (117)

I am readying her for the outside world. (118)

Here, Ms Mishima has been forced to perform a drill which she successfully completes but the episode yet again blurs the line between real and unreal, as far as Mr K and the employed hacker is concerned. Also, the cat with its responses changes the thought process not only of the hacker but the reader as well. While the narrative doesn't allow the reader to assume the real identities either of Mr K or the hacker, the cat does help in interpreting the maze that both of them are creating.

According to Latour, as a result of having agency, nonhumans are different from intermediators as they are not just transmitting the action but actively engaging and reworking it. They are sometimes risky and one might add, even unstable. Conceived as a mediator, a nonhuman is necessarily seen as adding something to a chain of interaction or an association and thus it becomes impossible to treat them as mere substitutes for human actors.

In *The Lion of Kashmir*, Whitey, the dog, is a constant reminder of the fear of the unknown: "I am not her protector… She is protecting me… Whitey is not scared for her life" (130). Thus, nonhumans act and as a result demand new models of action from other actors, they are considered something "more" than mere causal actors. However, what this "more" consists of is ambiguous.

Major K sits next to me and listens patiently to my analysis. Stroking Ms Mishima, our only companion, he mumbles softly

into her ear. He speaks to her in a language I don't know. But his words aren't bereft of meaning. There's a glint of affection in his eyes as he attends to Ms Mishima. (Gigoo, *Mehr* 115)

Similarly in the novel *The Lion of Kashmir*:

Whitey barges in through a window… She seems to have come for Zubair and me…She will help me find a way out of here… She will know the way out of here. (127-128)

Whitey is not scared for her life. She's scared of me… Her weakness has become her greatest strength. She will give up everything to defend me. (130)

The third facet that Latour illustrates is that nonhumans become visible members of moral and political associations, thereby altering the texture of morality and politics within the network. Countering the traditional human-centric perception of politics and morality, Latour argues that nonhumans—like technology, animals, and objects—can be actants that contribute to moral and political outcomes in significant ways:

Whitey indeed knows and has knowledge of things that are about to unfold. I would not have survived had it not been for her.... Flatnose knows I owe my survival to Whitey… She was trying to steal Whitey from me. And she almost succeeded in winning Whitey's heart. (143-144)

It is through the eyes of Zooni, the daughter, and Zooni's constant relation with Whitey that the novel presents the quandary and ethical predicaments of the legendary police officer, the 'Lion of Kashmir', how he is pulled between his past and present, obligation and desertion, loyalty and treason, and right and wrong.

The nonhumans may also have a purpose, will, a sense of justice or they are moral or political actors in the same sense that human are, argues Latour, and also that moral choice or the political sphere is no longer confined to rationality or logic or even norms of the humans. For instance, the case with Ms Mishima:

> Ms Mishima begins to display an unusual trait I thought she didn't possess. She cheats major k into believing that she's not interested in me any longer. She pretends to obey his orders. She showers all her pretentious attention on him. But as days go by, she starts disregarding Major K's admonitions. It is her way of protesting. (139)

Even the cat becomes suspicious, illustrating that it does not want to be taken for granted. The wider argument that Latour offers is that morality is not an exclusive attribute possessed by the humans. Instead, it can be spread across the network that also includes nonhumans. It is through the role that Ms Mishima and Whitey play, through their engagement with the characters and the reader, that they have an active participation in raising certain questions of morality and, more so, about political associations in a conflict zone.

> At least I have Ms Mishima to prevent me from being consumed by bad dreams. She wakes me up when I am dreaming terrible dreams. It is hard for her.... Am I unable to understand the signs Ms Mishima seems to be conveying? Does she fear being taken away by major key? Is she feel full of me? Does she suspect my tensions? (Gigoo, *Mehr* 169)

The nonhuman agency towards political association would mean the power to create or raise questions, allow negotiations, manifest possibility of multiple realities, which are all central to sustaining of an order. The point that ANT makes is that morality and politics should not be linked to nonhumans separated from all other actors, but to associations. The nonhumans are not divorced from the question of morality or politics, but that this relationship must be considered as part of the association, the entire network.

> Once again, Ms Mishima's foreboding has alarmed me. She conveys the fears to me through a strange behavior she's never displayed. The fears are not hers. The fears are mine. (169)

Thus, it is through the agency of a nonhuman that the hacker/narrator and Major K, who in the end we realize are the same,

relate to the world around them. Ms Mishima is instrumental, an active actor, to the creation of that world, real or unreal, the world at the threshold, the world of the mindscape.

> I thought Major K and I were a team… Not without Ms Mishima… She's the proof of my innocence. She knows everything. (Gigoo, *Mehr* 180)

> Whitey is not afraid of anyone… Ever since she gave birth, she's become fearful… She has come to know fear and weakness. She has tasted love and that's making her weak. (Gigoo, *The Lion* 145)

The animals contribute immensely to the liminality that these novels present, through their narratives and through characterization, "opening up a space of qualms and dilemmas, of dispute and variance, of contradictions and intertwinings that facilitates the inferences and connotations to go deeper than the surface of the work, beyond the gaze" (Gangahar). The novels, through the nonhuman entities, depict the inner conflict of human character and their constant negotiation with realities. It is the nonhuman agency that assists them in relating to themselves and their surroundings but at times even in posing an opposition to them. Had it not been for the subtle play of human and nonhuman actants, the novels would have lost the value of being integrated into a unity with real life and its reading would have been quite perfunctory.

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The World and its Institutions: Reflections on D H Lawrence and Surendra Mohanty

Asima Ranjan Parhi

Introduction

Art has always been a tool of emancipation and liberation. Artists take recourse to it in order to expose the limitations as well as the restrictive nature of institutionalised religion, politics or social order. Thomas Hardy, D H Lawrence and James Joyce serve as powerful exemplars. Institutionalized religion has created a world of bondage without cleansing the bestial in the humans. Paradoxically religion has stolen the deeper spiritual essence within us which could make us one with the world and with our fellow beings. D H Lawrence exposes the failure of the claims of Christianity in redeeming mankind and privileges the pagan, Etruscan, eastern religious faith as enabling the spiritual progress of humanity as against Christianity. His novels depict liberation through instinct and the body. Surendra Mohanty, the modern Odia novelist is extremely vocal about the defeatist, life denying message of Buddhism and searches for fulfilment in and through the body.

At the fag end of his literary career, Lawrence invested his mystical energy in unravelling human civilization through a cosmic, pagan lens. *The Apocalypse* contains this energy that questions institutionalised religion in general and Christianity in particular. Drawing from the far south, especially the Hindu roots and its diverse philosophical and spiritual engagements, the author speculates of an ideal individual free from the dual trap of servility and faith. A*pocalypse* demands attention to the making of western religious history, its cultural and political reconstruction amidst a deep philosophical, theological crisis. From Platonic imitative art, the Renaissance response to geography and human potential to the far greater debates of human rationality in the eighteenth century and subsequent socio-cultural upheavals of the twentieth century, a

cursory look at human evolution seems to be a necessary technique in fathoming Lawrence's analysis of human civilisation. It happens to be his last shot at the ignominy of institutional religion and mass hysteria in the face of a chosen conservative aristocracy of the select few with the capacity to hold on to individual integrity rather than behaving like slaves to an imposed order. Lawrence has pondered over the subject all through his essays with the same power and energy while his masterpieces in the fictional narrative provide a solace out of the same inertia. Human 'Will' triumphs as individual 'Will'. The collective 'Will' is an illusion, a belief that corrupts the individual self and its potential to connect with the cosmos laments the prophetic author. In 'The Reality of Peace' (*Phoenix-I*), Lawrence contends 'Whichever it is, I am only half, complemented by my opposite' (691). Collective will, collective peace or collective submission is anathema for Lawrence. The general approval of religious teachings and puritan Christian values repel Lawrence who argues for the real, the ephemeral, the immediate existence of our flesh and blood; it is vital, elemental and physical in existence. The human, animal and inanimate world integrates and become parts of the cosmic whole. Lawrence furthers this idea in all his novels. Birkin and Ursula in *Women in Love* uphold love of the other, but not by sacrificing their individual ego. Paul in *Sons and Lovers* gets disillusioned by Miriam because she surrenders herself completely. This, Lawrence feels, is a culturally defined trait in women. Paul too is coded by the Victorian socio-cultural norm yet struggles to come out of it. Lady Chatterley attempts a release from institutionalised marriage and a religion that supports it. It is the cosmic presence of the self in diverse communication with the life force not in terms of the mind but body that Lawrence pleads for in his ideal romantic exploration of life on earth. Self is nothing but a unit like all other objects placed in their respective orbits of the cosmic force. Whether it is man-woman love or the question of god, Lawrence instinctually reacts against any form of uniformity, submission or supreme revelation. Much before institutionalised religion invented rigorous

rituals and a frightening god, human beings used to posit faith in the sun, moon, rain and all natural processes, lived with them and relied on them without any sense of fear or ideological preference. There was no sense of a Supreme God or Supreme Being other than nature. This is the contention of Lawrence in *The Apocalypse* where he satirizes the high handedness of the Christian Gospel: We cannot help hating the Christian fear whose method, from the very beginning has been to deny everything that didn't fit, or better still, suppress it (41).

Lawrence further makes a very valid point that exposes this superiority complex and homogenising tendency of Christianity: Curiously enough, we do not look on the Greeks and the Romans, after about 600 B.C. as real pagans: not like Hindus or Persians, Babylonians or Egyptians, or even Cretans for example we accept the Greeks and the Romans as the initiators of our intellectual and political civilization, the Jews as the fathers of our moral religious civilization so these are 'our sort'. All the rest are mere nothing, almost idiots (42). In chapter seven he questions more fervently what our postcolonial theorists would profess much later: What of it? Because they lacked our modern mental and mechanical attainments, were they any less 'civilised' or 'cultured'… and have we anything as good as the Egyptians of two or three thousand years before Christ as a people? Culture and civilisation are tested by vital consciousness. Are we more vitally conscious than an Egyptian 3000 years B.C. was? (46-47). Lawrence believes that preventing one's self from pure spirituality is a wrong approach to life in its natural state. For example, love in all forms, whether physical or not is a pure feeling but it is the crudity of mind that makes it appear sinful and forbidden. Making love is also a kind of liberation of soul, diving deep into the self. It is not only the physical act of merging but also uniting of two halves that forms a whole. He mocks the hypocrisy of the masses that has developed a 'grey disease of sex hatred' along with a 'yellow disease of dirt lust'. In his essay

'Pornography and Obscenity' Lawrence writes: But in the degraded human mind being the deep instincts have gone dead and then the two flows (sex flow and excrement flow) become identical. This is the secret of really the vulgar and pornographic: the sex flow and the excrement flow is the same to them. It happens when the psyche deteriorates, and the profound controlling instinct collapse. Then sex is dirt and dirt is sex, and sexual excitement becomes a playing with dirt (176). And in *Apocalypse* we get glimpses of this idea, for the cosmic as a whole is the central focus. The essence of true religion has already received a deadly blow and it is the mob or the masses that are to be blamed. This mob is the second minded people who are unable to distinguish between living and money, good and evil, earthly bread and heavenly bread. And the first minded people, the aristocrats are true individuals. And thus a religion like Christianity is not for the mob but for the aristocrats, the strong minded people. Lawrence draws from Dostoevsky immensely; in the chapter 'The Grand Inquisitor' from *The Brothers Karamazov,* Ivan Karamazov voices what Lawrence would time and again emphasize in the Apocaly*pse.* Here is Ivan: You promised them bread from heaven, but I again repeat can it stand comparison with earthly bread in the eyes of the weak, for the ever vicious and forever ingrate tribe of man? And even if, for the sake of bread from heaven, you are followed by thousands and tens of thousands, what will become of the millions and scores of thousands of millions of creatures unable to forgo the earthly bread for the sake of heavenly? (387) He speaks to Alyosha, his younger brother, 'you did not know, however, that as soon as man rejected miracles, he would immediately reject God as well, since it is not so much God that man seeks, as miracles' (390). Lawrence in his essay titled 'The Grand Inquisitor' talks about the inadequacy of Jesus while never discarding Jesus. He loves Jesus the lover but he hates Jesus the teacher. He struggles with this paradoxical search of god and feels that such teachings are not meant for the masses but for special individuals or the chosen

ones. Christianity looks for limitations and the good in man. But mankind also includes evil. And this is where the inadequacy lies.

In the preface to the sixth edition of his novel *Nila Shaila (The Blue Mountain)* Surendra Mohantystates, *Jagannatha* in Odisha is the *Purushottama* in *The Gita* that symbolises 'nirguna' (without set values, equally poised and not driven by either the good or the evil, not contemptuous of any). He further defines that this is beyond mere bhakti or devotion, it is difficult to decipher the deep *Jagannathtatwa* (concept, discourse).The two stories selected from Surendra Mohanty problematize and question the given existential renunciation and subjugation of the human self in the face of post Buddhist lethargy and surrender of a society earlier known for its spiritual, architectural and martial valour. In this context, he exposes the futility of *nirvana* and searches for the meaning of life in the vital, real flesh and blood. *Moksha* or liberation renews itself in the flow of an elemental energy of the individual passion than religious doctrine. In the *Upanishad*, which is a basic philosophical text of Hinduism, *Moksha* is defined as a state of total self-realisation and oneness with *Brahma*, the supreme divine. *Brahma* is believed to reside in each and every individual and one can achieve it by the process of self-realisation and only then there is the attainment of *Moksha*.The influence of the Hindu ethos is evident in Mohanty's art. He seems to have been influenced by the idea of *Aham Brahma* (I am the divine and I see the divine in everything) in Hindu thought which lays emphasis on the cosmos as being in itself divine. So all creatures are a manifestation of god, the entire world before us is divine. *Shiva* and *Shakti* are two halves that make a whole. Together they form this cosmos and stand for supreme consciousness, one is incomplete without the 'other'. It is the recognition here and now of the mundane and the immediate world which speaks of the presence of the concrete and individual self in all and the presence of all in the self. Mohanty's critique of Buddhism has a historical significance since Odia society has gone into a state of

disillusionment and dormancy post Kalinga war. Buddhism, after the disappearance of Buddha crafted a social structure that evades any form of active, physical and vital living. Mohanty's '*pheri jaa bhikhsu*' echoes the courageous Odia mother and her vision of a future active life. Lawrence time and again speaks of a society that found menial work of the miner livid and elemental which got replaced by the crippling theorisation of Freud and Marx (post industrialisation). So is Surendra Mohanty's dream of reviving ancient glory, stressing on the abode of Sri Jagannath and its cultural, historical significance (*Nila Shaila)* or an active social space ('Sariputta' and 'Mahanirvana') that rejoices in work and vigour more than any oppressive religion. Mohanty rejoices in reconstructing Odisha's histor by his narrative intertwining of history and fiction. His historical imagination enables the author to closely view the possible gaps that exist in exploring the riches of the Romance in Odia literature. Travelling in historical time, he critiques the course of their cultural timidity as a result of multiple invasions, be it the Mughals or the Marahathas who not only looted their resources, but crippled their souls:

> Ehipariatyachara o pidana re Odia jati ra meru danda bhangi padi thila.Odia jati ra bartamana thila anishchita, bhabishyata thila andhakara, atita hin thila ekamatra santwana.Adha kahaani o adha itihasa madhya re se atita ra udbodhana o smarana ehi bhagnajanu jatikubelebelebanchiba pain jahakichhipreranadeuthila ('Dalei Budha', 'Kabi O Nartaki', 134).

> The Odia culture was devastated and its very existence was threatened. It lived a doubtful present, its future was grim. It only stood by its memory of the past. With the help of history and fiction, the broken soul of this society tried to inspire itself and stand on its own.

> (Translation mine)

The language of both Lawrence and Mohanty inherently match in terms of their lyrical pace that is like the flow of blood in

veins. The instances of love making or descriptive luxury of physical details appear to be similar in the two writers by the sheer magic of word play. Here is Mohanty in 'Mahanirvana':

> Nila chela parihita, kusumita aparajita, bratati pari, shyama barna, krushangi Madhubrata.Dui charana jepari priya milana ra sangeeta re murchhanamaya. Khina kati talebartula jaghana, puni kanchala ra kathora bandhana tale peena stana bikhubdha bakhya ra leelayita rekha, peedana pain jepari udbelita hoi uthi thila. Olatapadmatalapari dui ayatanetra re kintu, ekachhayachhannah-radarakarunaudasinata. (4)

> Clad in blue, in meditative mood, wheatish, slim Madhubrata whose feet were even desperate to merge in the other. Her slim waist and rotund thighs, sharp breasts under tight brassier impatient with passion await invasion. But the wide eyes like lotus were melancholic like a shady lake.

> <div align="right">(Translation mine)</div>

And here is Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

> … the stirring fireng fire in his loins! …to fight that sparkling electric Thing outside there, to preserve the tenderness of life, the tenderness of women and the natural riches of desire (112)

> It might come with the thrust of a sword in her softly opened body, and that would be death. But it came with a strange slow thrust of peace, the dark thrust of peace and a ponderous, primordial tenderness, such as made the world in the beginning.... And now she touched him, and it was the sons of god with the daughters of men. How beautiful he felt, how pure in tissue! What beauty, of flesh, the life within life, the sheer warm, potent loveliness. (162-164)

Then there is Mohanty:

> Ehi ta sehi anirbachaniya mahashunya, jaha madhyare deha o atma mansa o prana, rupa o arupa, sabu nishchinha hoijae. (5)

This is that expressionless awareness of a great void in which the body, soul, life force, shape and the shapeless get fused and emptied with a mysterious silence.

(Translation mine)

Lawrence evokes a sense of that urgency of feeling and mutual self surrender in *Sons and Lovers*:

Everything was still, perfect in itself, along with him. This wonderful stillness in each thing in itself, while it was being borne along in a very ecstasy of living, seemed the highest point of bliss. (342)

In the end of 'Mahanirvana', Niloptala achieves his salvation in the mystical void:

Eka barnanatita mahanirvana Madhyare, se jepari sattahina bhavare bilupta hoipadithile. (12)

He was lost in an inexplicable salvation.

Birkin and Ursula achieve the same bliss in *Women in Love*:

In the new superfine bliss, a peace superseding knowledge, there was no I and you, there was only the third, unrealized wonder….Speech travels between the separate parts. But in the perfect One there is perfect silence of bliss. (417)

Conclusion

Both D H Lawrence and Surendra Mohanty express their strong reservations about servile humans and their unhesitant adoption of religious doctrines - Christianity and Buddhism in their respective contexts. The modern industrial as well as lustreless religious bigotry has robbed human beings of their natural and biological vigour. Their language exhibits a magic of word chemistry, a lyricism that matches the flow of blood. The highly charged diction is a fitting replacement of the dead human reality of the twentieth century that has robbed religion of its vitality of love and energy.

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The Rise of Techno-Taste: Hayles, Latour, and Posthuman Consumption

Priyanka Das

Introduction

The rise of posthumanism as a theoretical framework has transformed our understanding of humanity's place within a world increasingly mediated by technology. Rooted in the rejection of anthropocentric hierarchies, posthumanism questions the primacy of the human subject and its presumed superiority over the non-human, technological, and ecological spheres. Central to this discourse is the interrogation of how emergent technologies – particularly in the realms of artificial intelligence (AI), digital humanities, and virtual reality – reshape traditional notions of identity, embodiment, and lived experience. These sh ifts become especially pertinent when applied to everyday phenomena that are often taken for granted – such as the act of eating and the cultural meanings attached to food.

Food – as both a material necessity and a deeply cultural artifact – occupies a unique space in posthuman studies. It traverses the biological, social, and symbolic domains making it a potent site for exploring the intersections of technology, identity, and existential anxieties in the posthuman era. The digital humanities, with their emphasis on interdisciplinary inquiry and computational methodologies, offer fertile ground for examining how narratives around food and consumption are reimagined in technologically mediated contexts. Similarly, AI and virtual environments, which blur the lines between the real and the simulated, open up new possibilities for theorizing food as not just sustenance but also a construct laden with cultural, economic, and ethical implications.

In this light, the concept of food in the posthuman era becomes a critical perspective through which broader anxieties about humanity's future are articulated. These anxieties often find expression in speculative fiction, where dystopian visions of

ecological collapse, overpopulation, and technological dominance coalesce around the theme of food scarcity and its substitutes. Pinpointing the "first" ever film to specifically deal with Food in the Posthuman terrain, as a topic can be a bit challenging, since it, practically, does not exist. However, as a tribute I would mention a 1973 film *Soylent Green* – a cultural touchstone indeed, which is set in a dystopian future – the year 2022 – where overpopulation and ecological degradation have led to food shortages, and the government provides a food substitute called "Soylent Green".Of all the anxieties that shroud the postmodern human existence regarding Food, there are two crucial ones – Food Insecurity and Gastronomic Identity – as the precursors to two more novice ideas that have the potential to increase the posthuman angst.

Techno-Taste Revolution: Money-Technology/ Body-Identity

This paper proposes the idea of Techno-Food or Techno-Taste – a concept that aims to encapsulate the fusion of culinary practices with technological mediation. It further seeks to theorize "techno-taste" through the lens of posthuman subjectivity, examining how virtual consumption and disembodied gastronomy complicate traditional understandings of food as a site of identity formation and social cohesion. The digital humanities play a pivotal role in situating these inquiries within a broader techno-cultural context. The web series, called *Upload,* envisioned by Greg Daniels, was released in 2020 – right at a time when humanity was facing one of the worst existential threats of the millennia. While death was knocking at almost everyone's door, here comes a series – *about* Death, but donning a futuristic world where Human consciousness can be uploaded into a virtual realm – *after* their Death.

The paper is divided into two primary arguments – albeit overlapping at times– about this complex understanding of food and posthuman subjectivity. The major part focuses on the idea of Virtual Consumption – where I have discussed the underlying tenets of food, money, and posthuman technology. The rest of the paper

discusses the centrality of the Body within consciousness and identity formation – which I would refer as Disembodied Gastronomy.

Virtual Consumption: Food, Money, and Posthuman Technology

One of the most prevalent postmodern anxieties surrounding Food and Posthuman is the fear of Genetic modification. As science pushes the boundaries of what is edible – debates arise on the long-term health impacts of Genetically Modified Organisms. The introduction of modified crops – such as Bt Cotton and Bt Brinjal – has already raised concerns over the ethical implications of altering the very DNA of our staple. Fast forward to the Posthuman era, where Food is synthesized from imagination, where Algorithms curate the perfect menu, where Virtual Reality is the new dining room. Here our protagonists dine on holographic delights – downloading Flavours from the Cloud.

Mortality as a Subscription Service: The Economics of Afterlife

Now coming to the specific show that I have chosen - the central theme in *Upload* is treating Mortality as a Subscription Service. The wealthiest of the lot transcends Mortal Death by "purchasing" the subscription to upload their Consciousness into a Digital Afterlife. This macabre subscription model turns Immortality into a Luxury product – reserved only for the privileged Elites.

Our protagonist, Nathan Brown, though not affluent himself, gets sponsored by his super rich girlfriend – and is almost coaxed into a Posthuman reality, which challenges not only his perceptions of life and death, but also the minute essence of his fundamental existence as a human. Such a sponsorship highlights the pronounced socio-economic disparities in accessing Posthuman experiences – raising concerns over agency and autonomy in the face of such transitions.

Nathan wakes up in a high-end Boutique Hotel called Lakeview, where a complimentary breakfast is a fleeting luxury that vanishes for those who arrive late. This can be read either as a mechanism for disciplining the body, or as a powerful metaphor for the transient nature of life. The vanishing food and the ephemeral nature of this sustenance highlights the fragility of our existence. As a hungry Nathan tries his luck at the snack-vending machine, he is told that his "Afterlife Card" is low on credit, which can be recharged only with real money – and not to mention, by the mortal who purchased the subscription.

In the meanwhile, the other residents of Lakeview indulge in an array of culinary experiences, without actually feeling hungry or sensing appetite. As Nathan glances through the holographic delights that mimic the diverse dishes he once enjoyed in the physical world, both Nathan and the viewers enter the zone of bewilderment at the seemingly infinite choices available at the Digital Buffet. Here, the consumption of Food becomes a Data-driven simulation – where the pleasure derived from eating is *not* through the nourishment of the body, but through the simulation of the digital consciousness. One can even pay some extra bucks to monetize flavour and customise their own gourmet dishes. This, in the process, reinforces the capitalist desire to commercialize corporeal pleasure. The transient and dynamic evolution of technology, particularly the Digital Afterlife, resonates with Zygmunt Bauman's idea of a Liquid Society. The characters' experiences within the virtual space reflects the pervasive uncertainties and perpetual metamorphoses inherent in Liquid Modernity.

3D Food and Food Printing

While the Digital Afterlife gleams in its monetary abundance, the outside world is no less surprising. Another quirky insertion of the technological threat is introduced through the concept of 3D Food and Food Printing. We see Nathan's alive and

not-so-affluent family, gathered at the dinner table, waiting for the 3D Printing Device to print a semblance of food. In this part of the world, only the rich have an exclusive access to real food and real meat.

The most obvious reading would call for a Marxist critique of the Posthuman – as the narrative throws a strong commentary on the ever-growing socio-economic disparities that extend beyond mortal life. The socio-economic disparities highlight the idea of "invasive inequality" that Bauman talks about in his thesis of Liquid Modernity – as the Premium Afterlife services available to the Affluent introduces the class dimension – stressing how class struggle is permanent. Pre-life, Life, Post-Life – if one thing is constant and irrecuperable then it is class disparity.

Cinema is a powerful means to reflect this binary of feast and famine in gripping narratives. For instance, in the movie *Snowpiercer*, a dystopian tale set in a frozen world, the Elite few at the front of a perpetually moving train, revel in decadent meals, while the impoverished masses at the tail end of the train struggle for survival on gelatinous protein bars! This highlights the irony of food abundance and food scarcity existing in very close quarters, and definitely not so much in the remote future from our own reality. However, for this paper, I would like to focus on the Posthuman and cite Donna Haraway who urges us to abandon the rigid dualisms that have traditionally defined our understanding of the world. The philosophy of the Posthuman inherently relies on the dismantling of Nature/Culture and Human/Machine binaries. *Upload*, in the same breath, dares to challenge such dualisms, as it constantly confuses us regarding what is real and what is artificial. Haraway's vision of the posthuman world – where the human and the machine merge into a seamless entity – finds a strong resonance in *Upload*.

Thus, the concept of Virtual Consumption marks a radical departure from conventional gastronomic paradigms, triggering us to explore how technology reshapes our relationship with food. The

series, by resisting preconceived notions of taste, texture, and the act of eating, hints at the fluidity of our identity in a technologically mediated world.

Disembodied Gastronomy

Coming to the second part of the paper, *Upload* quite boldly ventures into a terrain where consciousness – something that has been eternally tethered to the organic confines of brain – is redefined as a "code". Here, the human consciousness can be quantified, digitized, and subsequently uploaded.

As Nathan grapples with his Digital Afterlife, his constant interaction with food becomes a poignant symbol of his identity. Scenes where he attempts to recreate the taste of his favourite dish from the living world serve as a metaphor for the persistence of personal identity in the face of technological transcendence. This exploration of identity through the medium of food makes us reflect on the essence of what makes us who we are, additionally redefining the way individuals understand and interact with food in the digital format. Latour's concept of Translation, where "actors" work to align their interests, is evident in the translation of identities from the physical to the digital space. How identities are translated and transformed across different networks – if we get a grip of that – we will be better equipped to understand the fluidity of Posthuman subjectivity.

Then comes the absurdity of Digital Calories, adding a touch of dark humour to the narrative. The scenes at the digital grocery store, where Nathan discovers the meaningless nature of caloric values, function as a satirical commentary on social prescriptions surrounding food and body image. The fact that Horizen, the company, retained the ritualistic Supermarket grocery shopping in a world devoid of actual physicality, emphasizes the way humans, especially the affluent class, are defined by their "power to purchase". The Afterlife as a commodified experience takes us to

Posthuman Capitalism, and as such ethical concerns arise from the portrayal of Digital Afterlife as a subscription service – or this transactional nature of uploading consciousness. We are literally witnessing the corporatization of immortality, the depiction of a digital buffet, the ability to monetize flavours and customize dishes speak to the show's scathing commentary on consumerism, particularly the commodification of sensory pleasures and the desire for personalized indulgences even in the afterlife.

Katherine Hayles argues that the melding of the human with the digital does not negate the significance of the body. Instead, it transforms the *nature* of embodiment, merely reshaping our subjective experiences. The fashion in which the Lakeview residents continue having timely meals, enjoying lavish parties, sharing communal dining, going grocery shopping – without actually feeling the pangs of hunger – mirrors Hayles' idea of post-human subjectivity, where the body even when existing in a digitized state, remains central to formation of identity and construction of subjectivity.

Conclusion

To conclude , one may argue that *Upload* not only resists the conventional understandings of life, death, real, artificial, but also offers a theoretical liberation from the shackles of biological constraints, by positing that consciousness *can* exist independently of the body. Rather it proposes that death, in a capitalist world, is not the absolute cessation of consciousness, but only a transition, perhaps to a "service-driven afterlife". Such an idea not only raises Marxist concerns, but also challenges the perennial concept of mortality as an inescapable truth, problematizing the very philosophy of life. While we continue making memes on phrases like – "I will be impressed with technology only when I can download food directly" – this web series goes to the extent of exploring both the Upload and Download of Food – and making it as convincing as possible.

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Culture is Ordinary

Huzaifa Pandit

"Culture is Ordinary" by Raymond Williams represents an important milestone in the theorization of Culture Studies. Deriving largely from a Marxist outlook, Williams critiques the appropriation of the notion of culture by its association with an elitist class or a romantic, nostalgic pre-industrial discourse and a corresponding absence of the working class and post-industrialized discourse. Williams destabilizes this binary by situating culture within the most mundane and common interactions, examining how the construct is realized within a close reading of the ordinary homogenous culture of the working class. "Culture is Ordinary", therefore represents an attempt to rescue the exclusivist conceptual outline of culture and thereby map its aesthetic location as firmly within the ordinary everyday life especially of the excluded working classes. The essay resists the easy categorization of culture as attributive of the 'tea shop' gentry and as a corollary acceptance of the same by the working class by infusing it with a pejorative value. The resistance is manifested in an examination of the shifts in meanings of culture and by extension the shifts in the dynamics of culture.

A tool often employed by Williams is the reliance on autobiographical elements to lend concreteness to an abstract point. At the commencement, Williams delves into his personal history to arrive at a contemporary understanding of culture and starts with a description of his upbringing. Growing up in a countryside far away from centers of conventional 'civilized' society, Williams locates his ascent to Cambridge, to this 'excluded place', pointing out the existence of a library and readership accommodating him in this privileged space. Proceeding from that point, Williams outlines his tenure at Cambridge as that of natural acclimatization and appropriation on account of his childhood training despite being born into a working class culture. Cambridge, he notes, did not

intimidate him since he had been trained into a reading culture from his early childhood courtesy the rural library. His ascent into academia therefore did not constitute any aberration or digression from an established normativity of ignorance. Rather, it made sense that a product of the working-class culture should exhaust one of the natural destinations of intuitive intelligence defeating the socio-economic forces of poverty and lack of opportunity. This easy naturalization and smooth transition is situated in a paradoxical relation with the elitist cultural notion and thereby decenters it. This decentering is a natural progression from the earlier decentering where the class distinction is manifest in terms of access, a point taken up later in detail, as a group of clergymen are allowed to pass into the library easily while it takes an hour of haranguing in his case.

Culture emerges, in this light, as a combinatory unit comprising of accepted epistemological leanings and a dialectical epistemological inquiry, leading therein to a new conceptualization. This inquiry however is not restricted to the bourgeoisie or any 'cultured classes' with such transparent yardsticks as outward behavior, accent or dressing but a universal phenomenon. The phenomenon of recollection and modification of culture is reflected in each human being in their interactions with the world. Culture, then, is not exclusivist in nature but an integral part of every ordinary person's experiential corpus. As a child bred in working class culture, Williams is aware of the process of manufacture of culture as he witnesses the class in which he is bred construct their own working class culture which is described later in detail, and therefore moves further away from the appropriation of culture as an elitist possession.

This is further reflected in his rejection of the binary outlined in the tea shop at Cambridge. The tea shop frowns upon cultures that are not consistent with its totalizing elitist bourgeoisie standard. On a reactionary level, among the working classes, there is the notion

of 'high culture' as a pejorative concept wherein culture is seen as a bourgeoisie affectation, manifested in the terms 'do-gooder' and 'high-brow' and thence to be avoided. Both views are radical and inimical to the actual representation of culture. The elitist culture is false since it fails to stand to an empirical scrutiny as there are others who are accepted as 'cultured' mostly if not universally and yet don't conform to this bourgeoisie normativity. The concept of normativity is significant since this allows for the inclusion of the working class that is capable of production and appreciation of music, arts and other cultural artefacts. The reactionary notion is false since it substitutes ethics with a 'purely technical standard' wherein the emphasis is on technical efficiency rather than the "whole positive human reference" (Williams 13). In other words, advertisement has succeeded in substituting the 'good practices' that lead to a developed culture, as outlined by Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*. This is a direct consequence of the capitalist positionality wherein art and skill is merely used for promoting consumerism and the profit ethic through mass-advertisement. This capitalist appropriation of art through advertisement has blurred the boundaries that defined the ethical context of the action. Proficiency in technical efficiency can be a sign equally of a positive act such as writing as well as a negative act such as burglary. Consequentially, there is a real danger of subversion of real standards manifest in culture and thereby an instance of 'false consciousness' where the past is romanticized by placement in museums but simultaneously rejected as insufficient for imitation.

The capitalist ethic is contradicted by the classical Marxist ethic which traditionally would have social interactions governed by an economic base and the cultural and political superstructure directly dependent and proportional to the base. A radical egalitarian restructuring of the base then will yield a desirable change in the cultural and political superstructure. By extension, any cultural study should aim at unravelling the underlying process of

production. Williams rejects this relation as it leads to several unaccountable complications and so is far removed from its simplistic appearance. Nonetheless, as a neo-Marxist, Williams concedes the emphasis on economic factors is justified as in his experience culture is a "whole way of life and arts are a part of the social organization" and "economic changes affect this organization radically" (Williams 24). The neo-Marxism also entails an inherent dissatisfaction with the economic system which ensures unequal access to resources being heavily biased in favour of the propertied bourgeoisie. This unequal access certainly reflects in terms of access to education in that only a small proportion of the poor get a chance to pursue it. However, this restricted access to education is not synonymous with restricted access to culture as that would be denying the assertion posited earlier, that the working class create their unique brand of culture which is based on mutual empathy, mutual obligation and common betterment. Williams again relies on autobiography to exemplify this cultural discourse recalling that when his father was dying, a neighbour brought wood in his own vehicle, another chopped and arranged it while other anonymous neighbour left a sack of potatoes at the door as a neighbourhood lady came in and took away a bag of clothes for laundry. This discourse of mutual unity and empathy is a repudiation of the classical Marxist notion of the deprived working class denied representation in the cultural paradigm. The Marxian concept thereof, of an advocacy of transformation of the systems of production is a false cultural directive since production means bear no relation to the creation and sustenance of culture. Besides, the binary leads to a form of rigid determinism to circumscribe the future that can't be determined by any measure. Such metanarratives only serve to highlight the oxymoronic anxiety of the future. Socialism is not the only framework available to understand the cultural production in consonance with the proletariat ideology.

Williams also examines cultural production through a Leavisian lens of a pre-industrial world as a pre-lapserian world and the industrialized world as a decayed fallen world corrupted by technological advancement. Williams again turns to autobiography to decenter this notion since he has experienced both worlds. As a representative of the working class, Williams can vouch for the fact that industrialization brought immense ease and relief to the proletariat. The advent of machine spared them the hard labour and they benefitted immensely by the use of technology like water-pump and automobiles. Leavis' postulation that technology brought in misery and decay is therefore unfounded and at best an essentialist romanticized preoccupation with an elusive past.

Having critiqued the prevalent positions about the advent of culture and finding them insufficient, Williams argues that the way ahead is to catalyze the creation of a 'good' culture that is egalitarian and inclusive by nature. This necessitates riddance from some residual theoretical legacies that can be summed up as two false equations, one false analogy, and one false proposition. The false preposition concerns consideration of industrialization and capitalism as synonymous. The blame for urbanization, overcrowding, slums and dirt is often laid at the door of industrialization. However, this is a convenient excuse for overlooking the fact that these factors were largely a result of mismanagement driven by capitalist greed. Theorizing a machine free future is simply a delusional utopian dream that fails to account for the immense significance of the machine in our lives and reduces human agency while trying to promote it.

The first false equation refers to the erroneous notion that mass education is responsible for production of mass culture that is low and trivial in nature and habit. However, this is again a totalizing absolutist tendency. Masses don't exist in the real world but are created by a biased ideology that tends to compartmentalize the world. The categorization of masses is an attempt to create a

transparent representation of the other that resists such representation owing to its inherent diversity and complexity. The charge of mass production is often brought out against the presence of compulsory education wherein the unsuitability of the recipients leads to an inevitable corruption of culture especially through the evolution of a cheap press. The production of an unprincipled press is usually attributed to the Education act of 1870 that introduced compulsory education. However historical facts prove the insubstantiality of this attribution. Sufficient literacy rates were prevalent before 1870 to sustain an unprincipled cheap press. The formulation of a cheap press owes its origins to the advent of chaotic industrialism starting 1890 where a paradigm shift in newspaper policy occurred: selling of advertising space was prioritized over dissemination of news. This naturally led then to an increasing clout of the industrialist bourgeoisie over the press and thereby manipulation to serve vested interests.

The second false equation refers to the notion that the ubiquitous prevalence of bad culture is reflective of the lowly mental and emotional standards of the consumers. Nothing could be far from the truth as Williams again demonstrates from personal experience as he observes a small gathering of his working class friends for traces of lowly standards but to no avail. On the contrary, he finds "as much natural fineness of feeling, as much quick discrimination, as much clear grasp of ideas within the range of experience as I have found anywhere" (Williams 32).

This leads to the false analogy which is a case of bourgeoisie panic. Going by Grisham's law, it postulates that bad culture will eventually replace good culture as bad money replaces good money. The panic is completely unfounded as is proved by an historical investigation. The elements of good culture like good literary volumes exist today in greater presence and quality than before. Industrialization with all its negative influences on the one hand has led to the evolution of more leisure and hence more time to pursue

'good culture'. The expansion of culture entails that the good elements too will experience greater dissemination along with the elements of cheapness. Thereby, there is a need to radically revise our theoretical frameworks about "the nature and conditions of an expanding culture of our kind" (Williams 33) that demands a critical examination of existing conceptual frameworks.

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Between the Cyborg and the Ghost: Rethinking the Marginal Posthuman Subjectivity in S B Divya's *Runtime*

Arka Mukhopadhyay

The cyborg is largely understood in critical discourse as an image, or better said, a fable. In the words of Haraway (5), it is 'a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.' In such a formulation, however, the image is still present in the material domain, and is not a 'thing' but a 'creature.' The exteriority of the cyberculture interface thus conceals some life in the interior, however synthetic it may be. The technological progress of late capitalism and the resultant negative re-configuration of posthumanism make us rethink the boundaries of the self-other dichotomy. A traditional take of modern social theory is that the self is what shapes itself as a subject from the other, the hegemonic and institutional frameworks of society. The subject is thus conventionally formed in 'the field of social forces' (Hardt and Negri 195). In the present times, a process of disintegration of the institutions, which coincides with the 'informatization of production,' when 'all of nature has become capital, or at least has become subject to capital,' and the binary oppositions are merging to be indistinguishable, we are forced to rethink the notion of subjectivity (Hardt and Negri 272).

In such a time, when 'we are all chimeras,' and the notion of subjectivity is led to deconstruction by contemporary social and ontological philosophers, is there hope to revive the subject (Haraway7)? Can critical posthumanism offer a political tool against oppressive frameworks of colonialism, racism, and class segregation, and act towards the inclusion of marginalities? While the Eurocentric discourse of humanism thrives on distinctions between humans and non-humans, colonizer and colonized, master and slave, male and female, inside and outside, how far can the binary breakdowns inherent in the logic of critical posthumanism

accommodate the margins? Does the informatization in cyberculture society also disrupt the boundaries of center-margin? Analyzing S. B. Divya's young adult science fiction novel *Runtime*, this paper will embark upon a broader philosophical question: is the marginal cyborg subject a possibility?

As understood from the uneasy and apologetic 'concern for the interests and dignity of all people around the globe' raised in the Transhumanist Declaration, cyberculture discourse employs a neo-colonial stance to articulate the posthuman (Bostrom et al.). Transhumanism can itself be understood as the popular form of posthumanism, which is 'post-' in a positive sense, as an extension of humanism, an optimistic doctrine of a technologically mediated future utopia where the symbiosis between the human-animal-machine triad is complete, resulting in an 'enhanced human condition' (Bostrom et al.). This uniform 'humanity,' however, is far from universal, as it is used to "underpin an unacknowledged hierarchy within this humanity, which, as a consequence, has led to the oppression of not only nonhuman others but also of individuals and groups within the human species" (Herbrechter 199-200).

Monirul Islam notes how 'the posthumanist argument for freedom and individuality seems to be a disguise for its hidden agenda of power, politics and money.' However, in such a reading, one overlooks the radical political possibilities of critical posthumanism as an instrument of critique of androcentric, logocentric, and anthropocentric hierarchies, where the prefix 'post-' is used in the negative. As a continuation and modification of the deconstruction project, critical posthumanism does not 'liquidate the subject,' but 'rather opens up the opportunity for new, 'post-metaphysical' subjectivities' (Herbrechter 196-7). Following Derrida (102, qtd. in Herbrechter 197), the subject is as much a fable as the cyborg, so there is perhaps a possibility of conciliation between the two under the lens of critical posthumanism. Critical posthumanism sees 'subjectivity as networked and collective, which

is'especially relevant to the construction of subjectivity in relation to intelligent machines such as computers' or more broadly hyperobjective cybernetic interfaces (Flanagan 21).

Critical posthumanism can be better understood as an all-encompassing decolonization project against hypersubjectivity, the singular, male, and eurocentric human subject, and its 'set of features or conditions: rationality, authority, autonomy, and agency' (Nayar 5). This subjectivity, which is in a 'constant social process of generation,' is traditionally produced within the institutional framework, marking a clear distinction between the inside and the outside (Hardt and Negri 196). However, the radical shift towards post-metaphysical and indeed posthuman subjectivities towards the end of the twentieth century conceals within it a disruption as well as an intensification of the institutions, where 'inside and outside are becoming indistinguishable' (196).

Can the capitalist institutions, which now operate from a complete exteriority of cybernetic interfaces, make room for marginal cyborgs? Or is that too much to ask for? Gabilondo (424) notes how the postcolonial cyborg is a thematic impossibility since the postcolonial subaltern does not inherit enough cultural capital to access the cyberspace interface. As opposed to the dominant Western subject, which has access to both cyberculture and mass culture interfaces, marginal subjectivity is formed 'by its single interface with mass culture' (Gabilondo 426). However, the rapid dissemination of cyberculture interface into non-capitalist economies under the new regime of the Empire tells another story. Let us consider, for instance, how Facebook became a dominant ideological tool in causing genocide in Myanmar, a non-capitalist country that opened up to Western capitalization only in 2011 (Guzman). Another example could be the Chinese city of Rongcheng, whose famous technological experiment with the vague social credit system entailed a moralist principal embedded in the

Chinese society, altering personal credit based on 'good or bad deeds' (Yang).

As these examples unfold, the encounter between the cyberspace interface and non-capitalist societies is often hostile in their nascent stages, but as Hardt and Negri (269) argue, this 'ecological struggle' also results in the 'new production of subjectivity of the proletariat.' At this juncture, a plethora of post-millennial speculative fiction from South Asia attempts to narrativize these ecological changes that occur at the intersection of 'space of places' and 'space of flows' (Read 139). One of the most promising authors of post-millennial speculative fiction from South Asia is S. B. Divya, whose debut 2016 novella *Runtime* features an exercise towards the formulation of a new proletarian subjectivity. The narrative unfolds in a futuristic west, chronicling a posthuman race in the mountains of Sierra Nevada.

The population in the future society of the novella is divided between 'nats,' natural bodies, and 'moots' or 'embeds,' technologically modified human-machine organisms. However, this restructuring of society also fosters the alarmism of Bostrom and colleagues, where the technological enhancements and posthuman possibilities are limited to the rich and the 'licensed,' while the poor are left to scrap the pieces:

> Marmeg washed her plate and then sat with her equipment. Her embedded control chips were legit, but the surgery to put them in wasn't, and her exoskeletal gear was filched from trash bins in rich neighborhoods. The pieces tended to break. (Divya loc. 104)

The technological divide here is apparent. Furthermore, the proliferation of technology in this imagination results in a reimposed apartheid in the West, a kind of casteism where the populace is divided between licensed and unlicensed. The protagonist, Marmeg, and her family belong to the unlicensed category, and thus they are deprived of necessities like 'free education and healthcare' (Divya

loc. 110). The novella charts the transformation of Marmeg towards visibility, towards the formation of a posthuman subjectivity that exists only in the state of becoming and not in the state of immanence or self-presence: 'Be invisible: that was Marmeg's role. Here at the club or out in the world, nobody wanted to see the likes of her, but she would be worth noticing soon' (Divya loc. 48).

The distinction between inside and outside plays a crucial role, where the 'unlicensed' like Marmeg operate outside the biopolitical order. But we come to know in the novel, that the 'embeds' use something called a grid, which is a 'space of flows' (cf. Castelles) integrated in the exoskeletal gear and is used for all sorts of things, from payments to tracing identities to texting and navigating in the world. Gabilondo (425) notices how in the cyberspace interface 'the institutions of subject formation... from the madhouse to the prison, have turned themselves inside out in an attempt to leave the insane and the criminals out.' The grid is thus Gabilondo's nightmare, an inside-outside meta-institutional framework that results in the simultaneous formation and abstraction of subjectivities. The informational structure of the 'grid' is better understood by Justin Read (128), who echoes Hardt and Negri in his conceptual formation of unicity, a global network of flow production which is 'an "internalized border," but one that works to territorialize the entire planet as absolute exteriority.' Read (131-143) provides an alternative to the center-margin dichotomy, as unicity is not characterized by absolute interiors and exteriors as zones of inclusion and exclusion, but byintrones ('informationally "poor"') and extrones ('informationally "rich"'), flows of untranslatability and translatability. Marmeg remains a marginal identity in society, but participating in the grid economy can initiate the process of subject formation.

Marmeg's incentive for the Minerva Sierra Challenge is a degree program: 'As long as she placed in the top five in tomorrow's race, she'd have the money to start a four-year embed degree

program. Real degrees led to real money, and that's what she needed to live on her terms, not her mother's' (Divya loc. 105-110). Education leads to the Derridean formation of the 'subject being' which is foundational to Western individuality but also strips away the traditional communal femininity of the 'sati' image (Marmeg's God-fearing mother) which is central to Spivak's discourse of the subaltern. In their differentiated relation to the institutional frameworks, the colonial imaginary of sati and the postcolonial symbolic of the cyborg are diametrically opposed to each other, but they can perhaps be complimentary in the postcolonial feminist discourse, in the decolonization move against the normative European and androcentric subject.

In her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak embarks upon a detailed analysis of Kant, who becomes a 'sticking point' in her deconstruction of the Eurocentric subject (Maggio 425). According to Kant, the humanizing of the human takes place with the cultivation of moral education, which transforms the *homo barbarus* into *homo humanus*. However, as Spivak points out, the 'raw human' or '*rohen Menschen*' of Kant is particularly suggestive because 'roh' in German means 'uneducated.' Spivak (12) writes in her footnote: 'In fact, in Kant, the "uneducated" are specifically the child and the poor, the "naturally uneducable" is the woman. By contrast, *der rohen Mensch* man in the raw, in its signifying reach, accommodate the savage and the primitive...' For Spivak, Sati is the prototypical subaltern self, who is caught between colonialist and nationalist narrativization, and thus, her lack of agency ensures that she is always spoken for (Maggio 424). The posthuman subjectivities should have an affinity with the Sati, since they also lack the conditions that form the dominant Eurocentric male subject, like self-presence, autonomy, and authority. Like sati, therefore, the posthuman subjectivities are reliant on 'processes of interpellation and response-ability' (Herbrechter 198).

Narrativization leads to informational density, and results in a passage from introns to extrones, but the narrative fragments that posthuman subjects create are relational and intertextual: only to be understood through processes of difference and deference. Since cyberspace operates outside the state *nomos* and dismisses any authorial position in its extra-nomic structure, the (un)translatability of such narrative fragments results in suspicion. After all, the space of flows is an open field of play, opposition, and relative dominance. The 'anti-nomic space' of Unicity as per Read (135-36), calls for a new juridico-political framework, where outliers like Marmeg can participate in the ecological struggle of becoming proletarian subjects, embodying an ecopolitical ethos. When Marmeg meets fellow contestant Ardhanara, and divulges that her gear is picked up from a garbage bin, the initial reaction of Ardhanara is one of repulsion. While coming up with an immediate reply, Ardha takes recourse to the traditional *nomos* of the state, bringing up the binary of authorized/criminal: '"We're very careful to recycle all of our used gear so that it doesn't fall into criminal hands"' (Divya loc. 418).

Ardhanara skillfully damages Marmeg's gear so that she cannot win the race, becoming the criminal himself, but the very act ironically enables her to win the race. Early in the novel, Marmeg comes to know about the phenomenon of Mountain Mike from a fellow contestant. Mountain Mike happens to be 'a radical nat who lives in the backcountry.' As he is found near 'the biggest accident sites,' the authorities suspect foul play on his part, but operating outside the 'grid,' he remains as elusive as an urban fable. The fellow contestant contends, 'Maybe living off-grid makes it easy to disappear.' However, when Marmeg looks worried, the fellow contestant aims to console her by suggesting that '...he's mostly a scare story. There are worse things for you to worry about' (Divya loc. 301).

If, following Gabilondo (425), 'Cyberspace is the interface between the cyborg and the ghost/monster,' the phenomenon of Mounatain Mike, a 'radical nat' who might as well be a 'scare story,' is a ghost/monster that does not give in to translatability. Gabilondo's treatment of the ghost as a disruptive exteriority can be reformulated from Read's intrones-extrones paradigm. The cybernetic interface, which is the abstracted domain of the cyborg, is an informationally dense extrone, but entangled with and largely dependent upon the ghost. The journey of becoming the posthuman subject, it can be said, is the journey from the human ghost to the non-human cyborg. Mountain Mikes' help Marmeg win the race, unraveling hidden passages in the circuit. The ghost exists in these 'black holes' of the cyberspace network, where 'information may... become suspended like fuzzy static charge' (Read 143). Mountain Mikes ('as plural, rather than individualistic' which is what identities become in the posthuman era) ask for half the prize money in return for helping Marmeg, but their cause to return the world to a natural state of order cannot be translated to post-oedipal Marmeg and therefore remains meaningless in face of a pressing emergency (Flanagan 48). Marmeg discovers Ardha fatally wounded on the way and decides to activate her grid to send a rescue signal to the authorities, thereby ensuring her disqualification from the race. Marmeg's embodiment of cyborg politics is part of a larger eco-politics, as it lends her a sense of social justice.This act should have made her a humanist, but it ironically separates her from the humanist agenda of Mountain Mikes. Marmeg's disqualification presupposes an 'imperial society of control,' where 'the functioning of the institution is both more intensive and extensive' (Hardt and Negri 197-8).

By exercising her cyborg politics, of which Foucault's biopolitics is a 'flaccid premonition,' Marmeg breaks the ideological barriers between the 'nats' and 'moots' (Haraway 7). Ironically, only by embracing her 'contradictory standpoints' over

totalizing narratives of revolution can Marmeg obtain her fleeting subjective experience, albeit thereby 'displaced into the network(s) of informational flows' and 'only experienced in the differential movement' (Haraway 15; Read 142). In the tale, while Marmeg transcends to get into a college through the agency of Ardha's father, Mountain Mikes' collective narrative favouring a 'natural' life remain devoid of an absolute meaning. However, following Morton and Boyer's (15) hyperobject-hyposubject paradigm, Mountain Mikes become hyposubjects, ignoring 'expert advice that they don't or can't exist,' virtually controlling the course of the race as ghosts in the shell. Marmeg, on the other hand, embraces her movement towards informational density,even though it remains mediated by the agency of Ardha's father.The world of informatization is the world 'as a global border zone,' where decentred cyborg selves like Marmeg must depend on Mountain Mikes, the human others at the centre interior, and vice versa, causing a diffusion of differences. In that sense, Marmeg and Mountain Mike, posthuman subjectivities, can only exist in their co-dependence and relationality, channelling information, and in effect, re-imposing the surveillance structure of the grid.

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Beyond the Veil of Being: Transcendence of Self in Transhumanism and Sufism

Badrunissa Bhat

Introduction

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and a growing fascination with the possibilities of human enhancement, questions regarding the nature of selfhood, consciousness, and the boundaries of human potential have become increasingly pertinent. Over the past three decades, the emergence of biotechnologies has offered promising avenues for new medical treatments aimed at enhancing human performance. While many of these biotechnologies are still in their early stages, they address concerns regarding human decline and the loss of cognitive abilities due to factors such as trauma and aging. Innovations such as Genetic engineering, recombinant DNA, Nanotechnology, and Information Technology have garnered significant attention worldwide, presenting a vision of a future where human suffering is alleviated, and capabilities are enhanced.

Genetic engineering, for instance, has led to the creation of recombinant animals containing human DNA, showcasing the potential of these technologies. However, the integration of these advancements poses challenging questions for the spiritual aspect of humans. This paper seeks to explore the parallels and disparities between Sufism (mystical branch of Islam) and the burgeoning transhumanist movement, which embraces these biotechnological advancements positively. This paper aims to elucidate the positioning of the Sufism in relation to transhumanism.

I argue that both Sufism and transhumanism offer distinct yet comparable perspectives on the human body, viewing it as both an instrument and a catalyst for spiritual transformation. This stance is influenced by Cox's perspective, which sees the body as a nexus that connects the material and immaterial aspects of human

existence (281-291). While Transhumanism advocates for the use of technology to transcend the limitations of the human condition, Sufism emphasizes the inner journey towards spiritual enlightenment and union with the divine. Despite their apparent differences, both traditions share a fundamental interest in the transcendence of self and the pursuit of an elevated state of being.

Transhumanism: Beyond Human Boundaries

Transhumanism has emerged as a captivating philosophical offshoot of recent advancements in biotechnology, gaining traction across the world. This ideology posits a future where humans undergo profound transformations due to technological interventions in the body and mind. Transhumanists envision a trajectory of evolution as a "process of evolutionary complexification toward evermore complex structures, forms and operations" (Young 19). Renowned intellectuals including Ray Kurzweil, Nick Bostrom, Gregory Stock, and Simon Young assert that our current cognitive and physical capacities are bound by the confines of evolutionary mechanisms, suggesting that human potential is inherently limited by our evolutionary heritage. Some even go as far as proclaiming the human body as outdated and feeble, necessitating enhancement through new technologies.

A central tenet of transhumanism is the belief that the human body is susceptible to various limitations such as malfunction, fatigue, disease, and aging, confining individuals within the boundaries of their biological constraints. The transhumanist vision anticipates a future where these limitations are transcended through genetic and molecular engineering, cybernetics, and nanotechnology. This pursuit of body enhancement echoes humanity's age-old endeavor to refine and perfect physical capabilities, a practice observed across ancient and contemporary societies.

Proponents of transhumanism anticipate a singularity point, possibly by 2030, where technological advancements will usher in

a new era of 'super' technologies. This singularity marks a departure from traditional biological evolution, as rapid cognitive augmentation and genetically altered bodies take precedence (Tandy 85-96). Post-humanism, the envisioned outcome, portrays individuals as interfaces between human and machine, endowed with vastly enhanced cognitive and physical abilities. Posthumans may potentially achieve immortality and overcome congenital and chronic diseases, fundamentally altering the course of human evolution. In Kurzweil's words:

> The purpose of the universe reflects the same purpose as our lives; to move toward greater intelligence and knowledge . . . we will within this century be ready to infuse our solar system with our intelligence through self-replicating non-biological intelligence. (372)

Post-humanism encompasses "a multitude of technological concepts aimed at reshaping humanity, ranging from genetic engineering to various utopian scenarios involving cyborg integration" (Krueger 55-67). While post humans may retain biological elements, they are anticipated to be predominantly postbiological, with personalities transferred into more durable, modifiable, powerful bodies and cognitive hardware. Technologies such as genetic engineering, neural-computer integration, molecular nanotechnology, and cognitive science are envisaged to facilitate this transition. Moreover, heightened cognitive capacities may enable future humans to devise innovative solutions for environmental challenges and develop alternative, sustainable energy sources. Posthuman existence promises a virtual realm where individuals can freely manipulate their appearance without physical constraints. They may indulge in various virtual experiences, including culinary delights and sensual pleasures. Despite the encouragement to shed biological bodies, physicality and sexuality are expected to persist in novel forms within this virtual landscape.

Seeking the "Ideal (or All-Encompassing) Human" in Sufi Philosophy

In Islamic metaphysics, human nature is perceived as divine. According to Schimmel (1975, 188), the Qur'an states that "man was created 'by God's hands" (Sura 38:75), an idea that tradition elaborated: God kneaded Adam's clay forty days before He gave him life by breathing into him with His own breath (Sura 15:29, 38:72). This shared breath signifies the intimate connection between human nature and God's divinity. Additionally, humans are seen as the "channel of grace for nature" (Nasr and Chittick 67), indicating their special place in the Islamic concept of creation and the responsibility of stewardship bestowed upon them as "God's vicegerents on Earth" (Ozdemir 27).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a leading Islamic scholar, summarizes the idea of the perfect man:

> The Universal Man is then the sum of all degrees of existence, a total mirror before the Divine Presence and at the same time the supreme archetype of creation. It is the prototype of man, the reality that man carries potentially within himself and can always realize if there is aspiration, persistence, and of course divine succor. It is enough for man to realize the total possibility of his own existence, to become fully conscious of himself, to gain that treasure of true felicity and peace which he seeks outwardly here and there but never seems to find. (Nasr and Chittick 66)

In the Hadith of the "Hidden Treasure," God addresses the question of the purpose of creation, stating, "I was a treasure that was not known, so I loved to be known. Hence, I created the creatures and I made Myself known to them, and thus they came to know Me" (Chittick 47). This indicates a bidirectional reference inherent in the knowledge of God, where humanity serves as both the subject and object of divine knowing and self-knowledge. Ibn al-Arabi, a renowned thirteenth-century Andalusian Sufi writer, expresses this reciprocity, saying, "When my Beloved appears /

With what eye do I see Him /I with his eye, not with mine / For none sees Him except Himself" (quoted in Schimmel 266).

Other Sufis such as Hallaj, Suhrawardi, and Rumi also emphasize the intimacy of knowing and being known by God as divine love, wherein lover and beloved merge. Schimmel notes:

> 'The mystics have found numerous allusions in the Koran to prove man's lofty rank. One of their favorite verses in this respect is:

> "And we shall show you signs on the horizons and in yourself" - do you not see?" (Sura 41 :53), a verse that they interpret as God's order to look into their own hearts to find the source of knowledge and, eventually the divine beloved who is closer than the jugular vein." (Sura 50: 16)". From this feeling the hadith "man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa rabbahu " "who knows himself knows his lord, must have developed; it may originally have been an adaptation of the Delphic *gnothi seauton*, know thyself" (Schimmel 2011, 190)

In this context, divine knowledge represents the highest form of self-knowledge, with the purpose of creation being God's desire to be known through human self-awareness. According to Ibn al-Arabi's interpretation of this hadith, the cosmos serves as a mirror reflecting the glory of God, with humans tasked with polishing it through conscious acts of witnessing (*shahada*) the creator's handiwork. The metaphor of polishing may be interpreted in terms of various human activities, but fundamentally, it signifies bearing witness to cosmic theophany, the showing forth, or self-disclosure of God on both the cosmic and human scales.

Even in the Christian form of asceticism, the body is regarded as a vessel for spiritual transformation, serving as a pivotal aspect of spiritual awakening. Cox underscores this notion by emphasizing the significance of the whole person in Christianity's journey towards spiritual metamorphosis. He highlights how traditional Christian belief perceiving the body as inferior were

influenced by Greek dualism, which deemed the body as less significant compared to the spirit (Cox). Cox further contends that the human body, far from being inherently evil, should instead be seen as a gatekeeper aligned with God's purposes.

In Islam, a similar emphasis is placed on the meticulous control of the body through a range of body techniques aimed at achieving a "complete and absolute cathecting or investment of the body" (Bouhdiba 56). Most Muslims are instilled with a deep-seated aversion to dirt and uncleanness, especially when it encroaches upon their immediate surroundings (Bouhdiba). This aversion prompts rigorous responses to cleanse the body of impurities, often through practices such as religious ablution (wuzu), recitation of religious formulas, wearing clean clothes, and maintaining cleanliness in surroundings. As articulated by Bouhdiba, bodily functions such as eating, drinking, urinating, and defecating can compromise one's control over bodily boundaries to varying degrees, necessitating restoration to a state of purity to continue the quest for spirituality (19).

The principle of bodily purification, or its absence, is intricately woven into the broader Islamic perspective of maintaining control over bodily orifices. This perspective is encapsulated in the well-known Islamic adage, "Cleanliness is part of faith. Dirt is the work of the devil" (Bouhdiba).

Transformative Dynamics: Bodies, Minds, and Future Paths

Both Sufism and transhumanism share a perspective that regards the human body not as a static corporeal entity, but as a dynamic vessel capable of transformation. This viewpoint finds expression in Islamic theology as well, where human beings are understood as biomorphic entities composed of both matter and spirit. In Islam, the concept of *nafs* encompasses the human personality and its susceptibility to sin, with various levels ranging from the lower, instinct-driven *nafs-e-ammara* to the highest state

of spiritual refinement represented by *nafs-al-mutmainnah*. The journey towards attaining the elevated state of *nafs-al-mutmainnah* in Sufism involves rigorous control and refinement of the lower *nafs* through practices such as fasting, meditation, and prayer, ultimately leading to where the lower *nafs* is rigorously checked (*ridayat an-nafs*). Once *ridayat an-nafs* is attained, the Sufi enters into a state of awareness in which the *nafs* is 'dissolved' or 'annihilated' within the Divine (*fana*), state of dissolution or annihilation within the Divine which is akin to the Buddhist notion of nirvana or the Hindu concept of moksha.

The body is perceived as a vessel constantly monitored through various disciplines, with practices aimed at transforming it into a superior entity. Sufism emphasizes the importance of the body as a vehicle for spiritual transformation, employing techniques such as fasting, prayer, and meditation to purify and elevate the self.

In the realm of transhumanism, advancements in technologies such as gene therapy, nanotechnology, and brain-machine interfaces offer avenues for enhancing the human body and mind. Cosmetic neurology, which involves the non-therapeutic use of pharmacological substances to enhance cognitive abilities, mirrors practices found in Sufism aimed at achieving heightened states of awareness. The utilization of pharmacological substances to enhance cognitive functions bears resemblance to the historical practice of Indian Sufis employing cannabis to induce altered states of consciousness. Both transhumanists and Sufis view the mind as neuroplastic, capable of accessing heightened states of awareness that facilitate deeper insights into the self and the world. Furthermore, the use of pharmacological substances represents an extension of the meditative and contemplative practices found in Sufism, which aim to cultivate heightened levels of consciousness. One can say that substances may combine with nanotechnology in the future to improve precision and efficacy, potentially triggering new religious and spiritual experiences.

Within Islamic belief, the universe originates from an expression of Divine mercy (*rahma*) and is marked by *(al-fitra)*, embodying a natural order. The concept of *al-fitra* is exemplified in the intricate array of meta-patterns inherent in nature. Muslim scholars often depicted the body in naturalistic terms, employing the model of microcosm-macrocosm. In this view, the human being is regarded as a miniature reflection of the universe, embodying similar patterns found throughout the cosmos. This notion of naturalness in Sufism is also reflected in individual and collective behaviors, including respect for elders, and proper parenting (Ardalan).

Despite potential concerns about a divide between transhumanism and spirituality, future enhancement body techniques could instead offer new avenues for engaging with non-ordinary states of consciousness. Transhumanists may come to appreciate intense religious-like experiences facilitated by advanced technologies, fostering a convergence rather than a division between the two domains. As human brains become interconnected with computers, individuals may engage with virtual worlds that deepen spiritual experiences by allowing access to altered states of consciousness akin to Sufi practices. Thus, rather than creating a divide, future technologies may pave the way for new forms of spiritual exploration and understanding.

Transhumanism similarly embraces naturalistic concepts of the body through the lens of Darwinian evolution. According to this perspective, the human body is the result of millions of years of natural selection and genetic variation, which have endowed it with unique physical and mental characteristics. Recent advancements in molecular biology have reinforced this view, revealing the genetic relatedness of Homo sapiens to all life on Earth. The human brain's tri-partite structure, as noted by neuroscientist Paul Maclean, reflects evolutionary ancestry tracing back hundreds of millions of years. At a cosmic scale, astrophysicists like Carl Sagan have

elucidated the naturalistic connection between humans and the universe, highlighting that every elemental atom in the human body originated from stars. Sagan said humans are composed of "Star stuff."

Transhumanists utilize Darwinian evolution to elucidate the current limitations of the human body. However, the physical and cognitive enhancements proposed by transhumanism operate within the framework of natural evolution. In transhumanist philosophy, human development and technological advancement alter the course of human evolution, with technology becoming intrinsic to this process. The naturalistic perspectives of both Sufi and trans-humanist philosophy serve as models for understanding the interconnectedness between the human and non-human worlds.

Both Creation and Islamic theologies celebrate the order of the universe, facilitating Divine participation in the cosmos. Likewise, transhumanist philosophy envisions humanity as capable of re-evolving within the universe, actively engaging as creative participants. Thus, both Sufi and transhumanist approaches underscore human creativity and its potential to shape and participate in the cosmos.

However, transhumanism's trajectory toward merging humans with technology, while promising enhanced cognitive and physical abilities, raises profound concerns about the potential loss of humanity. Critics argue that the relentless pursuit of technological advancements in transhumanism risks eroding essential human qualities and experiences. Concepts such as vulnerability, empathy, and emotional depth, cherished in philosophical and ethical discourse, may become casualties in the race for technological perfection. Moreover, the emphasis on transcending human limitations through artificial means threatens to undermine the very essence of humanity, relegating natural human attributes to obsolescence. Sufism, on the other hand, venerates the inherent human qualities and values the richness of human experience.

Central to Sufi teachings is the recognition of the human heart as the locus of spiritual connection and the seat of divine love. Sufism emphasizes the cultivation of empathy, compassion, and humility as integral to the journey towards spiritual enlightenment, cherishing the inherent humanity of individuals as they navigate the path of inner transformation.

Ethical implications surrounding transhumanism loom large in contemporary discourse, casting a shadow over the relentless pursuit of technological enhancement. The stratification of society into enhanced and unenhanced classes presents a stark ethical dilemma, as access to enhancement technologies becomes a privilege rather than a universal right. Such disparities threaten to deepen existing social inequalities, exacerbating divisions along socioeconomic lines. Additionally, concerns about the loss of individual autonomy and privacy arise as humans integrate more closely with technology, raising questions about the ethical boundaries of technological intervention in human lives. In stark contrast, Sufism espouses principles of social justice, emphasizing the inherent dignity and equality of all individuals regardless of their material circumstances. Sufi teachings advocate for the cultivation of compassion, justice, and ethical conduct as essential elements of spiritual practice, promoting a vision of society founded on principles of equity and solidarity. Thus, while transhumanism grapples with ethical dilemmas stemming from the pursuit of technological advancement, Sufism offers a moral compass grounded in the values of human dignity, empathy, and ethical responsibility.

While also rejecting the notion of perfection as antiquated, transhumanism advocates for unrestricted enhancement as the optimal path to human well-being. Consequently, transhumanism evaluates progress by comparing improvements to the current state of affairs, seeking to rectify or eliminate human imperfections without preconceived notions of an "ideal" or perfectly human

standard. Kurzweil reflects a fundamental belief of transhumanism by questioning the inevitability of death. However, it's noteworthy that the concept of the "posthuman" state pursued by transhumanists is defined in negative terms: the rejection of death symbolizes its mission to eradicate various natural flaws and "design errors." When articulated positively, the goals of transhumanism often revolve around enhancing existing human qualities considered valuable. Despite not being a religion, transhumanism remains influenced by religious ideals, which contribute to the quasi-mythical nature of many of its aspirations.

Conclusion

The acknowledgment of imperfection in human existence is not merely a statement of fact but also reveals a yearning for transcendence beyond our inherent limitations. Throughout history, reflections on human perfection have sparked diverse interpretations, blending elements of realism with a quest for something greater. However, navigating this complex terrain requires a delicate balance between rational discourse and the recognition of non-scientific considerations, including the wisdom passed down by pre-modern traditions.

Indeed, the current emphasis on scientific and technological solutions in debates about human enhancement often overshadows the wisdom embedded in non-literal, non-discursive forms of thought. By reintegrating the insights of traditions like Sufism into contemporary discourse, we can enrich our understanding of human potential. Sufism, with its reverence for art, poetry, and spiritual reflection, offers a valuable perspective on the holistic development of individuals.

If figures like Ibn al-Arabi were to return to our time, they might encourage us to consider not only the fruits of technological advancement but also the cultivation of wisdom and discernment in our choices. They might inquire about the state of our music, poetry,

and spiritual practices, urging us to prioritize the quality of our cultural expressions alongside the expansion of our capacities. In this way, Sufism reminds us that true human enhancement encompasses not only physical and mental abilities but also the refinement of the soul and the cultivation of inner harmony and wisdom.

In conclusion the integration of Sufi insights into contemporary debates on human enhancement offers a multifaceted approach to addressing the complexities of human existence. By acknowledging the limitations of purely scientific and technological solutions, we open ourselves to a broader understanding of human potential that encompasses spiritual, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions. Sufism's emphasis on the cultivation of inner harmony and wisdom serves as a guiding light in navigating the challenges of modernity, reminding us of the intrinsic value of holistic human development.

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Sacred Sites of Collective Memory: A Study of India's Popular Sufi *Dargahs*

Balpreet Singh

Introduction

Sufism is a mystical and spiritual dimension of Islam that emphasizes the inward search for God and personal closeness to the Divine. The term "Sufi" is derived from the Arabic roots '*Safa*' (purity), '*Suf*' (wool), and '*Safwah*' (the chosen ones). The word Sufism, derived from the Arabic word '*Tasawwuf*', refers to wool and the wearer of wool clothing - a sign of repentance, as it represented a turning away from one's own gratification and from worldly things. Sometimes referred to as 'Islamic Mysticism', Sufism is a branch of Islamic spirituality: "it is the act of following a mystical path, a quest for ethical and moral perfection as one tries to realize Allah in one's self" (Safvi XI). Sufis are often referred to as "Sufi mystics" or "Sufi poets," and their practices and beliefs vary across different Sufi orders or *tariqas* like Qadiriyya, Naqshbandiyya, and Chishtiyya. Sufism is also characterized by a strong emphasis on spiritual experiences, seeking a direct and intimate connection with God through practices like meditation, *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and self-purification. Sufis believe in the concept of *tawhid* (the oneness of God) and strive to experience this oneness first-hand. Many Sufi poets like Rumi and Hafiz have composed beautiful verses expressing their love for the divine. For these Sufis, Sufi shrines (*Dargahs*) serve as focal points for spiritual practices, attracting pilgrims from various walks of life who come to engage in and observe Sufi activities.

Sufi shrines also known as *Dargahs* originated as a place where a Sufi saint, also known as *Awliya Allah* or 'friend of God', is buried and a shrine is constructed over his grave *(mazar).* These saints are venerated for their piety, wisdom, and closeness to God. Visitors to these shrines come to seek spiritual blessings, guidance,

and to connect with the memory of these revered individuals. These Sufi shrines don't just have a spiritual legacy but also often possess a rich cultural heritage associated with them. They may be adorned with intricate artwork, calligraphy and architecture that reflects the cultural and artistic traditions of the region. These physical elements serve as a tangible representation of the collective memory of the Sufi tradition, its history and artistic expression. The collective memory of these saints is preserved through oral traditions, stories, and rituals passed down through generations.

Maurice Halbwachs, in his work *On Collective Memory* (1980) describes collective memory as an ongoing stream of thoughts that remains alive in the present, as it is integrated into the lived experiences of a community. The recollections are numerous and scattered, remarkable and fleeting, not recollected and documented in a single cohesive narrative. However, communal memories are reinforced by a group that is conceptualised within a specific location and time frame. The historical accounts are contingent to the particular community and do not represent a universally shared past among numerous diverse cultures. Collective memory study involves the analysis of how groups recall and express their past experiences. Halbwachs' theory of collective memory is a fundamental framework for comprehending the way communities retain, recall and revisit their past encounters. Halbwachs contends that memory is not a personal trait but rather a social behaviour, influenced by the social group to which an individual is affiliated. According to Halbwachs, places of worship like Ajmer Sharif and Nizamuddin *Dargah* are not just physical locations but social spaces where collective memories are continually produced and reinforced through rituals and practices.

Two of the most significant Sufi shrines in the Indian subcontinent, Ajmer Sharif and Nizamuddin *Dargah*, serve as focal points for understanding how memory of the synchronized cultural fabric in the pre-partition days takes shape in contemporary

contexts. The communal harmony and sense of belongingness of an integrated India before mass migration, at the time of partition is reimagined and reinforced at these sacred spaces. These shrines are more than religious sites; they function as repositories of cultural and historical memory, maintaining a connection to a shared past through rituals, oral traditions and communal practices. By examining these shrines through the lens of collective memory theory, particularly the work of Maurice Halbwachs, Paul Connerton and others, this paper argues that the rituals, festivities and other practices at Ajmer Sharif and Nizamuddin *Dargah* are vital in preserving the memory of the past, both for individuals and communities. In subsequent sections, this paper will analyse how the Sufi shrines, Ajmer Sharif and Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, serve as locations of living history or collective memory, preserving the collective memory for many generations at distinct levels.

Rituals: A Manifestation of Collective Memory

Rituals at shrines are performances imbued with symbolism and significance particular to the place of worship. Typically, they are customary and serve as a method of collective commemoration. Their significance to a place is rooted in its historical, social, and cultural values. Rituals can be defined as formalised, rule-bound, structured and repetitive activities of a symbolic nature that are limited to certain times and locations. These rituals direct the attention of participants and viewers towards objects of thought and sensation that they consider to be of most significance. The repetitious nature of rituals suggests a sense of uninterrupted progression and link to past events. Rituals also combine movement and meaning. Participants are required to adhere to a structured sequence of physical motion and immobility at coordinated times and places. Within the framework of the organising group, these instances of motion and stillness hold significant value. In Ajmer Sharif *Dargah*, for *Ziyarat* (Visitation) devotees enter the dargah with a specific posture, often with their heads bowed and hands

folded in reverence. Upon reaching the main tomb of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, they circumambulate the tomb in a clockwise direction. This motion is typically slow and deliberate, reflecting the sacredness of the act. The act of circumambulation involves coordinated movement, followed by periods of immobility when devotees pause to offer prayers or silently reflect at the foot of the tomb. This ritual symbolizes the devotees' spiritual journey and their connection to the saint. The physical act of circumambulation and the pauses for prayer create a rhythmic pattern that reinforces the sacred memory of the saint - Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti. Most of the rituals are common to both Sufi spaces as both are linked to same Sufi order – Chisti Silsila. In Hazrat Nizamuddin Dargah also, each ritual-whether it is the personal act of *Ziyarat*, *Chadar Poshi* (Offering of Sacred Cloth) the communal experience of *Qawwali*, or the collective celebration of *Urs* (Annual Commemoration of the Saint's Death Anniversary)-serves as a medium through which the memory of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya is kept alive. Rituals may be classified into two groups according to their time of origin. First, an ancient ritual is one that is as old as the place where it is originates or predates it. Second, those which are relatively recent in their invention. Their date of origin and invention clearly indicates the connection between the historical setting and the site and history they represent.

Rituals also offer a window into the memory of a past. Connerton in his work *How Societies Remember* (1989) refers to them as 'carriers of memory', since they serve as a medium for preserving memories. The essential role of symbolic representation in rituals is to define the value of memory, pronounce social hierarchies and customs and validate participation. These descriptions of the rituals place them within their respective contexts. The rituals performed at both Hazrat Nizamuddin *Dargah* and Ajmer Sharif are prime examples of how commemorative memory operates. These rituals, as Connerton suggests, "convey the

memory of the past through repeated practices that ensure the continuity of tradition" (72). The structured sequences of physical motion—such as circumambulation of the tomb, the rhythmic recitations, and the collective meals during *Langar*—are all bodily practices that embed the memory of the saints into the communal body. These acts are not static; they are dynamic re-enactments that keep the past alive in the present, ensuring that the memory of the saints continues to shape the spiritual and cultural landscape of the community.

> ...to set a rite in its context is seen not as an auxiliary step but as an essential ingredient to the act of interpreting it; to investigate the context of a rite is not just to study additional information about it, but to put ourselves in a position to have a greater understanding of its meaning than would be accessible to someone who read it as a self-contained symbolic text. (Connerton 51)

Paul Connerton's exploration of rituals in *How Societies Remember* emphasizes the role of ritual in the transmission of memory. Rituals and ceremonies at both Ajmer Sharif and Nizamuddin *Dargah* are central to the preservation of collective memory. According to Connerton, these rituals are performative acts that not only commemorate the past but also inscribe it into the collective consciousness of the community. The repetition of these rituals over generations ensures the continuity of memory, making the past a living reality for the present. The offering of chadars, the recitation of prayers, and the communal gatherings during festivals are all rituals that reinforce the memory of a shared past, creating a sense of unity and continuity. Further, the political nature of their performances indicates the presence of social hierarchies within the society, such as the exclusive inclusion of *Sajjada Nashin* (a spiritual leader or successor) or *Khadims* (attendant at shrine) in the performance of certain rites at these Sufi shrines. Like the *Sajjada Nashin* of Ajmer Sharif *Dargah* has the exclusive privilege of performing the *Ghusl*, the sacred washing of the tomb of Khwaja

Moinuddin Chishti. This ritual is typically performed during the annual *Urs* festival, which commemorates the death anniversary of the saint. The ritual involves washing the tomb with rose water and other fragrant substances, followed by the covering of the tomb with fresh chadars (sacred cloths). The *Ghusl* ritual is deeply significant as it symbolizes the purification and sanctification of the tomb. It is also a moment of great reverence and is witnessed by a large number of devotees, who consider it a blessing to observe this sacred act. At Hazrat Nizamuddin *Dargah*, the *Sajjada Nashin* plays a pivotal role in the *Chadar Poshi* ritual during the annual *Urs* of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. While *Chadar Poshi* (the offering of a sacred cloth) is a common ritual that many devotees participate in, the Sajjada Nashin has the unique honour of placing the first chadar on the tomb during the *Urs*. This act is often accompanied by special prayers that only the Sajjada Nashin is authorized to recite. The ritual of *Ghusl* in Ajmer Sharif and *Chadar Poshi* performed by the Sajjada Nashin during the *Urs* at Hazrat Nizamuddin *Dargah* underscore the Sajjada Nashin's role as a symbolic of the spiritual leadership and the custodianship of the saint's legacy. It reaffirms the *Sajjada Nashin's* role as the spiritual guide of the community. For some, this position represents a hierarchical structure that emphasises the power dynamics at Sufi shrines. However, for others, it is a collective recollection of their past, when a spiritual leader (*Sajjada Nashin*) would lead them on their spiritual path from *Ishq-e-mizazi* to *Ishq-e-haqiqi*.

In both shrines, the rituals performed by the Sajjada Nashin—whether it is the *Ghusl* at Ajmer Sharif or the *Chadar Poshi* during the *Urs* at Hazrat Nizamuddin *Dargah*—are deeply symbolic acts that are integral to the preservation of the shrines' traditions and are central to the annual observances that connect the community to its collective spiritual memory. According to Halbwachs, the modes and vehicles of memory encompass both collective and individual rituals, as well as physical objects,

artefacts and the architectural design of physical spaces. In the context of Sufi shrines, this includes the courtyards that are designated for *sama mehfils* (music gatherings), *langhar* halls (community meal halls), women's courtyards, outdoor and indoor spaces for prayers and other activities.

Therefore, the performance of rituals and ceremonies is also formed by the memory of past events, whereby certain memories afford the reconstruction of others. Memories manifest as organised systems and are interconnected. To understand these rituals and their impact on an individual, it is necessary to establish their context within a group of people. Halbwachs calls it "the localization of memories." Thus, collective memory is the common denominator between the rituals and the Sufi space, which is formed by the interaction of its visitors and pilgrims. Halbwachs remarks:

> We can understand each memory as it occurs in individual thought only if we locate each within the thought of the corresponding group. We cannot property understand their relative strength and the ways in which they combine within individual, thought unless we connect the individual to the various groups of which he is simultaneously a member. (53)

Urs: Embodying and Re-enacting Commemorative Memory

The *Urs*, or the annual commemoration of the death anniversaries of Sufi saints, is a profoundly significant ritual in the Islamic tradition, particularly in the context of the shrines of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi and Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer Sharif. These commemorations are not merely rituals of remembrance; they are vital acts of "commemorative memory". This section argues that the *Urs* ceremonies at these shrines function as powerful sites of collective memory, where the past is not just remembered but actively re-enacted, thereby reinforcing the communal identity and spiritual continuity of the followers. In fact, the physical structures of Ajmer Sharif and Nizamuddin Dargah, with their historical inscriptions, tombs, and layouts, are

embodiments of urban memory, preserving the narrative of a syncretic culture that existed before the partition. This commemorative memory is apt for the annual *Urs* and other commemorative celebrations held at Sufi spaces which re-creates the landscape of communal harmony in pre-Partition India.

During an *Urs*, participation is not only from the indigenous population of Ajmer or Delhi and other parts of India, but people from Pakistan also actively engage in these yearly festivities. It serves as a space for people to reproduce the mental images of pre-partition times - an era characterised by communal cohesion. In his three-volume collection Les *Lieux de Mémoire* (Realms of Memory), historian Pierre Nora introduced the concept of *lieux de mémoire*, which translates to places as repositories of memory during times of crisis and rupture. Nora characterises these locations as intricate entities - both natural and man-made, uncomplicated and unclear, tangible and conceptual, they are lieux—places, sites, causes—in three aspects—physical, symbolic, and utilitarian. Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) offers a valuable perspective for examining these two Sufi shrines as locations where memories from the pre-partition period are preserved. Specifically, Nora contends that specific places, items or rituals serve as symbolic anchors for collective memory, particularly during periods of division or crisis. The Sufi shrines of Ajmer Sharif and Nizamuddin *Dargah* are locations of historical significance, acting as concrete connections to a time before the partition, conserving the remembrance of a common cultural and religious legacy that surpasses national borders. The residential settlement of migrants and refugees in Nizamuddin Basti around the *Dargah* serves as further evidence of the resurgence of a pre-partition era memory.

Maurice Halbwachs' idea of collective memory is an apt lens to analyse this creation of pre-partition era memory. Maurice Halbwachs, in his exploration of collective memory, posits that

memory is a social construct, deeply embedded within the framework of the community. He argues that "we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual summoning up of our past, we maintain our sense of identity" (47). The *Urs* of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya and Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti serve as annual rites where the community collectively summons up its spiritual past. These events are not merely recollections of the saints' lives but are re-enactments that serve to solidify the community's shared identity. The rituals, processions, and recitations performed during the *Urs* are collective acts that anchor the community's memory in the physical and spiritual presence of the saint.

Moreover, Paul Connerton in his work *How Societies Remember (1989)* extends Halbwachs' idea of memory in the context of history and society by emphasizing the role of bodily practices in the transmission of memory. Not only does he state that "groups provide individuals with frameworks within which their memories are localised" (37), but Connerton also believes that our memories must be conveyed and sustained through performances with these groups or else they will not be useful to us. Although Connerton states that "our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past" (2), we cannot use this knowledge unless we actively retrieve it and practice it. Connerton then goes on to discuss how this knowledge we have of the past is interwoven with historical reconstruction. At Sufi shrines, this past is retrieved through the practice of rituals and celebration of festivals like *Urs* in the form of commemorative memory. In these "commemorative memories," Paul Connerton observes, there is a strong link between memory and space. He argues that "commemorative ceremonies, which are performed on the basis of pre-set times and places, are designed to implant deeply in our memory the meaning of the events they commemorate" (70). The bodily practices observed during the *Urs*, such as the washing of the

tomb *(Ghusl)*, the offering of *chadars*, and the qawwali performances, are not just acts of devotion but are structured performances that implant the memory of the saints' teachings and lives into the collective consciousness of the community. These rituals, repeated annually, ensure that the memory of the saints is not merely recalled but is inscribed into the very bodies of the participants, making the past a living part of the present.

During the *Urs* of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, the *Dargah* transforms into a site where the community actively engages in commemorative memory. The special prayers, recitations of his poetry, and qawwali sessions performed during this time are more than acts of homage—they are ritualistic re-enactments that bring the saint's spiritual legacy into the present. As Connerton notes, "to remember is not simply to recall a set of facts but to perform the acts that recall those facts" (39). The communal participation in these rituals reinforces the collective memory of the saint, making his teachings and spiritual presence an enduring part of the community's identity.

Similarly, the *Urs* of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer Sharif is a grand commemorative event that draws pilgrims from across the world. The rituals performed here—particularly the *Ghusl* of the tomb and the *Chadar Poshi*—serve as collective acts that reinforce the community's connection to the saint. Halbwachs' notion that "every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework" is evident here, as the physical space of the shrine, filled with the bodily practices of the *Urs*, becomes a living repository of memory (122). The communal engagement in these rituals not only recalls the saint's historical significance but also reaffirms the spiritual and cultural identity of the community, making the *Urs* a powerful act of commemorative memory.

Collective memory and history are always in a reciprocal relationship. Thus, one conceptual binary is quite important to understand – history versus collective memory. History is typically

defined as an academic and objective representation of the past (Wertsch 318). Collective memory, however, reveals how groups interpret history (Bikmen 25). Collective memory is therefore an act of historicising the past. During the annual *Urs* shrines host gatherings that attract people from all walks of life and across social, economic, and religious lines. Thus, popular shrines are a kind of "bridge of [historical] understanding" (Humboldt 112) which contemporizes pasts, as a "living memory", and "carries within itself both survivals from previous eras and the possibility for further change" (Moran 56). Historian Nile Green argues that Sufi shrines are the only places where rituals, book collections and even family trees have been preserved in their original forms. They are "places in which memory is crystallized" (Safvi 201). Thus, the *Urs* ceremonies at Hazrat Nizamuddin *Dargah* and Ajmer Sharif are not merely rituals of remembrance; they are acts of commemorative memory that play a crucial role in the preservation and transmission of collective memory. Drawing on Halbwachs' theory of collective memory and Connerton's emphasis on the role of bodily practices, this section has argued that the *Urs* functions as a powerful medium through which the community reconnects with its spiritual past. The *Urs*, therefore, is a living tradition that ensures the past remains an integral part of the present, deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the community.

Conclusion

Ajmer Sharif and Hazrat Nizamuddin *Dargah* stand as powerful sites of collective memory, where the spiritual presence of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti and Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya continues to be vividly felt by their pilgrims. These sacred spaces transcend their physical boundaries, becoming living repositories of the saints' legacies. Through the rituals performed during the *Urs*, pilgrims do not merely commemorate the saints but experience their spiritual presence, allowing them to connect with a past that is both deeply personal and communal.

Moreover, these shrines evoke a landscape of memory that reaches back to the pre-partition era, preserving the cultural and religious heritage of a time when these saints played a unifying role in the diverse fabric of the Indian subcontinent. The collective memory nurtured at these sites reinforces the continuity of traditions that predate modern national boundaries, embodying a spiritual unity that transcends time and space. Thus, Ajmer Sharif and Hazrat Nizamuddin *Dargah* serve not only as places of devotion but as enduring symbols of a shared past, where the memory of the saints continues to shape the identities of their followers in a profoundly communal and politicised context.

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Metaphysical Entanglements: Posthumanist Musings in the *Bhagvad Gita*

Manjul Jagotra

Introduction

Indian culture is deeply intertwined with Indian philosophy and metaphysics, profoundly impacting how people understand the world around them. *Bhagvad Gita* and Sankhya metaphysics present a notion of the world where humans are not exclusivist entities standing on the hierarchical peak of existence but instead are part of the larger web of existence, simultaneously affecting and affected by various types of agencies at play. Such contributions are acknowledged by Francesca Ferrando in their book *Philosophical Posthumanism* who considers ancient Indian thought as one of the genealogical sources of Posthumanism. By acknowledging the value and agency of non-human entities, posthumanism opens up new possibilities for ethical and ecological thinking and challenges us to rethink our relationship with the world and our place within it. This ontological framework finds resonance within the philosophical tenets of the Sankhya school of thought endorsed by the *Bhagvad Gita.* Sankhya metaphysics recognizes that consciousness is not limited to human beings alone. It posits the existence of countless Purushas (metaphysical universal consciousness), beyond human entities. It presents a relational view of the world where all the entities are derived from fundamental primordial substances namely *Tattvas* and these entities continuously act upon and affect each other by virtue of their *Gunas* (primordial qualities) present in them thereby positing a worldview which is consistently in action in one form or the other whereby some agent is acting upon some other and vice versa. This perspective challenges the notion that humans are the sole possessors of consciousness, therefore, being the only entities capable of exercising their agency. By acknowledging the presence

of consciousness and agency in all forms of entities, Sankhya metaphysics counters human exceptionalism by providing agency to non-human entities. Posthumanism embraces a more fluid and dynamic understanding of identity that acknowledges the interdependence and hybridity of human and non-human entities. Rosi Braidotti challenges the idea of fixed identities and boundaries like race, gender, class etc. that have traditionally separated humans from 'other' humans and non-human entities. Instead, the entities in existence are seen as what Deleuze calls 'assemblages' of primordial substances acting upon each other. Braidotti in *The Posthuman* states, "Posthumanism entails a shift from the subject-centred humanist tradition to a relational, ecological and distributed model of identity" (49).

Within the expansive realm of *Sankhya* metaphysics, *Prakriti* emerges as the archaic and unmanifested substratum that serves as the fundamental foundation for all facets of material existence. *Prakriti* is the primordial, undifferentiated substance that forms the basis of all material existence. It is composed of three fundamental qualities or *Gunas—Sattva* (purity, harmony), *Rajas* (activity, passion), and *Tamas* (inertia, darkness). In a state of perpetual flux, these Gunas interweave, incessantly interacting and exerting their influences, thereby intricately shaping and orchestrating the formation and metamorphosis of the material world. Non-dualism is a key concept in the *Bhagavad Gita* that teaches that the true nature of reality is one, and many human centred dualities like subject-object, life-death, animate-inanimate etc. are contested. The text emphasizes that this separateness is illusory arising out of false humanist attachments, and that the ultimate reality is a single entangled web. The text therefore shows tendencies of non-dualistic thought which is central to Posthumanism. This rejection of dualistic thinking is essential in the posthumanist thought because as Francesca Ferrando in *Philosopical Posthumanism* states that unless we put an end to all

kind of dualities, the new type of dualities will keep emerging while we eradicate the previous ones through our deconstructive practices (60). One of the key themes in the *Bhagvad Gita* is the concept of karma, which emphasizes the unavoidable consequences of actions. The text presents a view of karma that extends beyond human beings to include all living beings and even the environment. The *Bhagvad Gita's* emphasis on the importance of "niskama karma" i.e., non-attachment with the fruitive results of the dutiful action, can be seen as a site of posthuman ethics. The text encourages individuals to detach themselves from their egos and therefore selfish pursuits while conducting oneself in harmony with the natural principles. The intersections and divergences between the Indian philosophical thought and posthumanism require critical examination in terms of their philosophical and metaphysical entanglements. This paper analyses such intersections and dialogues between these two areas.

Theoretical Framework

Posthumanism as a broad field of inquiry takes its viewpoints from diverse fields of study viz. Cybernetics as in the case of Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles, Critical philosophy as in the works of Rosi Braidotti, Animal studies as is the case with Carry Wolfe and the latest trend being the new materialist turn in the case of Karen Barad who draws on Quantum theory to foreground her arguments. There are associated fields of enquiry which can or cannot be called posthumanism depending upon how are you defining the term. Some of those are Object Oriented Ontology, Vibrant Materialism and Thing Theory to name a few. Therefore, there are various sub-types of posthumanism that emerge out of this theory depending upon various factors like the questions that they ask, or the methodology that they follow.

While all of this has enriched the development of posthumanism, however, the multifaceted nature of the term has engendered a degree of ambiguity and conceptual perplexity as well. As Gerald Miller astutely observes, posthumanism has assumed

diverse meanings across fields such as the natural sciences, Cybernetics, Epistemology, Ontology, Feminist studies, Film, Literary and Cultural studies, Animal studies, and Ecocriticism (163). Moreover, Herbrechter contends that the prefix 'post-' in 'posthumanism' is not only inherently ambiguous but possesses a "radically open" quality in its interpretation (76). The term can be construed either as 'post-humanism,' representing a critical deconstruction of humanism's assumptions, or as 'posthuman-ism,' signifying a philosophical stance toward future engineered beings with capacities surpassing contemporary humans. Ferrando provides further clarity by delineating three distinct forms of posthumanism—critical, cultural, and philosophical—while acknowledging the broader application of 'posthuman' to encompass related phenomena such as transhumanism, new materialism, anti-humanism, meta-humanism, and the post-humanities. Critical Posthumanism, in particular, employs critical methodologies to challenge prevailing conceptions of humanity and stimulate the formulation of more nuanced theoretical frameworks. Critical posthumanism does not come 'after' humanism in a chronological sense but instead follows from humanism in a conceptual sense. It "inhabits humanism deconstructively," (Herbrechter 14) critiquing historical binary conceptual oppositions between subject and object, biological and artificial, human and machine, human and animal, nature and nurture, and male and female.

> Unlike many strains of postmodernism, such critical posthumanism is not nihilistic; it is not about destroying the human subject but about recognizing a whole wealth of subjects that had never before been fully acknowledged or which – because of an absence of the necessary sociotechnological environment – could not previously exist in the real world. (Gladden 45)

Cultural posthumanism perceives 'post-humanity' as a condition already present in our current world. This perspective asserts that an understanding of post-humanity can be gleaned by

utilizing the methodologies of Cultural studies. The examination involves the analysis of various facets of contemporary culture, encompassing literature, film, television, music, visual arts, architecture, fashion, computer games, tabletop roleplaying games, as well as religious and political discourse. Philosophical posthumanism leverages the insights garnered from critical and cultural posthumanism, incorporating them into conventional philosophical methodologies. This integration aims to re-evaluate prior philosophical assertions with a heightened recognition of the pervasive "anthropocentric and humanistic assumptions" within the realm of philosophy (Ferrando 29). Philosophical posthumanism can be construed either as a branch of philosophy that assimilates elements of posthumanist thought or as an emergent facet of critical and cultural posthumanism directing its scrutiny toward traditional philosophical inquiries.

Ferrando elucidates that Philosophical Posthumanism can be defined as post-humanism, post-anthropocentrism and post-dualism (53). Post-humanism critiques the notion of associating 'humanity' with certain groups of humans say white, European, male while considering everyone else as 'others' or sub-human on the basis of race, gender etc. Post-humanism works by bringing into discourse the voice of these 'other' humans. Post-anthropocentrism works by decentring the divide between human and non-human entities while positing an interdependence of the two as well as the agency of non-human entities. Post-dualism challenges the way dualisms are employed in marking the identity and defining the self in narrow and closed rigid dichotomies like subject/object, white/black, animate/inanimate, life/death etc.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to enlist and discuss verses from the Gita that entangle the metaphysical realm of Indian thought with posthumanist thought. In human-centered ontologies, agency is often conceptualized in the narrow sense of intentionality. However, posthumanists downplay the difference between human

and nonhuman agency. They attribute agency to (inanimate) matter and nonhuman entities while at the same time disrupting humanist assumptions about identity and causality.

The very nature of existence expounded by the *Bhagvad Gita* through its metaphysics is post-humanist in the sense that first of all it explains the basis for all existence as common primordial substances called as 'Tattvas' containing 'Gunas' (inherent qualities) and it is through the intermixing of these substances in numerous permutations and combinations that different things of the material world come into being.

<div style="text-align: center">

mama yonir mahad brahma

tasmin garbhaà dadhämy aham

sambhavaha sarva-bhütänää

tato bhavati bhärata

</div>

<div style="text-align: right">

(Ch. 14, v.3)

</div>

My womb is the Great Prakriti (Mahat-Brahma) into which I deposit the seed (of My Intelligence); this is the cause of the birth of all beings.

<div style="text-align: right">

(Translation, Parmahansa 2018)

</div>

<div style="text-align: center">

sarva-yonisu kaunteya

mürtayaha sambhavanti yäh

täsäm brahma mahad yonir

aham bija-pradah pitä

</div>

<div style="text-align: right">

(Ch. 14, v.4)

</div>

It should be understood that all species of life, O son of Kunté, are made possible by birth in this material nature, and that I am the seed-giving father.

<div style="text-align: right">

(Translation, Prabhupad 1998)

</div>

These verses break down the exceptionalist idea of humans' ontological origin as different from other beings. Humans emerge

from same principle that is responsible for the existence of every other entity which is the coming together of *Purusa* and *Prakriti* where *Purusa* is the universal consciousness or intelligence as Parmahansa translates it and *Prakriti* is the universal principle of materiality as Parmahansa Yogananda calls it "Great Prakriti, is the womb of primordial matter" (1007) that is unmanifested unless it comes in contact with the *Purusa* and thereon the evolution of differentiated beings begins.

In another verse from same chapter, it is stated:

sattvam rajas tama iti

gunäh prakriti-sambhaväh

nibadhnanti mahä-bäho

dehe dehi namvyayam

(Ch. 14, v.5)

Material nature consists of three modes—goodness, passion and ignorance. When the eternal living entity comes in contact with nature, O mighty-armed Arjuna, he becomes conditioned by these modes.

(Translation, Prabhupad 1998)

sattvam sukhe sanjayati

rajah karmani bhärata

jnänam ävrtya tu tamah

pramäde saïjayaty uta

(Ch. 14, v.9)

O son of Bharata, the mode of goodness conditions one to happiness; passion conditions one to fruitive action; and ignorance, covering one's knowledge, binds one to madness.

(Translation, Prabhupad 1998)

nänyam gunebhyah kartäram

yadä drastänupasyati

gunebhyas ca param vetti

mad-bhävam so 'dhigacchati

(Ch. 14, v.19)

When one properly sees that in all activities no other performer is at work than these modes of nature and he knows the Supreme Lord, who is transcendental to all these modes, he attains My spiritual nature.

(Translation, Prabhupad 1998)

These verses illustrate the post-anthropocentric outlook of the Bhagvad Gita rooted in Sankhya thought where every being consists of three Gunas i.e inherent qualities that are present in each being in varying set of permutations and combinations having their own agency and thus acting upon each other. The three Gunas are *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas*. These Gunas are the driving force behind the evolution and diversity of the material world. Sattva is associated with the mode of happiness, clarity, wisdom and light. Rajas is associated with movement/motion or activity, desire and delusion. Tamas is associated with the quality of inertia, darkness, delusion and ignorance. So, any being that comes in contact with any other being is modified by the inherent agency of these Gunas present in those beings and their intermingling to create an effect. This leads us to the concept of 'Assemblage' as expounded in their works by scholars and philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari, Manuel De Landa, Bruno Latour and Jane Bennet to name a few. Assemblage, derived from the French term "agencement," refers to a philosophical methodology that explores the ontological diversity of agency. This approach involves the redistribution of the capacity to act, shifting it from an individual to a socio-material network composed of people, objects and narratives. Often referred to as assemblage theory or assemblage thinking, this philosophical perspective interprets social complexity by emphasizing fluidity, exchangeability and connectivity. In terms of the metaphysical

entities discussed above as Gunas, the materialization of the world can be seen as an assemblage of these Gunas acting over and acted upon by each other in a continuous never-ending process that aptly encapsulates the meaning of original French term 'engencement' which is a process rather than the brute English translation assemblage which seems more like a final product. So, in this manner, everything that humans come in contact with, whether physical or non-physical acts upon us and get modified to some extent. Thus, this metaphysical understanding and postulation of the material world in *Bhagvad Gita* is a posthumanist and post-anthropocentric in nature in a way that humans are not sole possessors of agency with the capacity to act upon others. The notion of intentionality and free will associated with agency by humanist thinkers is therefore challenged because the very mind and its processual faculty of thinking is just one of the modes of material existence as Sankhya thought propounds it "first product of the evolution is called Mahat, the Great. It is the germ of this vast world of objects including intellect, ego and mind. It is cosmic in its nature. But it has a psychological aspect also in which it is called buddhi or intellect…. buddhi or intellect, being the evolute of Prakrti, is material" (Sharma 162) and it is affected by the quantity and distribution of three Gunas in it. So, the humanist claim of a human intentionality free from any non-human influence or agency is henceforth refuted.

The post-anthropocentric approach is further evident in following verses of the *Bhagvad Gita*:

karmany evädhikäras te
mä phalesu kadäcana
mä karma-phala-hetur bhür
mä te sango 'stv akarmani

(Ch. 2, v. 47)

You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty.

(Translation, Prabhupad 1998)

annäd bhavanti bhütäni

parjanyäd anna-sambhavah

yajnäd bhavati parjanyo

yajna karma-samudbhavah

(Ch. 3, v.14)

All living bodies subsist on food grains, which are produced from rains. Rains are produced by performance of yajïa [sacrifice], and yajïa is born of prescribed duties.

(Translation, Prabhupad 1998)

yadä bhüta-påthag-bhävam

eka-stham anupasyati

tata eva ca vistäram

brahma sampadyate tadä

(Ch. 13, v. 31)

When a sensible man ceases to see different identities due to different material bodies and he sees how beings are expanded everywhere, he attains to the Brahman conception.

(Translation, Prabhupad 1998)

These verses take up the notion of a monistic pluralism which Rosi Braidotti also claims while drawing from Spinoza. Following Spinoza, she argues that the anthropocentric leanings of modern humanism that allow the development of urbanism and civilization function to keep humanity in isolation from the rest of the "raw cosmic energy" of an absolute reality. Braidotti advocates a vital materialism that identifies the whole of the universe as one infinite and indivisible substance. Life is a property not of individual entities, but rather a property of the substance as a whole. She sees "a direct connection between monism, the general unity of all matter

and post-anthropocentrism as a general frame of reference for contemporary subjectivity" (57). This monistically pluralistic understanding of the universe is in tune with the Sankhya understanding of the world as all the diverse things of the material world that we witness are just diversified manifestations of same *Tattvas* that form the basis of every existing entity and it is through the interconnectivity of these entities that existence is possible. The very ontology of existence is post-anthropocentric in the sense that we cannot exist unless we are linked with multiple others that we are surrounded with. As Donna Haraway says, we are "companion species" (2), although she limits her discussion to humans and dogs, but this can be extended ontologically to every other being especially in the light of *Bhagavad Gita's* metaphysical philosophy where this relationship of inter-dependence and inter-connected causality is conspicuously visible.

Finally, the subject of ethics in posthumanism will be examined as any discussion of posthumanism is incomplete without grappling with ethical nuances. The concepts that have been identified are the concept of zoe-centric ethics and the concept of posthuman affirmative ethics propounded by Rosi Braidotti in her two books. Braidotti advocates a shift from Anthropos centric ethics to zoe-centric ethics where zoe is the generic life force of cosmic energy present in all living beings as she states "life is not an inherent property of the individual, but rather the opposite: the mortal individual is best understood as a kind of temporary echo chamber for *zoe*" (132). So, instead of looking at other species as something that we can convert into a commercialised object in a capitalist setting, we need to take into consideration welfare of all and hence a shift from a self-centred ethics to an 'other'-centric ethics.

So, in the light of these concepts, let's consider the following verses:

advestä sarva-bhütänäm

maitrah karuna eva ca

nirmamo nirahankärah

sama-duùkha-sukhah ksami

santushtah satatam yogi

yatätmä drdha-niscaya

mayy arpita-mano-buddhir

yo mad-bhaktah sa me priyah

(Ch. 12. v. 13-14)

One who is not envious but is a kind friend to all living entities, who does not think himself a proprietor and is free from false ego, who is equal in both happiness and distress, who is tolerant, always satisfied, self-controlled, and engaged in devotional service with determination, his mind and intelligence fixed on Me—such a devotee of Mine is very dear to Me.

(Translation, Prabhupad 1998)

prakråtyaiva ca karmäni

kriyamänäni sarvasah

yah pasyati tathätmänam

akartäram sa pasyati

(Ch. 13 v. 30)

When a man beholds all separate beings as existent in the One that has expanded Itself into the many, he then merges with Brahman.

(Translation, Parmahansa 2018)

What we view in these verses is a consistent reminder to leave one's sense of proprietorship over everything else and this is what Braidotti laments when she says that modern capitalism has reduced animals and plants and even basic necessities of life like water into a commodity with a market value as if they don't have any right to exist if they don't have a value in the market. The emphasis on a common underlying unity that has expanded into manifoldness can be treated as the Indian counterpart to Braidotti's

idea of Zoe as a common force underlying everything but it is interesting to note that in *Bhagvad Gita* this idea of an underlying unity extends even to non-living entities as Parmahansa comments "No real difference is present among creatures: all are products of Prakriti and all are sustained by the same Underlying Divinity" (1001). In another verse it expounds the idea that there is no essential difference between a lump of earth, a piece of stone, and a piece of gold hence pointing towards an underlying unity as well as breaking all the dualities perpetuated by the capitalist market.

The next concept which is posthuman affirmative ethics deals with liberating ethics from the code of moralities. So, in this type of ethic, an action is not seen as morally good or evil but as ethically positive or negative, not as a normative value judgement but it is negative in the sense that it creates a blockage to open up to multiple others. As Braidotti writes, "Affirmative ethics builds on radical relationality, aiming at empowerment. This means increasing one's ability to relate to multiple others, in a productive and mutually enforcing manner, and creating a community that actualizes this ethical propensity" (175). So, it is required to give up negative passions like anger, hatred, boredom etc. that hinder our connect with the multiple others. Braidotti writes "Fundamentally, negative passions harm the self's capacity to relate to others, both human and non-human others, and thus to grow in and through others. Negative effects diminish our capacity to express high levels of interdependence, vital reliance on others that is the key to both a non-unitary vision of the subject and to affirmative ethics" (175).

Let's look at some verses that hold this kind of tendency:

<div align="center">

ahimsä satyam akrodhas

tyägah säntir apaisunam

dayä bhütesv aloluptvam

märdavam hrir acäpalam

</div>

tejah ksamä dhårtih saucam

adroho näti-mänitä

bhavanti sampadam daivam

abhijätasya bhärata

(Ch. 16. V. 2-3)

nonviolence; truthfulness; freedom from anger; renunciation; tranquillity; aversion to fault finding; compassion for all living entities; freedom from covetousness; gentleness; modesty; steady determination; vigor; forgiveness; fortitude; cleanliness; and freedom from envy and from the passion for honour—these transcendental qualities, O son of Bharata, belong to godly men endowed with divine nature.

(Translation, Prabhupad 1998)

Here, it is evident that just like Braidotti, the verse persuades to give up passions that decrease our capacity to connect with other people and in a way seclude us to ourselves. As Bradiotti remarks in *Posthuman Knowledge*:

…negative passions diminish our relational competence and deny our vital interdependence on others. They negate the positive power (*potentia*) of our relational ethical essence, of Life as the desire to endure, to continue, by becoming other-than-itself. The black hole of narcissism and paranoia, the despotic glee in humiliating others, the gloom of hatred – all this negativity hurts the victims, but also harms the perpetuators' capacity to pursue the ethical opening outwards. (175)

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be stated that posthumanism as a philosophical thought is aimed at critiquing humanist assumptions and locates itself as a theory of mediation among all kinds of radical postmodern practices of deconstruction where binaries are created to challenge any idea that we find problematic. Posthumanism in that context is post-exclusivist and post-centric as it refrains from

granting centrality to any subject as well as any idea. So, when we say that, it is important that we include all kind of knowledge systems into the discourse of posthumanism because if we are calling it posthumanism and taking only western notions into consideration then it is not post-human but post-human in a limited 'western' context. With this in mind, I have attempted to inculcate Indian thought particularly focusing on certain verses from the *Bhagvad Gita* into the discourse on posthumanism to showcase that an alternate trajectory of posthumanism can be possibly thought of through the route of Indian philosophical schools. Drawing upon a sacred text that dates back five thousand years in order to theorise posthumanism strengthens the idea that sometimes the answers to our future lie in the echoes of the past.

Notes

[1] Ferrando uses pronoun they/them to address (them)self.

[2] To maintain consistency, the Romanized transliteration of verses are taken from *Bhagvad Gita As It Is* by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. However, the commentaries, translations and interpretations are taken from multiple sources mentioned wherever occurring. Ch. – Chapter Number, v. – Verse Number.

[3] In his work *A Thousand Plateaus*

[4] In his book *Assemblage Theory*

[5] In his Actor Network Theory

[6] In her book *Vibrant Matter*

[7] In some editions/versions of the Bhagavad Gita, this verse is numbered as Verse Number 30 because the first verse of 13th chapter is omitted in many editions published by different publishers, and the next verse figures as the first verse of the thirteenth chapter.

[8]*The Posthuman* (2013) and *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019) respectively.

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In Search of Our Monsters' Gardens: An Ecofeminist Perspective on Women, Botany and Fears of Incorporation

Somya Dhuliya

Blackberries

Big as the ball of my thumb, and dumb as eyes

Ebon in the hedges, fat

With blue-red juices. These they squander on myfingers.

I had not asked for such a blood sisterhood; they must love

me.

(Plath, lines 4-8)

Women and the Natural World

The close association between women and the natural world can find its roots in the ancient soul/body divide, the appropriation of which has long been used to relegate them to a lower order of existence. In the Western philosophic tradition, Plato figures as one of the most eminent upholders of this dualism. The hierarchical superiority of the world of Forms carries with it a strong indictment of the body and physical existence, for the body and the sensorial input that it receives, deceive us and keep us riveted to the reflective material plane. Like our bodies, the material plane is transient, impermanent and prone to decay, while the Ideal is eternal, much like the soul. The soul, being immortal, carries the essence of who we are, not the body. Hence it is the soul and its welfare that should be the object of our concern, not the body. Should that not be the case, Plato writes, one would be living improperly, one would be living like a woman. Critiquing this philosophical tradition's obsession with the soul/body divide and the way it engenders women's subordination, Elisabeth Spelman writes,

Well, says Plato, look at the lives of women. It is women who

get hysterical at the thought of death (Phaedo 60a, 112d; Apology 35b); obviously, their emotions have overpowered their reason, and they can't control themselves. The worst possible model for young men could be" a woman, young or old or wrangling with her husband,defying heaven, loudly boasting, fortunate in her own conceit, or involved in misfortune or possessed by grief and lamentation still less a woman that is sick, in love, or in labor" (Republic 395d-e, as cited in Spelman 115)

In this paradigm, women find themselves tied to the body, chained to matter and their physicality on account of their bodily fluids, menstrual cycle, capacity to give birth, and other corporeal concerns. While men could pursue the higher, more noble goal of spiritual transcendence, via a higher order of metabolic activities such as thinking, women remain constrained by their polluting and corrupting bodies. While men were ruled by reason and logic, women languished in emotional hysteria. Notably, in Plato's hierarchy of the worst possible influences on a young man, women experiencing sorrow and child labour rank the lowest.

This transcendental dualism was co-opted by Judeo-Christian culture which also touted gendered images of God as a benevolent, omnipotent father with a problematic obviousness.

Ruether writes,

male monotheism…begins to split reality into a dualism of transcendent Spirit (mind, ego) and inferior and dependent physical nature…whereas the male is seen essentially as the image of the male transcendent ego of God, woman is seen as the image of the lower material nature…Gender becomes a primary symbol for the dualism of transcendence and immanence, spirit and matter. (53)[1]

The physical world and the women that inhabit it are subordinated to the higher order of the spirit, the mind, and the patriarch. Spelman coined the term "somatophobia" for the equation of women, children, non-white men and the natural world

along with its flora and fauna, to the maligned, basebody (Spelman 119). This equation finds its roots in the soul/body distinction and its construing of the body as despicable which materialises in socio-political inequalities.

Just as one can trace the lineages of thought that lend themselves to the subordination of women by equating them with the body and the natural world, similarly, we can trace tendencies in Western literature and language to cast the natural world as a woman. Nature goddesses in Greek mythology, such as Persephone, Demeter and Gaia, exemplify the perceived connectedness of women and nature. Natural spaces such as woodlands and streams were also imagined to be inhabited by feminine spirits such as nymphs and dryads. Ovid's Metamorphoses includes several instances of bereaved, vengeful or desperate women turning into flora and fauna, such as Philomela, the raped and silenced woman who finds her voice as a nightingale, and Daphne who is turned into a laurel tree as she flees a relentless Apollo. Similarly, Callisto, violated by Jupiter, is shunned by Diana and turned into a bear by Hera. (Ovid 243, 33, 70) In these transformations, women flee patriarchal violence and find reprieve in the natural world, often becoming a part of it. Several languages such as Latin (la natura), French (la nature), Spanish (lanaturaleza) and Italian (lanatura) use the female-gendered suffix for nature. Eve, and her feminine wiles, her curiosity, and her transgression cast man out of Eden and it is noteworthy that the ingestion of a fruit at the suggestion of a serpentile Satan are what led to mankind's fall. It is only after Eve's transgression, that Adam and Eve become aware of their corporeal forms and their nudity, harkening back to the association of women to the base body.

The gendering of nature enters common parlance and becomes idiomatic during the Enlightenment and the Romantic age with Francis Bacon exhorting to extract "nature's secrets" from her "bosom" while Wordsworth, Coleridge, Cowper, Gilpin, Byron

and Shelley later frame nature as a woman extolling its perceived feminine qualities of nourishment, care, reproduction, fertility, mystery, and cyclic changes. (Merchant 515)

> But doubly pitying Nature loves to show'r Soft on his wounded heart her healing power
>
> Who plods o'er hills and vales on his road forlorn Wooing her varying charms from eve to morn. (Wordsworth, lines 13-16)
>
> O Lady! We receive but what we give,
>
> And in our life alone does Nature live:
>
> Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud! (Coleridge, lines 47-49)
>
> Dear nature is the kindest mother still
>
> Though always changing, in her aspect mild From her bare bosom let me take my fill (Byron, lines 325-330)
>
> The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low, Each like a corpse within its grave, until
>
> Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
>
> Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
>
> (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air) With living hues and odours plain and hill:
>
> (Shelley, lines 7-12)

During the Victorian age, as the separation between the domestic and the public sphere became more severe, women found themselves being consigned to the former. Under the terms set by this separation, the only acceptable vocation for women was being a housewife. The domestic space was their primary concern and they were tasked with the moral, economic and aesthetic well-being of the house. This cordoning off of women to the domestic realm coincided with the Industrial Revolution and its rhetoric of domination over the naturalworld. The natural world was converted into a vast resource, available to conquer and exploit (Steinberg 261).

Domesticated women and curated natural spaces, created by the domination of natural forces find a confluence in the Garden literature of the 1800s. Gardening is by design, an exercise in unsustainable control. It involves the planting of non-native species, the use of chemical pesticides, the trimming of grasses and shrubs for arbitrary aesthetic purposes and the redirection of large quantities of water to maintain them. The genre of garden literature constitutes gardening manuals that provide women instruction on how to exercise control over the natural space in domestic gardens to optimise the use of any arable land attached to the house, aesthetically enhance the space and feed the family by tending to edible plants, herbs and flowers. This instruction was bound to an education in botany, which was seen as imperative in enhancing a woman's home-making skills (Shteir 29).

The simplicity of the Linnaean sexual system for the nomenclature and classification of plants also lent itself to the popularity of the subject. Flora and fauna identification plays a significant role in allaying emerging food anxieties, which I will return to later. But botany's codification as a feminine concern in the early nineteenth century is undeniable. Not only did women become predominant students of botany, but they also figured as creators and arbiters of scientific discourse on the subject, utilizing the subversive potential of scientific writing to make calls for economic independence or using botanical reproduction as a proxy for education in safe sexual practices (Harris, McNeill). Both McNeill and Shteir mention Priscilla Wakefield's

Introduction to Botany in a Series of Familiar Letters (1796) which employs a domestic setting and   an epistolary exchange between sisters where one passes on her governess's botany lessons to the other, as a prime example of women's discursive and intellectual authority in the field.

However, the access to botanical studies given to women started to be rescinded after the 1830s as the gendered codification

of botany was reversed. Shteir cites the writings of John Lindley, the professor of botany at Universal College London, as exemplifying the efforts taken in the upcoming decades to invert the gender identity of the subject. Following the death of the founder of the Linnean Society in England, Sir James Edward Smith, British botany observed a move away from the Linnaean classification in favour of plant morphology and physiology, as practised by the botanists in Geneva and Paris with Lindley as an avid advocate. Shteir continues,

> Lindley rejected Linnaean botany because of its social location in England as a polite activity and one widely gendered as feminine. In his inaugural lecture he declared his intention during the tenure of his professorship to "redeem one of the most interesting departments of Natural History from the obloquy which has become attached to it in this country." Lindley traced this "obloquy" to cultural connections between women and a class-marked culture of polite accomplishment:"It has been very much the fashion of late years, in this country, to undervalue the importance of this science, and to consider it an amusement for ladies rather than an occupation for the serious thoughts of man. (Shteir 33)

The rejection or belittlement of the dissemination of botanical knowledge among women was also a manifestation of patriarchal anxieties over female access to knowledge and the avenues it provided women to secure a place outside the domestic sphere. These anxieties are palpable in some of the age's publications. Sam George's book-length study titled *Botany,*

Sexuality and Women's Writing1760-1830 cites examples from the print culture at the time that made a direct attack on female botanists:

> …in the reactionary poem, *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), the Reverend Richard Polwhele (1760–1838) warned that botanising girls, in scrutinising the sexual parts of the flower, were indulging

in acts of wanton titillation. In the same year James Plumptre (1770–1832) conceived a comic opera entitled *The Lakers* in which the heroine is a female botanist, 'Miss Beccabunga Veronica of Diandria Hall'…*The Unsex'd Females* registers anxieties over a new bolder femininity which ultimately threatens to overturn social order. The female botanist is closely allied to 'female Quixotes of the new philosophy' (women who have failed to observe the 'natural,' intellectual and qualitative difference between the genders) who are set to imitate the 'Amazons' of republican France and introduce into England the disorder that has swept through that country. The *Botanic Garden* was considered to be a hotbed for such forward plants because it combined botany with liberal politics. (122)

What's Cooking

The garden must be seen as an extension of the kitchen. As discussed above, one of the primary concerns of the botanizing woman was feeding her family with fresh produce from the land. The alimentary function of the garden takes us to alimentary apprehensions.

In *Food, Self and Identity*, Claude Fischler coins the term "omnivore's paradox" to refer to the tension inherent in the need for variety in the human diet- on the one hand, humans can derive nutrition from a variety of foodstuffs (277). Their diets can be entirely meat, or plant-based, allowing them to survive in a myriad of ecosystems, facilitate movement and ensure continuity of the species even with the loss or disappearance of foods that constitute particular diets. But, on the other hand, humans also display a dependence on variety. Whereas herbivores and carnivores can derive all the nutrients they require from their specialised diets, humans need varying sources of proteins, vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates and fats. This translates to affiliation for newness, difference, diversification and change to ensure an optimum diet but also apprehension and conservatism when it comes to adding new foodstuffs as they carry the potential to be poisonous and fatal.

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Fishcler goes on to write that the basal process on which anxiety leading from the omnivore's paradox is concentrated is the act of incorporation. It is during this process that a foreign body is assimilated into our body, crossing the border between the inside and the outside, between self and the other, making it semantically loaded with questions of identity (of the consumer) and identification (of what is consumed) (277).

Moreover, this anxiety concentrates around plants as most of the meats humans consume are either familiar or culturally and religiously sanctioned and there is hardly any way for the human eye to ascertain the edibility/inedibility of a strange plant (Rozin 26-27). Fischler's delineation of the anxiety of incorporation is eerily similar to Kristeva's notion of the abjectand its ability to engender horror and disgust by the threat it poses to the distinction between the subject and the object, between the self and the other. Kristeva refers to the abject as "simply a frontier", interestingly using the example of a layer of cream that collects on top of a milk to convey the abject's threat to the borders of the self. She writes,

> Along with the sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and the father who proffer it."I"want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it. "I" expel it. (Kristeva 3)

The anxiety of incorporation is glaringly obvious here, lending credence to systems of identification, like the previously mentioned Linnean sexual classification. It is only through identification and classification that we can create reliable and reproducible knowledge of edible and non-edible species. Therefore, ingestion and incorporation are not value-neutral acts, even carrying elements of the disturbing and horrific in them. They are laden with anxieties about what is ingested, whether it is nutritive or destructive, how is it cooked and *who* cooks it, fanning fears of the fatality of women and plants. Women, who employ

home sciences in the kitchen, especially botany, can utilize their knowledge to upset the established order of the consumed and the consumer.

These anxieties materialised in the proliferation of print (and later, visual media) that associated the use of poison with the murderous women. This association, was once again, not new. Poison has almost always been a 'woman's weapon', whether it is the child-murdering Medea or the deceptive Circe, Hecate or Agrippa- administering poison to unsuspecting victims by women who were in the position of caregivers, seems to embody an archetypal anxiety.What if the caring, nurturing women turn monstrous? What if they use the resources and spaces that are meant to care for and nurture bodies, such as the kitchen and the garden, to incapacitate or kill? Female poisoners point to a cultural apprehension surrounding women's capacity for deception and this capacity is married to the capacity of the land, to also deceive and hurt the human body.

Killer Plants and Killer Women

There is no dearth in media of instances of women weaponising the domesticspace, especially the garden, to proliferate harm. Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story Rappaccini's Daughter tells the tale of Beatrice, a botanist's daughter, who, perhaps due to supernatural causes, unspecified scientific experiments, or prolonged exposure to her father's poisonous plants, becomes poisonous herself. Beatrice is introduced with floral metaphors, identifying her with the land, and the botanical obsessions of her father, perhaps suggesting that like the garden, she too is the product of her father's labour and has assimilated her surroundings within herself.

Soon there emerged from under a sculptured portal the figure of a young girl, arrayed with as much richness of taste as the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the day, and with a bloom

so deep and vivid that one shade more would have been too much…As Beatrice came down the garden-path, it was observable that she handled and inhaled the odor of several of the plants, which her father had most sedulously avoided. (Hawthorne 1046)

As Giovanni, the unsuspecting youth who courts Beatrice, learns of her poisonous abilities, so does the reader.

> approaching the shrub, she threw open her arms, as with a passionate ardor, and drew its branches into an intimate embrace; so intimate, that her features were hidden in its leafy bosom, and her glistening ringlets all intermingled with th eflowers."Give me thy breath, my sister," exclaimed Beatrice; "for I am faint with common air!" (Hawthorne 1049-1050)

The shrub that Beatrice embraces so ardently is extremely poisonous, killing off a small reptile as Beatrice plucks a blossom from it and places it near her bosom. Soon enough, Beatrice's and the garden's influence rubs off on Giovanni who starts to turn venomous as well. Beatrice's abjection of the boundary between her self and the garden, and later, between Giovanni and the plants is meant to alert us to the horrors of incorporation as he exclaims,

> Yes, poisonous thing! .... Thou hast done it! Thou hast blasted me! Thou hast filled my veins with poison! Thou hast made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself--a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity! Now--if our breath be happily as fatal to ourselves as to all others—let us join our lips in one kiss of unutterable hatred, and so die!(Hawthorne 1062-1063)

Beatrice is preceded by witches and sorceresses in mythology and folklore, brewing plants and animals into potions that could harm or charm; she is succeeded by a litany of poisoners who find their murder weapons in the garden. Numerous mystery plots by Agatha Christie feature lethal botanical poisons, such as yew berry extract in *A Pocket Full of Rye*, or nicotine from distilled rose spray in *Three Act Tragedy*. *Five Little Pigs* features a female killer, Elsa Greer, who uses coniine, a poison isolated from hemlock

as well as produced by the yellow pitcher plant, to murder her lover. Dorothy L. Sayers' *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* utilises a chemical preparation of the foxglove plant as a murder weapon. In Alan Bradley's *Sweetness at theBottom of the Pie*, eleven-year-old chemistry prodigy Flave de Luce extracts the oil of poison ivy and uses it to spike her elder sister's lipstick.

Killing plants and killer women take on a more literal meaning with the genre of carnivorous vegetation, and cannibalizing women. While these genres don't find any overlap in and of themselves, I propose that they are bound together due to the twin fears of fatal incorporation and the reversal of nurturing natures of the object turned monstrous.

Christian Nyby's adaptation of John Campbell's novella *Who Goes There?*, titled *The Thing from Another World* features a US Air Force crew chancing upon an alien spaceship which carries alien life. Once they unwittingly thaw the spaceship and the live matter it carries, they are faced with an advanced form of plant life that feeds on blood to survive. *The Little Shop Of Horrors* features another plant with a penchant for human blood. To draw more traffic to a failing florist's shop, one of its employees Seymour, tries to grow a unique and exotic plant, only to find that it could only survive by consuming humans. It is sentient and even learns to talk, commanding Seymour to do its bidding until it consumes him as well. In *Creeping Vine*, a part of Freddie Francis's horror anthology, *Dr.Terror's House of Horrors*, a businessman and his family return home from their vacation to learn that a plant in their garden has gained sentience and grows uncontrollably, reacting violently to any disruption in its path. The eponymous triffids in John Wyndham'spost-apocalyptic science fiction novel, *The Day of TheTriffids* are venomous carnivorous plants capable of locomotion.

Female cannibals abound in features like *Ginger Snaps,* where the titular Ginger transforms into a werewolf when she is bitten by one who is drawn to her at the onset of her menstrual cycle.

Justine, in Julia Ducournou's *Raw (Grave)*, discovers a penchant for cannibalism after a hazing ritual where she is forced to consume animal meat. Jusitne's appetite for meat is analogous to her sexual appetite, fostered by a life of repression and extreme vegetarianism. In Diablo Cody's and Karyn Kusama's *Jennifer's Body*, a young high school student Jennifer finds herself to have turned into a cannibalistic demon after a ritual sacrifice gone wrong, sustaining herself on a steady diet of the town's young boys. Patriarchal standards of beauty, the labour it requires women to undertake, and draconian suppression of reproductive rights, are explored through foetal cannibalism in Fruit Chan's *Dumplings*, where an ageing actress seems to find a cure for her ageing and malaise in a former gynaecologist's special recipe. Ingestion as a way to incorporate the qualities of the ingested within one's body forms a significant theme in Nicolas Winding Refn's *The Neon Demon* which inquires into the nature of envy and patriarchal exploitation through the lens of witchcraft, as well as Luca Guadagnino's *Bones And All*, a coming-of-age narrative drama on teenage cannibal Maren which features cannibalism as a way to incorporate the memories, characteristics and essence of the eaten, by the eater.

While botanical and female cannibals in media question and problematise the nature and order of consumption, they converge in narratives with the literal weaponisation of plant life by women. Perhaps the most prominent example in this category is DC's Poison Ivy. Created by Robert Kanigher and Sheldon Moldoff, Poison Ivy is a metahuman villain in the *Batman* universe. Initially, a promising botanist, she is persuaded by her professor to steal an Egyptian artefact containing ancient plant life. Out of the fear of implication in the theft, he poisons her with the plants inside the artefact since they are near untraceable but Ivy survives the attempt on her life and finds that she has become immune to natural toxins and venoms. In another version of her origin, her powers of immunity and ability to control plant life are traced to a metaphysical force called the Green

(Brian). Poison Ivy is an anarchic environmentalist, earning her place as a veritable villain on account of her eco-terrorist activities and her misanthropic crusade to re-establish the supremacy of the natural world. She embodies an extension of thenineteenth-century anxieties about botanisingwomen, their access to scientific knowledge (as well as places outside the domestic sphere), and the ability of that knowledge to corrupt seemingly innocent, unsuspecting women.

But these anxieties find expression in the domestic sphere as well, with housebound women and their plant perversions. Jan Švankmajer and Eva Švankmajerová's *Little Otik* is a dark surreal comedy, based on the folktale *Otesánek*. A woman's unfulfilled matronlyaspirations lead her to adopt a log of wood, name it Otik and take care of it as if it were a child. However, the log comes to life and develops an insatiable appetite, devouring any organic matter, then small pets and finally humans. Its voracious hunger, the source of the movie's alternative title *GreedyGuts*, is weaponised by the neighbour's daughter, Alžbětka, to lead a stalking paedophile to his death at Otik's hands, or rather, its mouth. The relentless desire for sexual consumption that he shows towards Alžbětka, is countered by that of Otik's literal desire to ingest and digest.

At the same time, human consumption of food is parodied in the movie with extreme close-ups of foods, acts of mastication and ingestion that are meant to invoke disgust, making them no different from the monstrous acts of eating by Otik. There is a constant blurring of boundaries- between the consumer and the consumed, as girls feed their stalkers to sentient plant life or as humans, considered to be at the apex of food chains, become fodder; as well as between the nourisher and the destroyer, as Alžbětka, who becomes a proxy mother to Otik, tearfully leads him to his end when his appetite gets impossible to keep up with.

Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived In The Castle* begins with this troubling insight into the protagonist Mary

Katherine "Merricat" Blackwood- "I like my sister Constance, and Richard Plantagenet, and Amanita Phalloides, the death cap mushroom. Everyone else in my family is dead" (Jackson 1). The sisters Merricat and Constance, along with their wheelchair-bound Uncle Julian, are the only surviving members of the family following a poisoning that killed their parents, aunt and younger brother six years before the events of the narrative. The family was poisoned with arsenic-laced sugar, sprinkled on top of blackberries. Merricat lives as she was punished to go to bed without dinner that night, and Constance survives as she was the only one who did not take her blackberries with sugar, making her the prime suspect in the murders. Even after her acquittal, Constance is considered guilty in the court of public opinion and remains ostracized by their community, making her agoraphobic and bound within their property lines which includes a vast forested area surrounding the house. Their feminine Eden is disrupted by the arrival of a distant male relative, Charles, who is implied to be solely interested in the family's finances. Both the sisters show a predilection towards the natural world and botanical interests with Constance assiduously gardening in the fields around the house and using produce from it to cook, while Merricat practices sympathetic magic, making use of raw natural elements like the soil, leaves and sticks to protect their house but to also display her hostility towards Charles. Eventually, the Blackwood house is consumed by a fire started by Merricat, forcing the sisters to take shelter in the foliage where Merricat admits that it was she who spiked the sugar, knowing that Constance would not consume it, and Constance admits to having known it all along. They return to the remains of their home, having expelled all remains of patriarchal intrusion from it and slowly, the house is taken over by the foliage, seemingly shutting them in with layers of thick vines. They soon gain a near-mythical status, with a rich tapestry of stories around them, making their community both fear and respect them. Interestingly, the novel ends with a conversation on unnatural, monstrous consumption between the two sisters,

where they come to terms with their otherness and make light of it:

> "We will have an omelette for breakfast."

> "I wonder if I *could* eat a child if I had the chance." "I doubt if I could cook one," said Constance.

> "Poor strangers," I said. "They have so much to be afraid of." (Jackson 146)

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* stands out in the way women and the natural world are aligned with each other as recipients of patriarchal brutality resulting in the woman becoming a plant herself. It dissects a cultural carno-phallocentrism through the figure of Yeong-Hye, who in the face of escalating gendered violence by her husband, stops eating meat and eventually, stops eating altogether. Feminist-vegetarian discourse has hinged upon drawing comparisons between the consumption of animals and women. Carol J. Adams, in her work *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, uses the concept of the absent referent to explain how the consumption of meat relies on the removal of meat from any association with the live animal which it once was. The Objectification of animals into meat is analogous to the sexual objectification and consumptionof women's bodies, who similarly become absent referents when sexually objectified. Adams writes:

> Sexual violence and meat eating, which appear to be discrete forms of violence, find a point of intersection in the absent referent. Cultural images of sexual violence, and actual sexual violence, often rely on our knowledge of how animals are butchered and eaten.

> For example, Kathy Barry tells us of "maisons d'abattage (literal translation: houses of slaughter)" where six or seven girls each serve 80 to120 customers a night. In addition, the bondage equipment of pornography—chains, cattle prods, nooses, dog collars, and ropes—suggests the control of animals. Thus, when women are victims of violence treatment of animals is recalled. Similarly, in images of animal slaughter, eroticovertones suggest

that women are the absent referent if animals are the absent referent in the phrase "the butchering of women," women are the absent referent in the phrase "the rape of animals." (22-23)

In the second part of the novel, her brother-in-law, an artist by profession, develops a strange obsession with a birthmark on her body in the shape of a flower petal. He has an artistic vision to record the intercourse between two people painted with flowers on the man   and he wishes to employ Yeong-Hye to fulfill his vision. The sexualisation of Yeong-Hye and his incestuous desire for her are sublimated into the floral obsession, adding a vegetal component to her exploitation. Her vegetarianism and disordered eating are met by further violence from her family and society, culminating in her institutionalisation where she encounters the violence inherent in care practices. While receiving a litany of treatments, she starts displaying arboreal aspirations, wishing to turn into a plant. Rose Casey writes:

> Throughout these three sections, *The Vegetarian* narrates Yeong-hye's will to arboreality through her unyielding, bodily compulsion to become a tree – to metamorphosize into a being capable of photosynthesis…She wants flowers to bloom from her crotch; she is nourished by sunshine, not food or water; and on the one occasion when she escapes psychiatric confinement, she goes straight to the forest where she stands, in physical and psychological stillness, until she is found among the trees to which she seems increasingly similar. (349)

Throughout the novel, Yeong-Hye remains speechless, her actions and minimal words being reported indirectly by her husband, her brother-in-law and then finally her sister.[2]When she becomes entirely non-verbal, her voice appears to her sister Kim In-Hye as she's falling asleep.

> Look, sister, I'm doing a handstand; leaves are growing out of my body, roots are sprouting out of my hands…they delve down into the earth. Endlessly, endlessly…yes, I spread my legs because I

wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch; I spread them wide…(Han)

Yeong Hye's recession from carnism, ingestion and speech is a radical protest against the carno-phallogocentric world. The novel at large, inquires the relationship between eating and suffering, between assimilation and destruction, and it does so through the body of Yeong-Hye and her increasingly vegetal character.

However, the general mistrust and fear associated with assimilation and incorporation is replaced by awe, wonder and reverence in Alex Garland's *Annihilation*. Based on Jeff Vandermeer's novel of the same name (part of the *Southern Reach* trilogy) *Annihilation* follows a cellular biologist, Lena who is employed by the U.S government to join an all-female team of scientists to venture into a mysterious quarantined zone termed AreaX which is inaccessible remotely and demarcated by a shifting veil termed as "the shimmer". Area X features a range of mutated species, brought into existence by a meteor impact roughly three years before the events of the film. Teams previously sent into Area X would mysteriously lose contact and never be heard from again so when this team enters the shimmer, they plan to reach the southern shore in the impact area which has a lighthouse, believed to be the epicentre of all the alien activity in the shimmer. However, as soon as the team enters the area, they lose all sense of time and direction and come across creatures transmogrified by the shimmer into perverted hybrids. In her paper "Co-Becoming with Diatoms: Between Posthuman Mourning and Wonder in Algae Research" Nina Lykke uses a autophenomenographic-poetic approach to reflect upon diatoms- a type of single-celled aquatic algae, human and more-than-human relations and intertwines her theoretical and creative explorations with mourning for her late lesbian life-partner whose ashes she spread in the diatom rich waters of Limfjorden, Denmark. Moving beyond binaries of living/non-living,

active/passive and alive/dead, Lykke deepens her connection with the ecologically sensitive fjord where her partner now rests, transformed into a state beyond her physical form, mixed with the diatomaceous and soft fjord bed, where she plans to follow her once she passes herself. This transformation opens up the possibility to imagine a corpo-affective relationship with the more-than-human for Lykke, for a co-becoming with the diatoms and the fjord waters and she uses poetry and speculative fabulation as a tool to express this relationship while also challenging human exceptionalism, dualistic thinking and technosolutionism to the climate crisis. Lykke's co-becoming provides an alternate model for imagining human and more-than-human relations. It acknowledges the agential capacity of the latter while decentering patently human concerns and critiquing anthropocentric biases to create a posthuman paradigm of relating to the many species that we share the planet with. *Annihilation* follows a similar logic of co-becoming where the paramedic's ouroboros tattoo appears on Lena's arm as the women are digested and assimilated not only into the land but also each other, their fingerprints shift and mutate and the physicist allows herself to be turned into a humanoid planthybrid, being incorporated into the landscape.

Annihilation challenges the ontological separation between the human and non-human. The horror stems from the breakdown of the stable boundaries that segregate us from the world around us. As humans inside Area X dissolve, degenerate and even double at one point (the impact area in the lighthouse produces a perfect mimicking double of Lena), they are faced with the precariousness of subjectivity and identity as what was considered the "outside" and therefore permanently severed from them, becomes them.

Fears of ingestion, incorporation and transformation by the combined objects of Spelman's somatophobia (this paper has majorly focussed on the vegetal non-human and women, but similar arguments can be made for children, animals and non-white people)

have found multi-faceted materialisations. Today, we find ourselves at a post-anthropocentric turn, where this incorporation can be seen as a positive transformation, a radical shift in subjectivity away from a fixed, rancid definition based on difference and stringent separations between the self and the other. This thought engenders marginalization of the natural world as well as of the people aligned with it. The need of the hour is to have human subjectivity defined relationally, and not differentially, to its social and planetary environment, and to perhaps, embrace the lack of fixity of separation between us and the world, between the self and the other. It is also imperative to understand that these aren't ontologically fixed categories, but are fluid, relyingon each other for their identification.

Notes

[1] However, God figures as a patriarch in other theological imaginations as well and this is attributed by Ruether to the spread of nomadic herding societies. (Ruether 53). Ruether cites the lack of the female gardening role (Martinand Voorhies, ascited in Ruether53) and aggression towards agricultural societies in nomadic religions as contributing to the worship of the "image God as the Sky Father" (James, as cited in Ruether 53).

[2] The paper "Blooming against Meat: Silence, Starvation, and Arboreal Subjectivity" in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* further explores the politics of speech and silence and reads Yeong-Hye'smeat-refusing body as a "performative text" resisting the carnivorous, all-consuming patriarchy (Lai).

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Exploring Hyphenated Identity in Memoryscape: A Reading of Michael Ondaatje's *The Story*

Sonika

Identity has long been associated with a person's inhabited or imagined landscape. Such a territorially confined idea is prominent in sociological, anthropological and political studies to solidify the sense of place/land in connection with identity. However, identity is not a simple concept- we ought to think of identity as "a production", which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 222). We tend to think of or imagine about (cultural) identity as *placed* – landscaped. But the cognition of individuality does not anymore sustain the traditional conceptualization of culture, place and identity. The contemporary dynamics of identity formation percolates through memory, trauma, migration, language and history among other elements. Thus, cognitive sociological approaches to identity "confine itself to the impersonal social mindscapes we *share in common*" (emphasis original, Zerubavel 8). The solitary thinker having personal thinking is insignificant here because what we "remember", in fact, happened "before we were born, and reminding us that it is not just particular individuals who happen to associate whiteness with purity" rather the "impersonal mindscapes" that we share with others (Zerubavel 112). And this leads to the development of memory culture with a social obligation to be linked to a group (Assmann 16). Hence, this paper seeks to develop the idea of memoryscape based on the concept of mindscape borrowed from Zerubavel (1997). It is in the memoryscape where recollections of the past are translated in a scape or dreamscape. Memory injects in culture the elements by which a society ensures cultural continuity through preserving its collective knowledge from one generation to the next facilitating the later generations to reconstruct their identity.

Furthermore, how we remember the past is more significant than what we remember, especially, in art. Memory is transmitted by a people in their social, historical and political context. It is the social group that filters from generation to generation the remembrances to pass on and the remembrances not to pass on. One of the means through which memory is transmitted is narrative. Narrative accentuates human thought and is capable of creating and recreating identity. As P. Nora asserts, "Where memory is no longer everywhere, it will not be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to recapture it through individual means" (6). Hence, the present paper is also an attempt to explore the means that the Sri Lankan – Canadian poet, Michael Ondaatje, employs to establish a connection between his identity and memoryscape. Ondaatje wields a dreamscape in his long poem *The Story* (2005) which crystallizes his own unique way of remembering the past.

Of late, Memory studies has become a burgeoning field comprising branches of Social sciences, Arts and Humanities including Geography, Sociology, Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Film studies, History and Psychology. And ever since Sage's inception of *Memory Studies* journal in 2008, the field of Memory studies has turned out to be specifically relevant to the twenty-first century as scholars ponder over and assess human lives, histories and geographical positions in postcolonial, new industrial, globalizing cultures in an era of ecocide (Guattari 2000). Memory studies deals, among other things, with public, collective and social memories encompassing individuals, families and other small units. Thus, examining literary productions through such theoretical stances is the need of the hour. Moreover, the spatial distance from the land one once inhabited or has *roots ingrained* in it does make an individual to remember the past, the place, and the scape frequently. Ondaatje, who has his roots in Sri Lanka, presents before us his lineage through the memoryscape that he plies in his long poem *The Story.* The poem is a peculiar example of the integration

of identity and memory enwrapped in intelligent verse narrating a story of belonging, becoming and being.

Ondaatje's personal history is one of multiple migrations due to which he did not live long enough in the country of his birth, Sri Lanka. His first stop as an immigrant was the U.K. where he spent his early years of intellectual maturing from age 11-19 during which his creative imagination probably first set off. In 1962, he came to Canada at age of 19 where he began writing. Therefore, Ondaatje has a task in hand in his poem to remember "the clear history of the self" (*The Story* 15). *The Story* begins with a popular belief that a child, for the first forty days after its birth, is given the dreams of the previous lives. The dreamscape that the poet creates is quite elusive and this surrealistic feature is sustained throughout the four parts of the poem. The opening lines are as follows:

> For his first forty days a child
>
> is given dreams of previous lives.
>
> Journeys, winding paths,
>
> a hundred small lessons
>
> and then the past is erased. (TS i 1-5)

Dreams of the past with journeys on curved paths is a lesson for the child. It is a presage of the dreams in the second and fourth sections of the poem where the four men and three women struggle to find their way through darkness. The "introspective wandering/into the past" (TS 7-8) takes the imagination to a world of an uncertain future with no remembrance of things past. The past life/lives of the child symbolically refer to a past with which a migrant can identify themselves. A childhood "dismantled" in the "buildings of the past" is a phenomenon common to all displaced beings.

"Memory can create", as Nicola King asserts, "the illusion of a momentary return to a lost past; its operations also articulate the complex relationship between past, present and future in human

consciousness" (11). References in the poem to "that bus ride in winter" (8) and "the speed of the city" (68) appear to locate the first and third sections in the present. And references to an unspecified king and queen, warriors and "the unlit habit of their journey" seem to suggest that the second and fourth parts are the matter of legend and hint towards an unspecified past. Each 'story' is concerned with remembering or reimagining a lost past:

> And those departures from family bonds
>
> leaving what was lost and needed.
>
> So the child's face is a lake
>
> of fast-moving clouds and emotions. (TS l 11-14)

The metaphorical reflection on the face of the child as a lake that mirrors the moving clouds and emotions contextualizes the association of landscape and identity in the backdrop of the departure from the homeland in the past. The spatiotemporal distance from one's *roots* takes one near to the *routes* of 'journeys in winding paths'. However, the sway between the temporal frames of the past and present in the garb of dream sequences denotes an *in-between* pull at work. And the future that is predicted for the queen and the unborn prince by the king himself propels the thoughts of transferring legacy from one generation to the next. "It is", as Homi K. Bhabha puts it, "an interstitial future, that emerges *in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present" (emphasis original, 219). Thus, the persona in the third section accepts in first person dialogue to the grandson that

> With all the swerves of history
>
> I cannot imagine your future.
>
> Would wish to dream it,
>
> . . .
>
> I no longer guess a future.
>
> And do not know how we end

nor where. (TS iii 63-71)

Though in the complementing first and third section there are direct hints at past and present respectively, there is another 'story' about maps. Ondaatje who desired "a world without maps" in his novel *The English Patient* (1992) is reiterating the same in the first section "Some great forty-day daydream/before we bury the maps" (TS i 19-20). However, it's not clear what "story about maps" in the third section he is referring to. But it certainly channelizes thoughts to land, landscape and the memory attached to these when he mentions maps.

Indeed, these are maps that make us geopolitically separated by borders. And these are maps that encompass the migrants/diasporas in the homeland/hostland binary making their identity dependent on a hyphen – belonging to both the sides – *in-between*.

Turning back to the dream motif, the second and fourth parts of *The Story* correlate with each other. Whereas the second uses the future tense to predict a war, the fourth is in the present tense to relive what was said in the prediction before. Both these parts are anonymously narrated and refute the 'erasure of the past' affirmed in the first section. These two parts tell a story about a prince who mysteriously remembers something that his father foresaw and conveyed to his pregnant wife while the prince was still in the womb. The king's prediction that "There will be a war" (TS 21) and that "In the last phase seven of us will cross/ the river to the east" (TS 22-23) is carried out by his son and six others and they save their lives with the help of ropes. Interestingly, the rope turns out to be a significant symbol in the poem. It connects the past with the present and one generation with the other. In fact, to quote Sam Solecki, "both these parts of the poem relate to fathers and sons, about exile and loss, and about the possibility that what has been lost and forgotten may be recovered. In both stories, the recovery includes an inadvertent or accidental legacy handed from one

generation to the next" (180).

Maurice Halbwachs, a cognitive sociologist in his book *On Collective Memory* (1992) states that our dreams are composed of fragments of memory too crippled and linked with others to allow us to recognize them. Sensations found in dreams are not true as we experience them when we are not asleep. Moreover, we are incapable of reliving our past while we dream; and even if dreams evoke images appearing to be memories, these remain in a fragmented state. "There never appears in dreams", as Halbwachs holds, "an event accompanied by all its particularities, without a mixture of alien elements" (41). Thus, the dream that is found in the poem works as a tool to represent the past mixed with uncertain and multidimensional memory images. The dream given to the child in the womb will be its future and end of his story. The dream is based only upon itself as opposed to our recollections that depend on those of our accompanying/associated fellows. This is the reason why in the fourth section the "old story" is "unremembered" after a certain point by the prince. This happens because the pregnant queen fell asleep while listening to her husband's prediction of the coming adventure in the life of the still unborn prince. Since the queen could not hear the full story, so did the child in the womb. Therefore, the recollection remains "unfinished" due to the dissociation from a companion who knew the full story and, thus, acquires the shape of a dream – incoherent, incongruous, and infelicitous.

Furthermore, the narrator recalls that in the second part the father had bitten off a wisp of his sleeping pregnant wife and braided it with his own. And though he says that "perhaps they perish" and then clearly says that "they will die without/ the dream of exit" (iv 120-121), he ends the narrative with a third ending with the escape of the seven persons:

> From the high windows the ropes
>
> are not long enough to reach the ground.

They take up the knives of the enemy

and cut their long hair and braid it

onto one rope and they descend

hoping it will be long enough

into the darkness of the night. (TS iv 123-129)

The braiding of hair into a rope stays in the subconscious of the prince as his dead father's legacy. The trope of the rope certainly interlinks two generations; dream with reality; and the past with the present. Thus, one of the poem's implicit meanings could be that while the future is unknown – we all descend a rope in and into darkness – we can remember, know and imagine the past (Solecki 181). Poetry can do this while establishing a relationship between the past and present. The poem offers the readers a dreamscape where everything begins with forgetting and ends in what can only be imagined in order to enliven a memory. The primary function of memory is not to preserve the past but to adapt it so as to enrich and engineer the present.

In view of the above, the poem by Ondaatje tells and retells, imagines and reimagines a "tender story" (114) in which past remembrances and dreams yield a memoryscape. The memories are attuned to embolden the fluidity in identity of the persona. It is a universal fact that without memory humans cannot exist. It is human memory that differentiates it from other living species. The three facets of the human mind – conscious, subconscious and unconscious – are all affected by memories persisting in the inner recesses of our psyche. The memoryscape created in *The Story* readily projects the pain, loss and longing for a past that belongs to one's own self now existing in the heritage of memory and dreams of that heritage. Such an interplay between the existence of the past and of the present hyphenates the identity of the poet/speaker. The pull of two temporal (or spatial) poles reminds the artist of a cultural baggage. Nonetheless, when Ondaatje says "My mind a carefully

empty diary" (*Rat Jelly*), he recognizes his cultural baggage and tries to fill the pages of his diary by taking a detour to his *roots* through *routes* between land of birth and land of settlement. In the end, it can be asserted that "it is within the 'ordinary' processes of memory that the self is continuously created and destroyed" (King 12) and, here, it is the constant creation of the affirmative self that is the crux of 'the story'.

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Translations

Poems

Saqi Faruqi

The Frog of Sher Imdad Ali

But in the cross-eyed

muddy pond

On the lotus in half-bloom

Spring was decked thus

It sprouted rainbows in the eyes of spectators

The water lured in its own right too

Surrendering, enticed

He shed his shirt off quickly

And leapt into the dead water

Mired in the water-weeds

Like a week old foetus

Squelchy, unripe skulls

Long tailed tadpoles

(unruly offspring

Of the singing frogs)

terrified

by the roar of shark waves

Scatter, plop, plop

And Sher Ali was in water up to his neck

The lotus was yet far

A bolt of lightning clattered across the sky

And one unruly water-eater catapulted

Like a blown up balloon that slips from sweaty hands

like a lizard's forked sword-tongue

plop plop

drowned right down the tunnel of his mouth

days passed

seasons changed

decades vanished

A voice kept plaguing him

"Let me out

Set me free from this dungeon"

He got doctors and surgeons by dozens

To scorch and exorcise him

with cool X-ray waves.

He changed his address

Shifted to a new city

And changed his country

But the pestering voice

Kept throbbing in his blood:

Let me out

Set me free from this dungeon

sher-imdad ali having usurped the property of water

sits padlocked in his house

Water stands guard outside

And in the water

Like peepal leaves

Bastards

Wrathful, angry-eyed

Pale yellow frogs

Lurk, lying in wait

Having laid their cordon.

Tale of a Rabbit

Dance

Evening stands and calls

Come out of the tents of yellow grass

And brown bushes

Soft breezes flutter by the frills of your hair

And crackle rabbitty jokes in long ears

Red Red buds

Green Green Grass

Slithering canopies of creepers…

A godown has been set up in the jungle, silly

Put the nose-pin of its fragrance

In your naïve nostrils

and dance.

Dupe every danger

A hundred doors open

Under the thieving stones

Cosy beds of fresh saffron flowers

The whole field is yours

To conquer and make merry

Death

And you both left your bedrooms

and lay now

bathed in warm blood

What indeed was the need for this?

There you were the emperor of the world

What did you lack?

Why did you wish

To conquer

 the bolted wall of dreams?

What allure

does this curiosity hold?

Why do you desire to subdue the unknown?

What fuels this old wishfulness?

Why do those charmed streets

snuggled behind

this flower bed tempt us?

Mortuary

Serving icy needles in my veins

treading, straddling piled mountains of naked corpses

the ice-cold hand of the breeze, cold like death

there it goes, there the doors bang their sullen heads

there, the bulb is shattered, the shadows desert

there, the dancing brains, delicately moist

there, the slithering arms, the screeching heads

those half-sculpted lips, the protruding teeth

there, the headless torsos come dancing.

those frightened bodies recoiling in cold sealed jars

any talk, acerbic poison is administered immediately

stay silent, they are hung by neck till death dutifully.

A thousand evil spirits lie hidden within these confines

there, those empty eyes staring

somewhere in space searching

for the original owner of the earth.

Every battered body is impressed with wounds

and a wail rises from each wound:

all these wounds were conferred after death

after the silencing of word and depiction

after the silencing of sound and reverberation.

A foul, musty smell runs riot in the trembling air.

I have departed home overseen by blood licking monsters.

There a punctured tongue arrives, stammers

laughs...speaks in scary whispers:

run quickly! run with your body

you can't listen to them all:

the tales of death are many

bless the wares of bodies:

the mortuaries that stock are many.

Stranger

Those dark nights

When I stay away, there is somebody

in my house who sleeps in my bed.

Somebody lies at the marbled door

of this room and weeps a soft flood.

I fear lest this man who weeps

a quiet flood be bereft like me

distressed like me, oppressed like me

It is probable

he too might be clueless

about the cause that causes him

to weep a hushed flood.

Translated from the Urdu by Huzaifa Pandit

Book Reviews

The Body by the Shore by Tabish Khair, USA: Interlink Books, 2022, ISBN: 9781623718466. Price: ₹1224

Md. Firoj Ahmmed

The Body by the Shore by Tabish Khair is an intriguing novel that explores the complex issues of identity, migration, miseries of human existence and the ugliness of daily life in a capitalist society. The novel, set in a coastal town in Denmark in a post-pandemic dystopian world in 2030, intertwines the lives of a variety of characters who grapple with the past, the present and the uncertainties of future. Divided into two parts, the second half of the novel is strangely reminiscent of H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* published in 1896. Set on an isolated oil rig in the North Sea, Khair's story centres around the discovery of the body of a young black man with his organs amputated on the coast of Denmark. A non-linear timeline and a number of narrative points of view are combined in *The Body by the Shore* to create an elaborately constructed structure. Exploring broader issues like racism, climate change, and organ trafficking, the story is told from the perspectives of a retired Danish police officer, a young Caribbean maid, and a former mercenary. Set in a variety of places, such as a remote oil rig in the North Sea and a Danish beach village, the shifting locales broaden the book's global reach. The narrative threads converge into a cohesive and captivating conclusion despite their intricacy.

The story is narrated through the lens of three main characters - a retired Danish policeman, a young Caribbean housekeeper, and a former covert operation mercenary — each of whom approaches the novel's overriding mystery in a different way. In Arhus, Jens Erik the ex-police officer who is extremely racist and xenophobic keeps thinking about the dead body of the black man with his organs detached. Harris Malouf, a villain who now lives a restful life tending his garden and raising swans joins a covert mission to look into the mystery enshrouding a seminar organised

at Aarhus University in 2012 on "Mind, Body and Soul: The Cognitive Sciences and Religion", where three speakers went missing and two were mysteriously killed. In the course of this clandestine operation, Harris comes across Vyachislav Mikhailov, the captain of the oil rig ship where amputation of healthy human organs and their disposal on the seaside takes place. A stunning Caribbean girl named Michelle Nancy witnesses several suspicious guests arriving on the rig and soon discovers that the rig is actually an operating room where captives, primarily refugees from underdeveloped countries, are subjected to experiments. Khair reveals how human organ trafficking has replaced the ivory trade and could be humanity's greatest challenge. He shows how youthful bodies with healthy organs have emerged as the new resource for the West and how agents, working with corporate medicine and big pharmas, profit from the influx of refugees from Africa and South Asia.

Khair engages with other contemporary issues such as racism, refugee crisis, post-pandemic challenges, climate change, and the effects of neo-liberalism. He addresses the problem of climate change in the novel, warning of the unexpected increase of water level in the North Sea. He talks of "greater worries due to sinking coastlines and islands" (63). Ironically though while islands and coastlines are getting inundated, financial market is amplifying and property prices are soaring up. He adds that in the post-pandemic society, people are chasing manufactured paradises.

Since the coronavirus outbreak swept the globe a decade ago, not much has changed. Its consequences are palpable and mainly "confined to those sections of society, the poor and the marginalized […] whose plights had been habitually ignored for decades" (77). The ruthlessness of unchecked capitalistic greed is more evident in the post-pandemic world than ever before. Moreover, the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 outbreak has spilled over to the future. The novelist's portrayal of our collective future appears

to be more terrifying owing to the pernicious presence of virulent microbes and plagues. Khair asserts that interspecies relationship is essential to the creation and maintenance of life on Earth that has been badly frayed. There are fascinating accounts of trees communicating with one another through a network of neuronal circuits implanted in the roots of "trees, shrubs, mushrooms, fungi, microbes are far better at communicating than we are, and that they communicate between species too" (265).

The Body by the Shore is primarily a reflection on identity and the nuanced interaction between the self and the society. Khair dexterously examines the subtleties of identification, alienation, and the influence of political and historical events on people's lives. The novelist adeptly navigates the psychological and emotional problems of those who have fled their homeland in pursuit of better opportunities. In particular, Khair draws attention to the non-Muslim world's continuous insensitivity towards Islam and Muslims. The narrator remarks: "Muslims had been replaced by a virus as the global villain [...], though with similar effects." (37). The Western stereotype of Muslims as terrorists or global villains is shown in the novel through Erick's Turkish friend, Aslan who always remains suspect due to his Muslim identity. In a similar vein, Hanif from Bangladesh is never trusted. This foregrounds the rising Islamophobia across the globe. In his article *Islamism and the left*, Michael Walzer writes, "… bigots in Europe and the United States … deliberately misunderstand and misrepresent contemporary Muslims. They make no distinction between the historic religion and the zealots of this moment; they regard every Muslim immigrant in a Western country as a potential terrorist; and they fail to acknowledge the towering achievements of Muslim philosophers, poets, and artists over many centuries". Khair too critiques this stereotyping and unthinking generalization in the novel.

The outstanding storytelling by Khair is one of the book's many virtues. The narrative unfolds through multiple perspectives,

allowing readers to closely connect with each character's thoughts and emotions. The prose is both lyrical and poignant, painting lucid images of the coastal landscape and immersing readers in the town's cultural milieu. *The Body by the Shore* is a captivating and thought-provoking novel that will appeal to readers who value complex characterisation, engrossing storytelling, and an examination of societal concerns.

Creative Pieces

Of Shadows and Sunlight

T. Ravichandran

Between the beleaguering books and blissful breaks,

between the coffee cups and lingering lips

slips through seas of elliptic miseries—

Untold truths or silent lies?

Odd to moon's hush or trees lush—

The mind makes them mountainous!

Engulfed in an enigmatic anguish,

Exploding a soulful savouring

of an individual's insightful illumination—

Devoid of Sigmunds and Satans.

The hybrid heart is held between—

Woven webs of worries and weed-fed wonders,

Insurmountable insanity or subdued serenity—

The mind makes them all null and dull!

Dumping all doctors' dosages in dirty dust bins,

Slouching self-analytically on the Freudian couch,

Lying lifelong on the lousy cot,

Staring inanely at the seepage wall,

Thinking why trivial termite mounds weigh over mounting terminations!

Oscillating between rope and dope—

The mind conflicts with despair and hope!

Wondering what nightmares await this diurnal doze,

Making meticulous moving maddeningly menacing,

Ignoring methodically many of mom's missed calls,

Undisturbed by gentle door-knocks,

Deeply despairing in darkened dungeons,

Bound by hallucinated blocks

Out of bounds for any human reach,

Where even sunrays dare not breach!

If only the mind tells the body—

To take that first step,

To reach out and burst the bubble,

To bask in the benevolence of the sunbeam,

And to scream for an ice cream

like a drenched girl dancing in the rain!

If only the mind will seek to find

that the first step was not in vain,

to feel the dew drops of vanquished pain,

to eternally embrace the planet

of the valiantly vibrant

waiting for long to accept without any disdain.

Every choice is a step on life's tightrope—

Shadows do shelter whispers of hope!

If only the mind marches to its desired destination—

The monster will recede to its lonely location!

If only the mind decides . . .

Then the monster recedes . . .

If only.

Born into Languages: On Translation and Multilingualism in Kashmir

Ashaq Hussain Parray

Arabic holds a sway on the Kashmiri imagination. When I was thrown into this world (yes, in *Kashur* we are not born, we drop off a womb), a man living in our neighborhood recited *baang* (the Muslim call to prayer) into my ears. The sacred words in Arabic were shouted loud and I was introduced to Allah, Muhammad (His messenger), and Ali, all in one Kashmiri-accented Arabic breath, even before I learned my mother's tongue *Kashur* (Kashmiri), before knowing the midwife who asked for four kilos of pulses and a fat white dotted swan to help me arrive.

The language our *Khoeda Soeb*, our local name for Allah, understands is Arabic, and it holds a mysterious power over our minds. We may not understand the words on a literal level, yet there is a mysterious texture and aroma that exudes from words in Arabic. For instance, to say 'Mashallah' on beholding beauty or to recite this verse from the Quran, *Rabbana zalamna anfusana wa illam taghfir lana wa tarhamna lanakunanna minal khasireen* (Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You don't forgive us and shower mercy on us, we will be among the losers), when in distress, to voluntarily utter *La hawla wa la quwwata illa billah* (There is no power and no strength except with Allah) while trying to get up or persevere through a hard time, or to say *Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un* (We belong to Allah and to Him shall we return) upon hearing of someone's death or begin every task with *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem* (In the name of Allah who is merciful and gracious) makes us feel as if a divine power suddenly cracks through the chinks of time to be in the present moment. We may be unable to tell others what these words mean separately, we may not be able to tell the grammar, punctuation, and the tone of the words apart, yet we hold onto these words in Arabic. We cling to them like one would

to a beloved in hopeless love. This breaking into the universe of Arabic serves as a stark reminder of our essential faith in Allah and our identity as Muslims.

Arabic is the language in which we converse with the divine realm, and this is why our local *Molvi Soeb* makes us parrot answers to otherworldly questions that will be asked on the Day of Judgement in Arabic. We learn of wide-eyed *houris* as we learn the right answers in Arabic to questions posed by angels tasked with the interrogation of our faith. Arabic is our ticket to the lush green Paradise flowing with everlasting honey, milk and wine that never intoxicates. We roam with the divine minstrels in Arabic, sing of poetry that delights the mind and soothes the ear in Arabic, we drink with fairies that calm the eyes and dream of youth that never gets old in Arabic. Arabic is our language of divine longing and eternal life.

We are also given farewell in Arabic. When a person whose mother tongue may be Kashmiri or Urdu or Pahari dies, we make sure to send them off with Arabic words blown over the funeral. As the soul begins its journey outside the body, we begin to recite verses in Arabic. It is usually a *Kalima*, confirming our faith as Muslims. In Shia Muslim faith, the sable shroud for the dead is written with words in Arabic called *Shahadat Namah* (a witness document) which serves as a record confirming the essential beliefs of the departed person. Once *ghusl* or ablution is done and the dead body covered in a shroud, we recite *Talqeen* in Arabic over it, reiterating all the articles of our faith—that Allah is One, that Mohammad is His messenger, that the Quran is our holy book. We recite it on behalf of the departed soul and stand witness that the deceased person followed the path of Allah and His messenger. For the first four days, we assemble on the grave of the deceased at the crack of dawn and recite Quranic verses hoping that they help the dead person on their way in meeting God and safeguard them from the

flames of Hell fire. We are born into Arabic and are given a farewell in Arabic.

Arabic is a hallowed language for us—far away from the mundane and ordinary battles fought on our roads. It is our otherworldly language. A word or a speech delivered in Arabic sprinkles a film of divinity in the air. Arabic smells of Heaven (sometimes Hell too) and its mysterious creatures lurk in the cleric's imagination. It is a passport to the realm of the unknown. When we have to ask for Allah's blessings or pray for our soul to be saved from damnation, we choose Arabic to be our carrier. Somehow, everything said and spoken in Arabic assumes a sacred aroma, takes on a divine smell, and reminds us of a different realm amidst the vanities of this material world.

Arabic is not always the language of mercy. It is the language of punishment as well. This is why I am scared of Arabic, or perhaps I am an exile into Arabic. It frightens me because it reminds me of the punishments reserved for the deviant and those who stray away from the right path. I am constantly reminded of *Jahnnam*, Hellfire, during the Friday sermons or during a Majlis, a religious gathering. Arabic reminds me of the eternal Hellfire whose flames crackle and roar and singe, waters that boil, winds that scorch and smoke that gags—all ready for those who doubt or deviate from their faith. But this is not how my mother views Arabic. She finds solace when she prays, though she can neither read nor write Arabic. She has learnt all the necessary verses by heart, required to complete a prayer. The prayer in Arabic provides her an anchor and a sense of being in the presence of the divine and sacred—a presence that allows her to connect to something beyond her daily toil of sorting, chopping, frying and serving food to a group of ravenous mouths in her family. For her, prayer has no language that needs to be understood. It is a modest silence in the face of confusion and anxiety she regularly encounters. It does not always need ratiocination and abstract intellectualization. Sometimes I wonder why she does not pray in

Kashur, but upon a little reflection, I understand that Arabic is her secret language to access Allah. And sometimes I like this idea of prayer in abstruse and cryptic Arabic precisely because of its incomprehensibility. I don't want to understand it because I think if I understand my prayer, maybe I won't like it. I want the mystic scent of the Arabic to stay with me. This is why I like my mother's prayers in Arabic more than I like my own because she is devoted to the mystery hidden beneath the language.

All expressions of Arabic and in Arabic alert us to the immanent presence hidden beneath the flesh of words. For instance, if we witness two people speaking in Arabic, we instantly turn our attention towards them and stop our profane conversation in the hope that something sacred must be spoken between these people! It might be an ordinary conversation in Arabic about romance and love, but our ears and minds are trained to receive all Arabic speech as sacred and celestial.

A well-known anecdote relates that a Kashmiri, on a pilgrimage to Mecca, raised his hands to heaven and uttered *Aameen* when he saw a group of people chatting in Arabic. There are reiterations of this apparently humorous anecdote in all parts of Kashmir, where people use it on various occasions. However, an important point that emerges from the anecdote is that for a Kashmiri, even a breath drawn in hasty Arabic is an instance of being in the presence of the sacred. And our local Molvi often prefaces his sermons with Arabic. He may curse people, but we are always ready to say *Aameen* to anything spoken in Arabic. Numerous prophetic narrations necessitate and corroborate this attitude toward Arabic in our daily lives. For instance, Molvi Sahab often repeats a Hadith that speaks of Arabic as the language of dwellers of Paradise, and perhaps this is the reason we are made to remember all sorts of answers to questions that may be asked in our journey to the next world. I often don't think of going to Hell because I have all the answers by heart. For instance, when I will be

asked "Mann Rabuka?" (Who is your Lord?), I will answer—"Allahu Rabbi Jal Jalalahu" (Indeed, Allah is my lord). I have answers ready for questions about my belief in Islam, my faith in Mohammad (SAW) as the last prophet of Allah, and Heaven and Hell as realities. Arabic prepares me for an unknown world, for a world that I shall journey to once the spirit flies away.

However, Arabic is not the language of joy and sadness for us. When someone gets married, we burn *izband*, our women perform *wunwun* and sing *rouf* to the sounds of a *tumbaknaer,* chanting melodies of love and joy in Koshur, our mother tongue. A Kashmiri wedding is incomplete without performing *Bismillah kaerith hemavai vanvoye, Sahibo az valo sonayei* (Let's begin with God's name, Sahibo, come pay us a visit today) and singing, *Lala zoola zalyo* (Darling, let us light lamps for your sake). Those with affluence invite the *Koshur* singer, *Gyevun Voel*, who, along with his companions, sings *Kashur* wedding songs all night. They are accompanied by a dancer-cum-singer who dances, sometimes with the ladies of the family, sometimes all alone, defying norms in a place where dance as a form of joy is frowned upon.

The dancer, called *Bachekoet*, is usually a thin, tall, young male who cross-dresses and moves his body with the jingle of bells in his ankles in ways men wouldn't dare, for fear of being labeled feminine. Interestingly, it is the women, young and old, who hold hands with the male *Bachekoet* and perform a gentle dance called *Haket,* where two people holding hands dance and move in circles. This holding of hands between genders would not be tolerated outside the wedding space in everyday conditions. In this way, the traditional *Koshur Bachekoet* flouts gender norms, religious and moral policing, and the entire scene transforms into a sort of carnivalesque, in which men and women watch with joyful eyes as family members, relatives, distant friends, and neighbors groove to the rapturous voice of the singer, taken into a trance-like state by the swinging steps of the singer-cum-dancer. One can feel the existence

of Kashir people in the presence of Kashur language—the intoxication and madness it brings with the clapping of hands, the blushing of cheeks, and the swaying of bodies to the melodious voice.

And when a *Koshur* dies, we wail and cry in Koshur. We send our cries to God in Koshur. We swear in Koshur and keep it secret, just like we keep love affairs from our parents. We are ashamed of it in public places, like city malls, but enjoy its company when alone. This is why our poet Rahman Rahi wrote in Koshur:

O *Kashur* tongue! I swear by you,

you are my awareness, my vision too

the radiant ray of my perception

the whirling violin of my conscience! (my trans.)

For Rahi, *Kashir* (Kashmiri people) and *Koshur* language were companions before they were born, and it is as important to people as sunshine is for a bud to blossom. Koshur is the language of joy and sorrow, that blesses wounds with a tongue, gives shape to our murmurs, weaves silk robes for us, flies us into the mighty skies, and washes our feet at the ghat. It is like our mother, tending to us in our moments of weakness and panic, comforting us when we shudder at the thought of a sieged tomorrow, calming our frightened hearts, offering music to our errant thoughts, and explaining our origin in this universe. Kashur is our *wajud*, our life.

During moments of deceptive calm in the valley of *Kasheer*, *Koshur* is our only way to vent our suppressed feelings. Or in moments of fight or flight, we give an earful in *Koshur*. *Koshur* is our language of love and joy, of pain and sorrow. Our mothers and grandmothers call upon their dead ancestors in *Koshur*, and we follow them in our attempts at *Koshur*. Even though not many of us can read or write *Koshur*, it makes us who we are. For instance, when we are surrounded by strange weapon-wielding men and feel

powerless, we resort to expletives in *Koshur*. When someone slaps us for walking on our roads after the evening, we sob in *Koshur*. When we hear of an attack, we warn others in *Koshur*. *Koshur* is our language of panic, flight, and comfort. When someone loses a son or daughter to a stray bullet, we comfort them in *Koshur*. And when we are occasionally happy and want to experience joy, we listen to Sufiana (Kashmiri Sufi music) in *Koshur*.

The voice of maestro Rashid Hafiz singing *ya tuli khanjar maeri, nateh saeni shaba rozei* (either my love will slay me with a sword, or else will stay a night at our house) or the verses of Wahab Khar, Psalms of Neyam Soeb, rhymes of Rahim Soeb, sonnets of Suche Kral and shruks of Sheikh ul Alam make us leap with joy, swing our bodies in motion, and dance as if it were our last day on earth. Such assemblies not only remind us of the essential free nature of our spiritual being but also serve as reminders that we are more than our bodies—and that we will eventually die and travel to an eternal afterlife.

And when sometimes we gather for mourning on someone's untimely death, we recite *Marsi,* elegies in *Koshur*, reminding ourselves of our historical heroes who persevered through hard times. For instance, whenever someone loses a young son, we make sure to recite verses of Mirza Aboul Qasim's *Marsi* (elegy) titled *Zanu— ho meyani novjawano, peeri manz meh banith kya aamu/che bront marun meon gaecha janu/voeth ba godeh meh qabreh savo* (O my young son, what has fallen me in this old age/does it befit you to die before I do/wake up and bury me first) or when someone is too tired to carry on daily life and is struck by anguish and ennui, they toss a *misra*, verse from Koshur Marsi titled *Kemya*, like *meh goem duniya qaed khan zindagi gayem vobaeley* (my world is a prison; my life, a desolation). When we collectively recite *Marsi* in *Koshur*, we cry like babies and our bodies break like twigs in a snow-storm. *Marsi* recitation is our attempt at coming to terms with the loss of a loved one, bearing the loss with dignity by reiterating

and remembering the greatest tragedies of human history—the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and his family in the desert of Karbala. We relive the trauma of Karbala in *Koshur* to make sense of our own daily traumas and anxieties of life.

When we visit a psychiatrist, we don't say we have depression or anxiety or any other term in English. Rather, we say, *daktar saeb*, *meh haz basan sorie dazaan* (Doctor, I feel like everything is on fire), *meh zan naar heavaan* (I feel like my being is slowly catching fire), *meh zan te shameh pateh kus tam jinn senas peth behaan tei dham karan* (I feel like a djinn sits on my bosom after dusk and stifles me), and *meh zan shah nivan kus tam* (I feel someone steals away my breath). The metaphoricity of feeling as if everything is engulfed in fire including one's own being, as if a djinn stifles and as if one's breath is stolen convey the darkest nights we bear in our city of desolation.

Similarly, when we have not seen someone for a long time and miss their presence and then happen to meet them, we immediately say expressions like *vondmaye zuv*, *logsaya balai*, which literally translates to may my life be sacrificed for you, *meh aes venij aemech phatnas* (my heart was about to burst in pieces) *meh oes sakh loel aamut* (I have been missing you). No amount of translation can capture the meanings of the word *loal*. It means love, affection, longing, desire and a pining for one's beloved-simultaneously. However, when we want to look polished, respectable, or want to display social status, education, culture, and progress, we ditch *Koshur* in favor of Urdu and English.

No wonder, *Koshur* is policed in various spaces in Kashmir and sometimes it can get you into trouble. An anecdote relates that once an old man from a certain village was returning home in the evening carrying a sack filled with farm tools on his back when he was stopped by non-*Koshur* speaking personnel and asked to raise his hands. Holding his hands in the air, he was asked, "What do you have in that bag?" "Samaan, Sir," he replied. He was immediately

apprehended and thrashed to pulp. They had confused his *Koshur samaan,* which means articles, objects, and things, with their own understanding of the word as weapons.

Our elite English-medium schools too punish students who speak *Koshur*. No wonder parents feel ashamed of teaching kids what they call the *greais Koshur*, the language of the villagers and peasants. An entire generation in Srinagar city has gone without speaking *Koshur* to their children. No wonder, many kids today can't even comprehend either speech or texts in *Koshur*. On certain occasions, when we feel too peasanty, Urdu turns out to be our savior. Our kids speak Urdu that neither speakers in India nor Pakistan accept as a standard form of the language. We have brought out our own accent of Urdu that helps us mask our class identities. At the same time, Urdu provides us access to a vast array of literature thanks to our fondness for ghazals. We often catch ourselves listening and grooving to Urdu ghazals and Qawwalis sung by maestros like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Ghulam Ali, Jagjit Singh, Abida Parveen and Farida Khanum. We have Kashmirized Urdu, a version that only makes sense in Kashmir. This is not to suggest that our version is inferior compared to Urdu spoken elsewhere in India and Pakistan, for no version of any language is inherently superior or inferior, but the fact that our transition to address each other from *Koshur* to Urdu often masks the asymmetrical relationship of class affiliations. At the same time, code-switching is a new phenomenon one witnesses daily in public transport and other places. As much as it conveys a new reality of the impact of dominant languages like English in non-English spaces, it also conveys the upward aspirations of a generation of people whose ancestors grew up speaking Koshur.

When we see someone speaking fluent English, we comment, *sue chue French thukaan* (He speaks eloquently). It is funny how speaking English is equated with speaking French, languages that have no roots in Kashmir prior to British colonialism

in the Indian subcontinent. And ironically, not more than ten percent of Kashmiris speak English ordinarily in their daily conversations, but it still the way to 'move forward'. Playing English-English is our way of putting on a show of our class privilege when we may or may not have one, or displaying our 'cultured' values and masquerading as liberal, educated men who routinely criticize the institution of marriage while harassing women in public spaces, passing on unsolicited comments.

English is also our way of sounding woke in a world of Instagram reels. We speak of women's rights in English on social media and yet wait at home for the women of the house to serve us. We flaunt having reached the highest pinnacle of a woman's independence while erasing women in villages and remote areas who still leave early morning to collect cow dung and firewood for winter, and who are still caught in the cycle of fetching water in pitchers from polluted streams and dysfunctional community taps. Our progressive values in English are class-based, our equal rights slogan selective. As long as we don't anger the surveillance cameras, we can keep doing our activism on social media. We have liberated ourselves in English on social media posts and yet are caught in vicious cycles of violence in offline lives.

English has offered us ways to connect with the world, but it has also evoked in our eyes desires and dreams of the first world while inhabiting bodies caught in the tropes of violence. The rupture of ourselves, the broken selves, is the inevitable result of this mismatched sense of self, a sort of translation in limbo. We are the new translated men and women hiding and manifesting, dying and living simultaneously beneath the tenacious flesh of words.

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