

BEYOND THE HUMAN- INDIGENOUS POSTHUMANISM IN NGANGOM, DAI AND AO

Pratistha Panda

MA in English,
Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

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Abstract

Posthumanism, with its promise to dissolve the boundaries between human and non-human, often arrives dressed as cyborgs, algorithms and artificial futures. Yet long before these techno-fables, our earth did tell stories of the rivers that hold memory, the forest that breathes like a living kin, and the spirits that murmur by our side. Hence, this paper captures those whispers as they flow through Indigenous and Indian Literatures.

Through close readings of **Robin S. Ngangom's** *Native Land*, where the earth testifies memory and belonging; **Mamang Dai's** *The Legends of Pensam*, where myth and landscape web intricately into lived realities; and **Temsula Ao's** *Laburnum for My Head*, which weaves the gossamer of life and death into community and land. These works carry forward to envision of life where human agency is woven into larger factors, both living and non-living.

Set against the backdrop of Western posthumanist thoughts of **Donna Haraway's** cyborgs, **Rossi Braidotti's** nomadic subjects, and **N. Katherine Hayle's** disembodied information; the chosen Indian Literary works offer a nuanced and a different genealogy of the concept of Posthuman, which is not rooted in technological transcendence and machines rather in memories and ecological reciprocity.

Therefore, this paper recognizes the agency of rivers, forests, myths to be the co-dwellers of existence, reshaping and reimagining humanity within more-than-a-human world.

Keywords: Indigenous Posthumanism, Human Agency, Reshaping Humanity, Ecological Reciprocity

Introduction

Long before the first silicon chip promised to re-engineer human, the rivers had learned to remember the mountains it crossed. The forest had already practised the art of breathing. Long before philosophy named the 'posthuman', Indigenous story tellers had sung of spirits that walk beside us, of mountains that brood in silence, of trees that outlive grief. Such cosmologies refuse the anthropocentric fiction that the human is the centre of all meaning.

In recent decades, posthuman ideas tracing through **Donna Haraway's** cyborg figuration which imagines human as an organic technological hybrid breaking boundaries of species and gender. **Rossi Braidotti's** nomadic subject; a fluid identity refusing fixed categories and moves across borders of culture and being. **N Katherine Hayles's** notion of information as disembodied life arguing that the human is increasingly defined by data rather than flesh. All of these ideas and thoughts have questioned the Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous rational subject.

This paper emphasizes on three works from Northeast India, voicing out the living land. **Robin S. Ngangom's** *Native Land* portrays the soil as the witness to migration, memory, the ache of exile. The rivers and the hills are not mere sceneries in his poem rather the keepers of stories, bearing the weight of both belonging and loss.

Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* blends oral histories and local myth seamlessly with the landscape making the forest a breathing archive and the river a restless narrator.

Equally resonating, **Temusula Ao's** *Laburnum for My Head*, where the golden Laburnum Tree embodies the fragile continuity between mortality and the cycles of nature where death is not an ending rather it's the return to the earth's rhythm. Together these texts envision an Indigenous Posthumanism; a world are not rulers of the landscapes rather a presence out of many, bound in reciprocity rivers, forests, spirits and ancestral memory.

The Western paradigms have been a crucial part in challenging the Enlightenment Humanism, yet they often share a futuristic, techno-centric imagination. The idea of 'more-than-human' is usually defined by mechanical and the virtual; leaving no room for the earth and its elements. This resulted in a subtle continuity of the very worldview where the humans implicit as the only privileging storyteller, even when reconfigured as hybrid or digital.

This definition of posthumanism evidently limits, when cultures that never believed in the demarcation of humans and nature are taken into account. For Indigenous Epistemologies, the forest is not "environmental", the river is not "resource", the mountain is not "scenery", each is a neighbour, a being with memory, power, agency and voice. To describe such worlds, the language of cyborgs and data proves insufficient.

This paper tries to create a vision of posthumanism beyond the dominant Euro-American genealogies of the posthuman, through the literature of Northeast India. Offering a counter tradition steeped in oral storytelling and ecological myth, remembering a return to older forms of rationality where the human was never alone at the centre of the cosmos.

Discussion

Robin S. Ngangom's *Native Land* is a poem where the land is not a silent stage on which human dramas unfold which has witnessed passages of generations, the wounds of conflict, and the migrations that have shaped the northeast. The soil is addressed like an old friend, the material instinct portrayed of nature by mentioning about the hills that once cradled childhood, which is further juxtaposed with the grief of conflict where the rivers carry the dust of wars. Such metaphors grant the terrain a testimonial voice which absorbs the grief of displacement and still cradles the living.

Ngangom weaves memory with topography. The river becomes the flowing archive of loss; carrying away the villager's name yet returning in monsoons with the same patient current. The hills scarred by insurgency are stoic witnesses. These images refuse the human centric assumption that only people suffer, instead the landscapes are imbedded with memory shaping its identity.

Unlike **N. Katherine Hayle's** idea of the self as "information patterns" detached from the body in *How we became Posthuman*, **Robin S. Ngangom's** *Native Land* anchor's identity in the landscapes of hills, soils and rivers. Hayles argue that human consciousness can be conceived as a flow of data that transcends the flesh; thus, her idea of posthuman is liberated from geography, climate and the particularities of place.

While Hayle's model privileges disembodiment as the horizon of the posthuman, Ngangom's poetry proposes posthumanism which is rooted in embodiment and locality, where the human self is the imprint of the land and the land, is the living archive of human grief. This contrast reveals the cultural divergence between a techno-centric Western theory and an Indigenous poetic vision.

In *The Legend of Pensam* by **Mamang Dai**, the landscape of Arunachal Pradesh is not a passive backdrop. The title *pensam* means "in between" in Adi language, this evokes liminal space where myth, memory and lived reality flow into one another like a confluence of rivers.

The novel unwraps a world where mountains, rivers and spirits share agency with humans. The rivers act like a living presence, breathing and flowing through seasons. The lingering ancestral spirits in the forest, blurs the lines between the seen and unseen. Dai's characters reveal a realm where human and non-human co-exist in deep awareness.

By threading folklore into modern life, Dai claims that myth is not a distant memory rather an ecological language. **Donna Haraway's** cyborg introduced in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, breaks down the boundary between humans, animals and machines which questions the idea of fixed identities. Haraway's hybrid is shaped by political criticism and technology; its agency arises from cultural and circuitry networks. In contrast, the hybrid world of the Dai is based on ecological kinship and oral memory, where the connective tissue of life is formed by the restless murmur of the river or the presence of spirits in bamboo groves.

Temsula Ao's collection of stories, *Laburnum for My Head*, demonstrates how mortality itself is a part of the earth's greater rhythms by moving subtly but profoundly between the human and the vegetal. The dying protagonist in the title story asks to be buried beneath a laburnum tree, whose yellow blossoms have symbolized the passing of the seasons. More than just a monument, the tree becomes a living companion that promises life after death, implying that the human body will eventually feed the soil that the tree grows from.

Rosi Braidotti's conception of the nomadic subject as advanced in *Nomadic Subjects*; is theorized as a self whose identity is fluid and not fixed, which continuously trespasses from one culture, one gender, one geography to another new discursively constructed landscape. In contrast, Ao's *Laburnum Tree* is an emblem of rooted endurance. The tree's very stillness resists the modern logic of restlessness and mobility, the burial of the dying protagonist beneath the tree symbolises human's urge to return to nature, to be connected to it. This questions the modern idea of posthuman, where a self is detached from nature and tries to build its own identity rather than co-existing with other earthly elements.

Conclusion

As we turn to this inquiry, we note that a contest between posthumanist philosophy and Indigenous literatures has developed into a meditation on belonging. This paper responds to the following questions: Who is a subject? What is our moral calculus for identifying those who are not human, and those who are? How do these lines change in narrative? returns and returns to the land, to trees that breathe, well up with water forgetting, and sideways silence of a single tree.

The texts reviewed here contribute a negative perspective to the present posthumanism that often imagines human and non-human as self-dissolving into code or circuits, or away in streaming movements.

Robin S. Ngangom's *Native Land*, for instance, was a meditation on the pain of exile and realization that land preserves memory more effectively than words could ever do. The speaker who comes back to "native land" instead finds the slopes whittled by battle and modernity but insists that the soil still holds belonging. By contrast, this earthy voice stands in stark opposition to **N. Katherine Hayles'** vision of the posthuman as a pattern of information alone that outlives the body. Whereas Hayles imagines a world of disembodied continuity, Ngangom emphasizes the singularity of memories inextricably related to locality. His poems remind us that the hills lie bare and the rivers turn dry and no amount of data can restore the bond between humans and the landscapes.

Laburnum Tree by **Temsula Ao** builds upon the prior reflection through exploring the fine line between the ephemeral nature of life and the long-lived quality of endurance. Although the laburnum represents life in general, it can be seen as a silent observer that endures longer than the people that have planted it or who love it. The speaker's yearning to lay under its shade is not a yearning to ascend to the heavens but to remain in the earth. This vision of laying under the laburnum tree contradicts Braidotti's conceptualization of the nomadic subject, which celebrates continued motion and disconnection as freedom from being anchored. Instead, the laburnum has the opposite qualities of the nomad; it remains still, continues on, and is rooted to the earth. The laburnum shows us that the most moral relationships we can create with the earth are created from lasting connections; the same connections that many times modern posthumanism describes as being nostalgic or provincial.

Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* weaves together ecological and mythological ideas with great sensitivity. In her stories, she brings alive spirits that live in the rivers, hills, and forests; the waters that contain the memories of the ancestors; and the villages that have their own rhythm with the changes of the seasons. In contrast to seeing these myths as relics of the past, Dai sees the myths shaping the living present, the supernatural coexists with the ordinary. In her world boundaries between human, animal, myth and matter are not merely crossed but rather haven been porous all the time.

In Dai's view of the non-human, they do not exist outside of the ever-unfolding of life; they participate in it. There are two different crossings when comparing Dai's visions with Donna Haraway's concept of cybernetic hybridity. Haraway's cyborg comes from a desire to combine body and machine to escape the idea of essentialism in the modern age; while Dai's spirits cross the boundaries of species, myth, and matter that did not exist originally to begin with. In Dai's world, the lines between species, myth, and matter are not crossed over, they are already permeable.

Thus, indigenous posthumanism should be viewed as both ethical and an aesthetic framework. Its ethical because it broadens moral attention beyond the human, and aesthetic because it draws from poetic traditions that reflect generations of coexistence with nature.

This perspective provides essential insight for the age of Anthropocene suggesting that ecological renewal demands more than innovation; it requires a re-envisioning of humanity's place within the natural order. In this light literature does not become evidence but also a form of knowledge.

The dialogues between these texts and posthumanist theory calls for attentive listening. They urge us to rethink the agency, subjectivity, and belonging, and to see that future our thoughts must not only revolve around Western technological imaginaries. Other genealogies of the posthuman thrive in oral traditions, forests, and rivers. To recognize humanity as one thread in this vast network does not reduce its worth rather restores harmony in a world which was long disrupted by human centric logic.

When we talk about Indigenous Posthumanism in these works, it really comes down to this idea of shared life and mutual responsibility. It challenges the notion that only humans can act, remember, or even suffer. Ngangom's hills, for instance; they hold stories of historical pain. Ao's laburnum, which kind of stands as a friend in mortality, Dai's rivers and the spirits that flow with them – these elements work together to shape destinies, right alongside human intentions.

All of this suggests a broader moral community that includes not just us, but the more-than-human world too. In this view, subjectivity isn't just about being a detached thinker. It's more about existing in a relationship with everything around us – constantly influenced by the land, our memories, and the myths we share. It's a rich tapestry, really, and it invites us to rethink our place in the world.

Ultimately, we return to our roots of existence; rivers, forests and the entire earth with its non-human beings moving and nurturing along us. Listening to these stories makes us realize that we inhabit in a world where literature becomes the bridge between the different understandings of existence. Human's bond with the earth has and will always go beyond all the cyborgs, machineries and the mechanical explanations of life. The works of Dai, Ngangom, and Ao do not offer a utopian escape but to awaken an ethical attention. If posthumanism is to remain meaningful it needs to learn to incorporate the ancient ways of knowing; rooting identity not in technology or speed but in earth's enduring wisdom.

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