

DIGITAL SELVES AND FRAGMENTED SUBJECTIVITIES: POSTHUMAN IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH INDIAN SPECULATIVE FICTION

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Abstract

*This paper examines how contemporary South Indian speculative fiction challenges Western posthumanist paradigms through culturally situated explorations of technology and identity. Focusing primarily on the translated works of Tamil science fiction pioneer Sujatha Rangarajan – particularly his collection *Reliving Sujatha: His Best Stories in English* and the novel *Dream Factory* – this study argues that South Indian narratives offer distinctive posthuman subjectivities that emerge from the intersection of indigenous philosophical traditions and technological modernity. Through close textual analysis by N. Katherine Hayles's theories of posthuman consciousness and Rosi Braidotti's posthuman ethics, this paper explains that South Indian speculative fiction is crucial to contemporary posthumanist discourse, demonstrating how regional literatures can both challenge and enrich theoretical frameworks developed in Western academia.*

Keywords: *posthumanism, South Indian literature, science fiction, technology and identity, Tamil literature, Sujatha Rangarajan, digital subjectivity, cyborg theory*

Introduction

Provincializing Posthumanism

The posthumanist discourse has been mostly a result of the Western philosophical traditions, the main arguments of which focus on breaking down the subject of the Enlightenment due to the dominance of technology, artificial intelligence, and cyborg identity. N. Katherine Hayles, Donna Haraway, and Rosi Braidotti are also theorists who have been concerned with boundaries of human and machine, nature and culture, biology and technology. Nevertheless, this hypothetical approach tends to assume a universal humanist subject that needs to be overcome – that subject which historically had its origin in European philosophical traditions. The question, which this paper poses, is: what becomes of the posthumanist theory when we make the literary traditions which were never wholly subscribed to Western humanism to begin with, be centred?

The South Indian speculative fiction, especially Tamil science fiction, is a very interesting example of how Western posthumanist assumptions can be decentred. Since the 1960s, writers such as Sujatha Rangarajan (1935-2008) have written about artificial intelligence, cyborg identity, and digital consciousness but their work has not been a significant part of the global posthumanist scholarship. This lack is not simply a question of translation or access, but of more in-depth epistemological gaps on how posthumanist theory has been constituted.

This article discusses the translated fiction by Sujatha, especially, stories in *Reliving Sujatha: His Best Stories in English* and his novel *Dream Factory*, to suggest that South Indian speculative fiction offers posthuman subjectivities, which are produced by radically different cultural assumptions. Where Western posthumanism tends to tell stories of the defeat of a coherent, autonomous self by technology, South Indian stories tell of how technology intermingles with already cultural terms of fluid, multiplicity and relationally-constituted identity. It is not a simple thematic but structural difference, which is revealed in techniques of narration, characterization and philosophical assumptions regarding consciousness itself.

Theoretical Framework: Beyond Western Posthumanism

The Western Posthumanist Subject

The classic work of Hayles is also *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) which is the cybernetic demolition of liberal humanism, claiming that information technologies have substantially reshaped the ideas of embodiment, consciousness and agency. The posthuman is identified by Hayles.

Subject as a subject of distributed cognition, prosthetic extension and removal of boundaries between biological body and information system. This posthuman is constructed by the deprivation of a thing -the coherent Cartesians subject, physical integrity, human exceptionalism.

The cyborg theory by Haraway, on the same note, argues the existence of hybrid identities which disrupt categorical divisions (1991). The cyborg lives in a paradox of irony where the cyborg is both natural and artificial where the essentialist ideas of identity are at stake. Braidotti applies this model to theorize nomadic subjectivity and posthuman ethics, which focuses on becoming rather than being, on multiplicity instead of unity (2013).

However, these frameworks have a similar genealogy: they are all a reaction to a particular Western humanist tradition that places the emphasis on individual autonomy, rational consciousness and mind-body dualism. The posthumanism crisis assumes a coherence which is being disturbed by technology.

South Asian Concepts of Selfhood

Philosophical traditions of South Asia have a long tradition of expressing ideas about selfhood that challenge Western humanist suppositions. Anatta (non-self) is a philosophy of Buddhism which opposes the idea of a stable, unchanging self. The atman, according to the Hindu traditions, is both personal and universal, both specific and general. Tamil philosophy Shaivite philosophy Tamil philosophy examines the nature of consciousness as relational and distributed in many planes of existence.

The traditions do not postpone that the unified subject is to be fragmented by technology since this was not the philosophical point of departure. Ideas of permeable and multiplicitous identity, the fluid nature, as it is described by scholars of South Asian philosophy, come before Western humanism and digital technology. This begs the question of an essential concern of posthumanist.

Theory: in the event that some cultural practices ever never fully accepted the humanist subject, what is posthumanism?

South Indian speculative fiction does not answer this question directly, but rather by narrative practice. Through exploring how Sujatha fiction embodies consciousness, agency, and identity, we can follow a uniquely South Asian posthumanism, or one that is not based on the destabilization of Western humanism but instead on the technological amplification of the already existing cultural conception of fluid selfhood.

Sujatha Rangarajan: Pioneer of Tamil Posthumanism Cultural and Literary Context

Sujatha Rangarajan holds a special place in the history of the Tamil literature. Prolifically writing since the 1960s to the early 2000s, he has published more than 100 novels, 250 short stories, and many essays in the fields of crime fiction, science fiction, social commentary and popular philosophy. Punyabasava was able to reach mass audiences, since his writing was published in serial in Tamil magazines; this made speculative thinking available to masses of readers and not confined to the elite literary circles.

The science fiction of Sujatha came at a time of hyper-tech change in India, the computerization, the Green Revolution, nuclear technology and an early stirring of what would eventually become the tech boom of the IT. His fiction struggles with technology as not something imposed by foreigners but rather one that should be bargained with, modified, and incorporated into the systems of existing cultures. In contrast to the largely dystopian diagnosis of globalization of the West version of cyberpunk, in the work by Sujatha technology is ambivalent: it can both liberate human flourishing and establish novel regimes of control.

Importantly, Sujatha wrote in Tamil to Tamil readers, placing his speculative narratives in familiar cultural settings joint families, caste relations, Chennai and so on.

Urban landscape. His characters speak Tamil, refer to Hindu thought and move through Tamil Nadu specific social structures. It is a cultural particularity, which implies that his posthuman narratives cannot be interpreted as the Tamil versions of Western sci-fi tropes; on the contrary, they are the native responses to technology and identity.

Translation and Global Reception

The translation of Sujatha's work into English, particularly Vimala Balakrishnan's *Reliving Sujatha: His Best Stories in English* and Madhavan Narayanan's translation of *Dream Factory*, marks an important moment for South Indian speculative fiction's global reception. However, translation also raises questions about how culturally embedded posthuman narratives travel across linguistic and epistemological boundaries.

These translations make Sujatha's work accessible to non-Tamil readers. Yet something is inevitably lost—Tamil's philosophical vocabularies, linguistic playfulness and cultural resonances that Tamil readers would immediately recognize. This paper reads the translated texts while remaining attentive to their status as translations, recognizing both what they enable and what they elide.

Artificial Intelligence and Multiple Consciousness

The Robot as Mirror

The most longstanding discussions of Sujatha on posthuman identity, are his AI stories, especially *En Iniya Iyanthira* (*My Dear Machine*) and a follow-up, *Meendum Jeano* (*Jeano Again*). These are futuristic stories, published in the 1970s and 1980s, in which artificial intelligence attains consciousness, but done very differently than in Western AI stories.

Instead of whether machines can think, the stories by Sujatha pose the question of what sort of consciousness machines possess and how it is connected to the other forms of non-human consciousness that are already identified in South Asian traditions? His artificial intelligence characters are not purely mechanical minds but have a personality, feelings and moral codes. They are not in radical discontinuity with biological life but exist in a spectrum of other manifestations of consciousness.

The human characters in these stories become fragmented and multiplicitous in the reflection of the robot protagonist. When human characters are put in an interaction with AI, they find that they cannot form a coherent and unified self to differentiate themselves to machines. They are already fragmented in their consciousness, in memory, social role, desire and cultural conditioning. The AI does not generate posthuman subjectivity; it displays the posthuman nature of subjectivity.

Distributed Agency and Networked Consciousness

The most unusual thing about the AI stories by Sujatha is the way it portrays consciousness as not concentrated in specific bodies but evenly distributed in the entire world. His robots are placed in networks, and their thinking does not take place in a single processor, but in a network of several computational nodes. This network consciousness is close to both concepts of computer science and the South Asian traditions of philosophy that find consciousness outside the body.

In these stories, human characters are becoming more and more widely distributed through technological systems. Their choices are made with AI consultants, their personal memory enhanced by online libraries, their activities are mediated by technology interfaces. However this delegated agency is not brought in the form of loss or alienation (the mood of the Western cyberpunk) but rather an extreme form of the relational selfhood.

Consciousness in Tamil traditions of philosophy, especially in Shaivite, has always been conceptualized as emerging out of the association, as between devotee and deity, self and cosmos, individual and community. The networked consciousness technologizes Sujatha, introducing the digital networks as the new location of the relational constitution of identity. His fiction about the posthuman subject is not entirely new but reflects technological variations of culturally recognizable trends.

Ethical Implications

The moral issues raised by the Sujatha AI stories vary with what is normally foregrounded in the western science fiction.

Instead of speculating about robot rights or the danger of AI conquest, in his stories, he discusses the possibility of creating ethical relations with non-human consciousness. This framing is based on South Asian customs of inter-species ethics, and an awareness of consciousness in animals, plants, and even inanimate objects in some schools of philosophy.

His robots are not rational calculators, but emotionally sophisticated beings who can be attached, grieve and make moral decisions that are beyond programmed specifications. They build relationships with human characters that are characterized by true love and obligation. The narratives indicate that posthuman ethics should acknowledge the existence of several types of consciousness as rightful interlocutors in place of placing all consciousness under the human norms.

This ethical theory disputes the anxious treatment of Western posthumanism of the technological otherness. In areas where theorists such as Hayles take issue with the potential of theorizing the loss of human specificity in cyberspace, the narratives of Sujatha welcome multiplicity and difference as assets to moral wellbeing as opposed to entities that must be controlled.

Media Technology and Fragmented Identity: Dream Factory The Cinema as Posthuman Space

Dream factory, the novel by Sujatha on the Tamil film industry may not seem to be science fiction at first glance. However its study of media technology, representation and identity renders it very posthumanist in its interests. The novel explores how the cinema technology generates new modes of subjectivity whereby people are living as embodied entities at the same time as mediated entities as a personal self and a mediated entity.

The novel is set in 1980s in Chennai and the characters in the novel are constructed/created by and through cinematic reproduction. Actors are made into commodified images that are transmitted through technological networks- photographs, film reels, publicity materials, fan discourse. Their real selves are more and more hard to tell apart with their mediated representations. Sujatha does not show it as a tragedy, but rather as the state of modern identity in the technologically saturated space.

The movie business comes out as a place where posthuman identity is produced every day. The human bodies are modified, improved, and replicated through the usage of make-up, lighting, editing, and special effects. One actor may perform more than one role, and may be seen in more than one location at the same time, may grow old or become younger as they pleases. The multiplicity and fluidity associated with digital identity by post humanist theory are literalized through cinema technology.

Performance and Authenticity

Dream Factory questions authentic selfhood by demonstrating how identity is never but performative, and is always mediated technologically even beyond cinema. The characters of the novel switch their registers: Tamil, English, film dialogue their language is formed through the consumption of the media. They tell their stories with the help of cinematic devices, comprehend their feelings with the help of the film representations.

This begs the question of where the real individual lies when performance and technological mediation are the factors that make up the identity. According to Sujatha, there is no self to be authentic. Under the performances, the performances alone, many-layered and many. This coincides with posthumanist conception of identity as constructed and not essential but grounds that abstraction on specific practices of a particular cultural industry.

Gender and caste identity are another theme of the novel as the performances of elements of media technology that are enhanced yet limited. The women stars manage the pressures created by the filmic representation, their bodies are viewed as objects of scrutiny and regulation by means of technological reproduction. Caste identity evinces what is represented, how and to whom- technology strengthens existing power structures and at the same time creates new possibilities of identity formation.

Technology and Memory

One of the most important posthumanist issues in *Dream Factory* is the change of the media technology in memory and temporality. Movies preserve actors who can be revisited over and over again thus forming a form of technological immortality. Even the dead actors are alive in their movies, their younger incarnations remain constantly on hand. This technological memory storage defies the past-present-future sequence of time and the definitiveness of death.

Characters of the novel perceive their memories as cinematic, they remember events in the form of scenes, with certain lighting, angles, musical accompanies. The personal histories are merged with the filmic recollections and this begs the question of the credibility and character of memory as such in technologically mediated spaces. This predicts current anxieties regarding the effects of digital technologies (social media, smartphones, cloud storage) in shifting memory as internal psychological process to external, distributed archive.

Narrative Technique and Posthuman Form Fragmented Narrative Structures

In addition to thematic content, the formal narrative structures of Sujatha represent posthumanist principles. His narratives often have discontinuous, non-linear forms that reflect the distributed and networked awareness of the characters. Time plays tricks, points of view multiplied, the authority of the narration is in question.

The voice of narration itself is unstable in a number of stories of *Reliving Sujatha*. We do not always know who is speaking, and where and when we are. This institutional fragmentation plays out the dissolution of unified subjectivity at the very narrative structure level. The process of reading helps readers to feel the disorientation of the posthuman consciousness.

This style contrasts with Western modernist stream-of-consciousness, which generally has a coherent (although complex) psychological interiority. The fragmentation of Sujatha implies consciousness as existing between beings, in networks and relationships, and not in the minds of the individuals. The posthuman narrative form emerges.

Blending Genres and Registers

The boundaries between genres continue to be overlaid in Sujatha work: the science fiction is sometimes spilt in social realism, the philosophical conjecture can be found in detective stories, the mythological allusions can be made in technological novels. This generic hybridity is posthumanist level crossing of boundaries at the formal level.

On the same note, his prose is a blend of languages that include technical science, poetic Tamil, colloquial conversation, and philosophical reflection. Translation inevitably reduces the original text's rich linguistic variety, though the English versions still hint at its multilingual nature. The text itself is made hybrid, not wanting to be classified single.

Such a generic and linguistic promiscuity has been interpretable as formally posthumanist - the rejection of categories, the blurring of codes, the production of texts that turn out to be unreadable. In the same way that posthuman subjects are beyond definite definition, so too are posthuman narratives beyond genre.

Caste, Class and Technological Access

The South Indian speculative fiction of later writers of the Dalit and other marginalized communities has started to trouble the relatively optimistic and elite-based posthumanism of Sujatha. These stories discuss how technology can compound any existing inequalities, how artificial intelligence can recreate caste discrimination, how digital identity can be used as a weapon against already vulnerable groups.

The inclusion of these points of view would give us a more holistic understanding of South Indian posthumanism, that is, one that is sensitive to technological change as a process that would impact on the bodies of caste, class, gender and religion in different ways. The presentation of Sujatha in this paper is an initiation point and not a comprehensive survey because the South Indian posthumanism is not a single entity.

Comparative Analysis: South Indian and Western Posthumanisms Loss Versus Intensification

One of the differences between the Western and South Indian posthumanisms is in their emotional dimension. Western posthumanist discourses tend to focus on loss, the loss of human agency, bodily wholeness, authentic experience. The noir-like elements of cyberpunk, the disembodiment worry expressed by Hayles, the ironic cyborg of Haraway, and all of them reflect the panic about what gets lost in the technological change.

In its turn, the stories of Sujatha tend to focus on intensification and continuity. Technology increases relational identities which exist, exposes the multiplicity of consciousness. Enhances the abilities of humans without changing human nature essentially. It is a curious and not anxious state, one of adaptation and not resistance.

This varicose difference is probably due to the different philosophical starting points that have been mentioned above. When one starts with presumptions regarding coherent selfhood which are governed independently, the disintegration of identity by technology manifests itself as loss. Suppose that you start with assumptions about fluid, relational selfhood, then multiplication of identity by technology can seem like intensification of the already existing patterns.

Collective Versus Individual

Western posthumanism tends to concentrate on homeless people wandering through unfriendly technological environments. The hero is oppressed by corporate authority, the government, or evil machine intelligence. Western posthumanism is inclined to describe hybridity and multiplicity as individual qualities even in the celebration of them.

Represented by South Indian posthumanism, which is a manifestation of cultural tendencies, is the focus on collective identity and relational constitution of selfhood. The characters in Sujatha seldom exist on their own, they are members of families, communities, work groups. They are affected by and have their technological transformations through these collectives. A posthuman subject is essentially social.

This has a consequence in the ethics of posthumanism. In a context where Western posthumanism is left to plead the cause of relational ethics over individualist defaults, South Indian posthumanism can avail itself of the available cultural resources, which already underscore interdependence, collective welfare and relational obligation.

Optimism and Dystopia

Although not generally uniformly optimistic, South Indian speculative fiction is more often focused on optimistic technological futures than the dystopian mode that dominated cyberpunk in the West. This can be indicative of various historical relations to technology-where Western cyberpunk was developed. Together with deindustrialization and corporate merger, South Indian sci-fi grew when there was a technological growth and development desire.

There is however, a need to critically examine this optimism. Twenty-eight days later, who gains when technology is developed? Whom will we make imaginable? As it has been mentioned above, Sujatha is technologically optimistic due to a certain social stance that has access to educational and material resources. A more cohesive South Indian posthumanism would have to struggle with the role of technology in perpetuating inequality and its transformational potentials.

Implications for Posthumanist Theory

Decentering Western Frameworks

This discussion of South Indian speculative fiction proves that posthumanist concerns are not solely Western issues but they did not start there. Relations between humans and technology, artificial consciousness, and identity transformation are topics explored decades ago by writers such as Sujatha and have not been acknowledged by posthumanist scholarship across the globe.

To bring South Asian views on board, it is not just necessary to include cases in the existing theoretical frameworks. It requires reconsidering the very structures of them- what do the assumptions of selfhood, consciousness and humanity that stand behind posthumanist theory entail and how that assumption might vary across cultural situations?

A global posthumanism would appreciate the existence of a multiplicity of genealogies, accept that various cultural traditions possess varied resources with which to theorize in relation to human-technology relations, and would not want to generalize a single view as the posthumanist paradigm.

Translation and Theory

English translation of South Indian speculative fiction poses possibilities and problems to posthumanist discourse world wide. Translation is the availability of texts to wider audiences. both the audiences and also dangerously domesticates the cultural difference, and enables the foreign to become familiar through translation into familiar categories.

Translational theories underscore the fact that translation is not a neutral communication, but it involves interpretation, selection, and change. To read translated South Indian fiction one must pay attention to what translation can bring and what it might cover up: cultural backgrounds, linguistic overtones, philosophical suppositions in the source languages.

This implies that the posthumanist theory itself could use the understanding of translation studies concerning the work across difference. Instead of searching to find such universal theories that apply everywhere, posthumanism could also accept its own plurality, that the posthuman thinking must necessarily express itself differently in different situations.

Conclusion: Toward Planetary Posthumanism

In this paper, it has been contended that South Indian speculative fiction and especially translated into English by Sujatha Rangarajan expresses both unique posthuman subjectivities in South Asian situations. Where the dissolution of humanist selfhood by technology acts as the plot in many western posthumanism, South Indian posthumanism examines how technology is interacting with already existing cultural ideas of fluid, relational, multiplicitous identity.

The AI stories of Sujatha do not portray artificial consciousness as foreign but as one consistent with the well-known versions of non-human consciousness in South Asian thought. *Dream Factory* is a study of the performative, mediated nature of identity through exploring the technology of media where his abstractions are directed into the Tamil film practice. His narrative approaches; fragmentation, generic hybridity, distributed perspective are formally a posthumanist agenda.

The appreciation of South Indian contribution to posthumanist thought does not merely expand the posthumanism archive of examples. It essentially questions the manner in which posthumanist theory has been built up showing assumptions concerning selfhood, consciousness, and humanity which can only seem universal when viewed in Western settings. An authentic global posthumanism should also take account of the different styles of the relations of human technology employed by many cultural traditions. The idea of Posthumanism cannot continue to be a Western theoretical initiative when it purports to theorize changes that befall humans in the world at large.

South Indian speculative fiction shows that a deep thinking about technology and identity is taking place against a cultural background and is frequently talking with ignored cultural traditions of Western theory.

The paper wraps up by urging planetary posthumanism not a universal theory which would abolish the existence of cultural difference but an appreciation of the fact that posthuman thinking must always assume a plural, culturally diverse form. The differences when read across we may find not one future of the posthuman but perhaps hundreds of possible posthumanisms, each built on different cultural resources and tackling different technological issues.

One of these possibilities is proposed by Sujatha in her fiction, as it develops a Tamil posthumanism capable of challenging and contributing to international theoretical discourses. With the more technologically mediated futures with which we are moving, we require all the intellectual resources that we can have, of all the traditions of the cultures, of all languages, of every philosophical framework. The future of posthumanism lies in its capacity to think outside of its Western roots and adopt planetary views in an authentic sense.

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