REIMAGINING KINSHIP AND BECOMING: POSTHUMANIST READINGS OF NAMITA GOKHALE'S LOST IN TIME: GHATOTKACHA AND THE GAME OF ILLUSIONS

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Abstract

This paper explores Namita Gokhale's Lost in Time: Ghatotkacha and the Game of Illusions through posthumanist theory to examine how contemporary mythic retellings invite fresh reflections on hybrid subjectivity and interspecies kinship. Anchored in Donna Haraway's notion of "companion species," the analysis considers how Chintamani's evolving relationship with Ghatotkacha — the part-human, part-rakshasa son of Bhima and Hidimba — transgresses species boundaries and models ethical, interdependent bonds. At the same time, Chintamani's shifting roles and transformations across time resonate with Rosi Braidotti's concept of nomadic subjectivity, foregrounding becoming over fixed identity. By situating Gokhale's narrative within the mythic imagination of the Mahabharata, the paper asks whether Puranic figures such as Ghatotkacha can be read as precursors of posthuman thought, where hybridity, shapeshifting, and interspecies alliances anticipate concerns central to twenty-first-century posthumanism. Rather than treating the novel as merely derivative of myth or as an allegory of theory, the paper positions it as a generative site where cultural memory and posthumanist debates intersect, opening up space to rethink the genealogy of the posthuman beyond Euro-American frameworks.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Mythic Retellings, Hybrid Subjectivity, Companion Species, Nomadic Subjectivity

Introduction

In *Lost in Time: Ghatotkacha and the Game of Illusions* (2017), a work written in Mahabharata cosmology and yet perplexed by the anxieties and possibilities of adolescent subjectivity, myth, metamorphosis, and memory collude. The story in this retelling is narrated by a teenaged boy, Chintamani Dev Gupta, who is somehow transposed into the setting of the epic where he becomes a friend of Ghatotkacha, the half-rakshasa son of Bhima and Hidimbi, thereby undertaking a journey through time, illusion and cross-species friendship. Gokhale is frequently read as a mythic retelling or children/young adult literature; the critics find the worth of the work in the imaginative re-creation of the past and the present, in its discussion of the issue of courage and in its therapeutic treatment of loss and rediscovery. Nonetheless, the novel approach to hybridity, permeability and relational being has not been explored completely with the prism of posthumanist theory.

This essay poses the question: How does Gokhale reimburse Ghatotkacha and Chintamani as expressions of hybrid subjectivity and interspecies kinship to which the posthumanist theory can be answered? That is to say, not only can *Lost in Time* be read as an imaginative retelling of myth, but it is a mythic posthuman text, the one that reconstitutes human and nonhuman limits, models interdependence in relation and promises a becoming beyond determinacy of identity.

In order to do this, I turn to two foundational figures: the idea of companion species of Donna Haraway, which highlights the notion of co-constitution, interdependence and shared agency; and the idea of nomadic subjectivity by Rosi Braidotti, which is based on refuting the fixed, sovereign subject in favor of fluid, relational becoming. The work by Haraway challenges us to rethink kinship across species boundaries, and Braidotti can assist us in theorizing of identity not as essence, but as an itinerary. These structures enable us to understand *Lost in Time* as more than mythology it is a place where human, rakshasa, and ecological agencies actively co-construct each other.

The thesis of the posthumanism of the myth that *Lost in Time* performs is that the novel does not adhere strictly to the divisions between species and self, but to the contrary, it establishes kinship as co-becoming and not hierarchy or lineage. Through this, it goes beyond Euro-American genealogies in discussing how Puranic hybridity and mythic imagination may be used to add to plural, embodied posthuman thought.

I will place mythic retellings as fertile ground of posthuman inquiry in the following sections; read Chintamani-Ghatotkacha relation through the companion species of Haraway; trace Chintamani subjectivity in nomadic becoming of Braidotti; and finally believe in a Puranic posthumanity based on mythic cosmologies.

Mythic Retellings and Posthuman Horizons

Mythology has emerged as a vivid ingredient to novelists in the twenty first century who reexamine the epic contents to challenge the gender, power, and cultural identity. The authors like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (2008, 2019), Amish Tripathi (2010 – 2018), and Namita Gokhale (2017) rewrite classic stories in a feminist or outcast voice, thus producing a mythopoetic realism that translates memories of civilization and present experience. In the scholarly literature debating such retellings, emphasis is put on the fact that they are not nostalgic reenactments, but ideological interferences: they restore the voices that are muted down, and challenge the establishment of new ethical interpretations of ancient cosmologies.

Narratives of the Puranas and the Posthuman Potential

Puranic and epic sources are also hospitable to the posthumanist interpretation in the sense that they are filled with hybrids, shape-shifters, hybridizations between different species. Ontological multiplicity in these tales is as a result of porous boundary lines between gods, humans, animals, and rakshasas. The non-human characters of the Mahabharata, such as Hanuman, Jatayu, or Ghatotkacha already disrupt the concept of the human, pre-empting a sense of dependence and mutual susceptibility. These dynamics are reminiscent of posthumanist interests in relational ontology and multispecies ethics (Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2003). Recent Puranaic mythology scholarship has suggested that these myth cycles of the ancients foreshadowed a world-making of relations much different than Enlightenment humanism. The epic archive in this way is providing indigenous genealogies of what Haraway terms as companion species, much earlier than the name technoscientific posthumanism was assigned to them.

Even though it was advertised as a young-adult fantasy, *Lost in Time: Ghatotkacha and the Game of Illusions* (2017) by Gokhale is not restricted to children literature. The story of a Gurgaon schoolboy befriending a half-raksha warrior is an amalgamation of mythical ancestry and time-travel speculation that raises issues of temporality, interdependence, and ethical becoming. This causes scholars of the myth retellings of Indian children to note that the texts have the ability to produce empathy and moral imagination through their ability to enable young readers to travel across species and across time. The novel by Gokhale, thus, works as a cultural memory, as well as a speculative philosophy, a pedagogical entry into the posthuman ethics that questions the hierarchies based on anthropocentrism, yet maintains the affective resonance of the Mahabharata.

Companion Species and in Species Kinship

The idea of companion species by Donna Haraway changes the understanding of kinship into a connection of co-becoming instead of dominance and separation. According to *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), she states that we make each other up, literally, denying the idea that humans and nonhumans are independent and ready-made entities (Haraway, 2003, p. 15). Rather, creatures are created by communicating, being vulnerable and mutually dependent. Her multispecies entanglement vision of otherness as significant prefigures the ethical duty of the latter (Haraway, 2016).

This model provides the opportunity to interpret Namita Gokhale as an allegory of interspecies reciprocity in her work *Lost in Time: Ghatotkacha and the Game of Illusions* (2017). The friendship of Chintamani, a modern teenage girl, and that of Ghatotkacha, the half-rakshasa son of Bhima and Hidimbi, performs an ethics of co-constitution a Harawayan ethics. Both characters are formed in their interaction with each other and ecological and mythic systems they live.

The cross of temporal and ontological boundaries anticipates the metamorphosis of Chintamani as he comes in touch with Ghatotkacha. The latter, who was first considered as monstrous, turns into a mentor, friend, and reflector. Similarly, the human vulnerability and compassion are brought into the rakshasa world through the relationship of Ghatotkacha and Chintamani, who are curious, skeptical, urban. Their uniting is what Haraway (2003) describes as the ability to respond and be responsive across difference: what he calls response-ability. Both human and rakshasa do not exist before their relationship; on the contrary, they are made by each other.

Vulnerability, Dependency and Ethical Reciprocity

The ethics of Haraway are based on a mutual vulnerability and dependence. Likewise, the novel shows moments of interdependent action e.g. Ghatotkacha saves Chintamani in the forest, and Chintamani subsequently mediates Ghatotkacha about the time and fate. Their friendship is anti-utilitarian; it is not mastery but relationship sensitivity. These points reverberate with a harmonious co-existence of one kind of being being tied to the existence of another.

The Monster as Family and Crossing the Line

The rakshasa nature of Ghatotkacha makes him a character of a liminal type, a half-human and a half-demon. But Gokhale redefines monstrosity as kin potential instead of aberrant. The novel, by virtue of the acceptance of Chintamani, breaks down species and ethical dualism and places monstrosity as part of a continuum of becoming. According to Pramod Nayar (2021), Indian mythic posthumanism tends to rethink the monstrous body as the relational body, but that which disrupts the category of the human (p. 42). In that regard, the story by Gokhale follows the multispecies ethic of Haraway: kinship is co-constitution rather than descent.

Forest, Ecology and Nonhuman Mediation

The forest in *Lost in Time* is not just a setting but a dynamic mesh where kinship is generated. The mediators of the relationship between Chintamani and Ghatotkacha include ecological agencies: trees, elements, animals. This extends the concept of companion species beyond the relationship of people to the environment itself. Anna Tsing (2012) also ventures Haraways concept to fungi and forests by stating that entanglements of multispecies determine both survival and imagination. This forest of Gokhale is then turned into a location of ethical interdependency, an Indian ecological reflection of the planetary posthumanism of Haraway.

Lost in Time uses the prism of Haraway to practice a mythic ethics of interspecies kinship. Chintamani and Ghatotkacha are neither antithetical nor analogies; they are collaborators in a mutual process of becoming which involves ecological and temporal others. Their friendship provides a paradigm of affective, ethical posthumanism that refigures kinship as response to one another, as opposed to descent. This query is expanded in the following section that deals with the notions of nomadic subjectivity by Rosi Braidotti by following the ways in which Chintamani changes over the years and space that speak of a mythic manifestation of posthuman becoming.

Nomadic Subjectivity and Temporal Becoming

The theory of nomadic subjectivity of Rosi Braidotti provides the important perspective to perceive identity not as a substance, but as a process. In Nomadic Subjects (1994, 2011), Braidotti asserts that the nomad does not imply a physically mobile individual, but is a figurative state of subjectivity that is not fixated, comfortable with many-ness, passage and association. Nomadic thinking envoys the unity desire into the multiplicity, complexity, and difference desire (Braidotti, 2011, p. 7). The nomadic subject, therefore, cancels the humanist stasis of individuality, and is aligned to the posthumanism emphasis on becoming, interdependence, and situated affect and materiality flows (Braidotti, 2013).

Within the framework of *Lost in Time*, we can understand this temporal and ontological displacement of Chintamani not just as an adventure of the fantastic but as performances of nomadic becoming. This is not just a battle through time, but a battle between the subject positions, epistemes and ethical systems of the boy when he travels between Gurgaon of the twenty-first century and the mythical forest of Ghatotkacha.

Temporal Displacement by Chintamani as Nomadic Movement

The trip of Chintamani destabilizes his identity; Chintamani begins as a misunderstood school-minded kid and is immediately hurled into a realm of the Mahabharata, where time alters and species are beginning to merge. His identity is deterritorialized and is no longer related to the temporality of modernity. This is one of the reasons that make Braidotti (2013) speak of these as such elements of so-called nomadic mobility: a state of continuous presence and absence that requires mediation between a sense of belonging and difference.

Chintamani must also negotiate several regimes of existence in this mythic temporality: technological modernity, Puranic cosmology, and ecological embeddedness. In each environment, his relational co-ordinates, that is to him, to his kin, and to his nonhuman counterparts, are altered. Instead of adopting one identity into another, Chintamani occupies between spaces, the so-called zones of indetermination in which becoming occurs as defined by Braidotti (2019) (p. 46). This fluidity is what makes him a movable subject who learns to think and feel outside the exceptionalism of human beings and not merely a human.

Ethics Temporal and the Refusal of Closure

Nomadic becoming involves an ethical involvement of process rather than resolution. Chintamani does not arrive at knowing and mastering in the end of his adventure he learns the humility of non-finitude. Due to his wanderings with Ghatotkacha and the game of time illusion, he is in a relational ontology, in which all beings, humans, rakshasa, elemental, are a part of cyclical time.

Instead of losing the stable identity, Braidotti (2013) ethics of affirmation dwells upon affirming the constant changes of life. Chintamani is such ethical affirmation that is why he returns to the mythical land transformed, but not disillusioned. He has acknowledged that identity is a negotiation, a process of becoming-with-other(s). This is becoming-other as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call it; a creative intersubjective process of unfolding that supplants the self-world binary.

Mythic Time, Ecological and Future Thinking Subjectivity

The time-travel kid in *Lost in Time* introduces the idea of time as a non-linear and relational concept as it reflects on the Braidotti (2017) and Chakrabarty (2021) discourse of the ethics of temporalities in posthumanism. This epistemic hybridization between mythic time (cyclical, regenerative) and historical time (linear, progressive time) is presented in the novel in a way that Braidotti calls as zigzagging temporality of nomadic vision (2011, p. 58).

In such ecological time-making, the becoming of Chintamani can not be separated with his relational subject positions-with the Giant Man, the forest, and even the mythic illusion itself; this subject position is across species, is later ecological, and future oriented in which the act of becoming belongs to Chintamani. The placement of this teenage subject into the posthuman temporality of becoming invites Gokhale to instill this coming-of-age story with the philosophical consideration of relational ontology.

Puranic Posthumanism and Indigenous Genealogies of Becoming

The main origin of posthumanism has been Euro-American spaces anchored on technoscientific imaginings, as well as, the Enlightenment denunciations of humanism (Braidotti, 2013; Wolfe, 2010). However there is an earlier and parallel account of non-anthropocentrism provided by the ontological plurality of South Asian myth. Hybrid beings, cosmic interdependence, and fluid temporalities already express what Pramod K. Nayar (2021) means with the term indigenous posthumanisms conceptual systems that de-centre the human and place politely-indigenous lives in front of a continuum of life and being, both material and spiritual (p. 37).

Human beings in this mythical world are never isolated but are always engrossed in the world of gods, rakshasas, animals, the wild world, and forces of nature. *Lost in Time* by Gokhale is founded directly on this cosmology where coexistence and co-creation exist as ontological facts and not just metaphors. This re-telling of Gokhale thus enriches the posthumanism dialogue since the foundation of her cosmology is Puranic, an imagination that transcends modern humanism and nevertheless subverting the foundations of humanism.

Hybridity, Kinship and Ethics of Co-Becoming

In the Puranas, myths praise the identities of hybridness more than other identities. There is an example of species crossover (fish, tortoise, boar, man-lion) in the avatars of Vishnu, and of a cross-divine / cross-human / cross-animal in Hanuman or Ghatotkacha. These utopian histories of the world validate the imperative of Donna Haraway (2016) to make kin, not babies, to prioritize the relationships and responsible vulnerability. In the course of the story *Lost in Time*, Gokhale recreates this moral horizon by the friendship of Chintamani and Ghatotkacha. In the Indian retelling of myths, their kinship is not genealogical but affective and ecological trans-species solidarity.

Such re-positioning of hybridity is a challenge not only to Western humanism, but also to some anthropocentric interpretations of Indian tradition. The rakshasa - who is commonly demonized as monstrous - turns into an object of sympathetic difference. According to Nayar (2019), the hybridity of the Mahābhārata is beyond the ability to divide the gods, demons, and men, thus providing a native philosophy of co-becoming (p. 14). This plural ontology is inherited by Gokhale in his text and even hybridity is presented not as deviation but as ethical relation.

Planetary Futures and Mythic Temporality

The combination of mythical cyclical time with modern linear time by Gokhale echoes the conceit of planetary imagination by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2021), which is a scale of thought that extends widely to encompass geological, mythical, and ecological time, inclusively. *Lost in Time* is intertwined with these temporals: the migration of Chintamani is the incorporation of the past with the speculation of the future, the reworking of the past into an archive, but an active field an archive which is still to be become.

This chronological stratification reminds us of the Puranic conception of yugas, a cyclic and successive cosmic age of creation and dissolution, in which time is simultaneously circular and linear. With the help of this frame, Gokhale recycles posthuman temporality of rupture into continuity: a rhythm of dissolution and rebirth in which life recreates itself endlessly. The conclusion is mythic ecology of time in which ethical becoming is strictly determined by an adherence to cosmic regenerative temporality.

To an Indian History of the Posthuman

In the context of Haraway and Braidotti, the reading of *Lost in Time* reveals echoes between the novel and posthumanist ethics, only to provide a foundation of those readings in the Puranic cosmological framework of South Asian intellectual history. We can interpret the hybrid beings, ecological consciousness, and fluid temporalities of the Mahabharata is a non-Western genealogy of the posthuman, that is focused on relational ontology, reciprocity, and the porous continuum of life.

Thus, the narrative by Gokhale is not merely borrowing the posthuman state of thoughts; it is turning the theory inside out and pointing out how Indian mythic imagination can generate the knowledge about the posthuman inside of its metaphysical apparatus. By so doing, *Lost in Time* exemplifies what Braidotti (2019) describes as a so-called cosmopolitan posthumanism: a plural ethics that is the result of unique epistemologies instead of a unified Western path.

Losing the thread of time entwines the companion species of Haraway and the nomadic subjectivity of Braidotti with the Puranic cosmology, and, as a result, *Lost in Time* is the mythic posthumanism, grounded in the Indian cultural memory. The story invites the reader to ponder the kinship as co-becoming, temporality as a cyclical process, and identity as nomadic becoming, and the story is tending to a compilation of stories, which is part of a larger project of decolonizing posthumanism and looking into the future along the lines of other intellectual possibilities that have been accumulating in South Asian mythic thought.

Conclusion: Toward a Mythic Posthumanism

The book *Lost in Time* by Namita Gokhale is one of the examples of how modern mythic retelling can become an interesting field of posthumanism. The novel by Gokhale is based on the interwoven structures of the companion species of Haraway and the nomadic subjectivity of Braidotti to emphasize the relational ethics, hybrid subjectivity, and the time. The friendship of Chintamani and Ghatotkacha generates that co-becoming that destabilizes anthropocentrism and indicates the dynamism of kinship as being more reciprocal and mutual. In the same way, the temporal and ontological displacements of Chintamani depict the nomadic subject at work: there is no fixed identity, there is no mastery, and ethical responsibility arises in relation to the encounters with human, nonhuman, and ecological other (Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2003).

By placing these understandings in the context of Puranic cosmology it is possible to take posthumanist accounts out of a Euro-American framework.

The story by Gokhale makes use of a hybrid genealogies, shapeshifting bodies and cyclic temporality to depict an indigenous posthumanism, which is basically based on ethical relationality, ecological entanglement and multiplicity of time. Both planetary and indigenous imagining require acknowledging life beyond anthropocentrism as Chakrabarty (2021) and Nayar (2021) propose. Through this, it is not only that *Lost in Time* is a retelling of myth, but theorizing posthumanism as it applies to cultural memory, ethical pedagogy and speculative imagination to a plurivers.

The final result of Gokhales work is that mythic imagination is a potential decolonial carrier of posthumanist thinking. The modern debates regarding interspecies family relation, the ethics of hybrids, and their ontology have been preempted by such characters as Ghatotkacha and Hidimbi. By posthumanizing myth (without making demands based on Western paradigms), the novel provides a process of pluralistic theorization by suggesting that the posthuman does not necessarily apply only to technoscientific or Eurocentric aggregations. In light of the interaction of the epic memory, ecological attention and speculative imagination, *Lost in Time* imagines the future posthuman based on the relational, ethical and mythical becoming.

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