

Exploring Ecosophical Tenets of Posthumanism through O.V Vijayan's *The Infinity of Grace*

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ABSTRACT

*The paper attempts to unravel newer ecosophical dimensions of posthumanism through the textual analysis of Ottupulackal Velukkuty Vijayan's *The Infinity of Grace* (1987/1999). Posthumanism, a dynamic field of inquiry generally explored in the current context of "bio-, nano-, neuro- and info- technologies" also refers to what Rosi Braidotti calls an "enlarged sense of interconnectedness between self and the other." Braidotti, while reinventing the posthuman subjectivity, bases it on an ecosophy that merges technological, geological, and biological dimensions. In this context, the paper argues how the spiritually rooted Indian environmental philosophy offers new perspectives to look at Braidotti's relational model of ecosophy through the analysis of the chosen text. Using Braidotti's theoretical concepts, zoe-centrism, symbiotic becoming, and nomadic subjectivity, this paper presents insights into the formation of individual subjectivity through the characters' interaction with their physical and mental environments and its rootedness in Indian environmental philosophy. In doing so, the study reveals a guru-shishya trope, a trope that generally depicts a mentor-disciple relationship among the nonhuman and human entities. By focusing on this trope, the role of Vijayan's writings in contributing to the expanding eco-philosophy of posthumanism may be foregrounded.*

Keywords: Critical posthumanism; ecosophy; Guru-Shishya; interconnectedness; post-anthropocentrism; post-dual

INTRODUCTION

Posthumanism as an established cultural and philosophical movement has multiple viewpoints and pedagogies which are united by the common rejection of anthropocentrism. While transhumanism supports the contributions of technology in fortifying human lives to go beyond human capabilities, critical posthumanism is a "theoretical approach which maps and engages with the ongoing deconstruction of humanisms" (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018, p. 94). It thus maps the imbalance of power due to which humans find themselves amidst various political, cultural, and ecological crises including religious fundamentalism, xenophobia, global warming, and racial and gender inequalities. After Norbert Wiener formulated the concept of cybernetics in 1948, Donna Haraway enriched the discussion on posthumanism in the early 1990s. Her *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991) discusses the changing subjectivity with cyborg as the metaphor for the blurring of the boundaries between human and machines. Other thinkers like Nancy Katherine Hayles and Neil Badmington further dealt with the role of cybernetics in the lives of human and animals, and the implication of posthumanism in culture and society, respectively. Francis Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future* (2002) contributes to one of the earliest political discussions on posthumanism

wherein he takes a bio-conservative stand and “rather than theorise posthumanism, [he] uses the concept as a signifier to warn about a future of human enhancements” (Miah, 2008, p.73).

Two of the important works of the 21st century contributing to the reconceptualisation of the humans and consequently, the reinvention of humanities as a discipline (posthumanities), are Rosi Braidotti’s *The Posthuman* (2013) and *The Posthuman Knowledge* (2019). Braidotti as an antihumanist feminist has contributed much to the discussions on identity formation and the philosophical concept of becoming in her works *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994) and “Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming” (2002). Her *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (2006) later explores the ethical implications of her nomadic subject theory. Building on these arguments, she envisions posthumanism as a navigational tool to understand where humanity is currently at and to understand how our identity becomes a “collective assemblage” or “a web of complex relationships” (Braidotti, 2014, p.171). Furthermore, her posthuman theory works towards constructing a “panhuman cosmopolitan bond” (Braidotti, 2013, p.68) in the contemporary times of crisis. Drawing mainly from the ethico-political views of the French psychoanalyst and semiotician Felix Guattari, Braidotti advocates for an ecosophical model of subject formation in the anthropocene (periods in which human activities significantly impacted the Earth, which, according to Crutzen, had started around 200 years ago (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018, p.130)).

Nonetheless, in addition to articulating what she refers to as a neo-Spinozist worldview, Braidotti briefly alludes to the practical application of posthumanist philosophy, hinting at the incorporation of a posthuman ecosophical framework into educational curricula and governmental legislation (Braidotti, 2013, pp.10-11). At this juncture, the paper examines the literary representations of ecosophical becoming in the novel, *The Infinity of Grace* (1999), by the Indian writer and mythologist, O.V Vijayan.

Though literature has provided an apt space primarily through the genre of science fiction and its subgenre cyberpunk to, so far, discuss the moral implication of transhumanism¹, there is little representation of critical posthumanism in literature; in the mainstream works, to say the least. That is, the popular literary pieces termed as “posthuman” have either apocalyptic or dystopian tones (say *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K. Dick, or *The Windup Girl* by Paolo Bacigalupi). This paper therefore considers the study of existing literary works from the critical posthuman standpoint as an emerging and increasingly valuable field of scholarship. Such a rereading of literary works could also furnish us with the opportunity to “start reevaluating other alternatives that may contribute to acquiring newfound meanings of being human” (Jin Beng & Zakaria, 2023, p.33) or, perhaps, human-becoming.

Through the analysis of the selected text, the paper argues that the ecosophical becoming of humans could also be fortified through raising consciousness on the Indian environmental philosophy that can, in turn, contribute largely to the understanding of the posthuman condition. The novel, *The Infinity of Grace*, revolves around Kunjunni, a journalist hailing from Kerala who works in New Delhi. Kunjunni is portrayed, like many of Vijayan’s protagonists, as someone haunted by the nostalgia for his childhood in a quest to understand *karma*, a notion that individual actions determine the nature of the person’s future existence in the current or future life. He undergoes existential crises due to the personal losses in relationships and monotonous nature of his work. There are multiple plots in the novel that, though not directly connected, pave the way for the spiritual evolution of the protagonist and other characters as well. The novel ends with Kunjunni’s acceptance of his non-biological daughter which results in his deeper planetary

¹ See Elaine Graham’s works “Representations of the Post/Human” and “The Politics of the Post/Human”

revelations of understanding himself, his life, and his reality. He is able to experience profound love and compassion of and for the people, nature, and all the entities in it. The ecosophy forms an integral part of the spiritual experience that Kunjuni and characters like Olga and Raicharan go through in the novel.

With this brief introduction, the next section of the paper, traces the birth and subsequent expansion of ecosophy as a concept, concluding with Braidotti's contribution to the same. This overview may provide the context for an understanding of Braidotti's ecosophical subjectivity, specifically how Braidotti's concern is central to the reading of the paper. The third section of the paper briefly explains the important works emphasizing on ecosophy in literature and the critical works of Vijayan by identifying the gaps amidst available investigations concerning the topic. The fourth section describes the theoretical framework that incorporates critical posthumanism and the theoretical concepts of zoe-centrism, symbiotic becoming, and nomadic subjectivity as used in the paper. The fifth section firstly juxtaposes the novel with the ecosophical tenets as borrowed from Braidotti's posthuman framework of posthuman. Of central concern is the exploration of the similarities in the Indian and Western concepts of planetary interconnectedness. This section, therefore, foregrounds how points of convergence are established between the critical posthumanist tenets and environmental philosophy of the East. Secondly, in 'Guru-Shisya Trope: New Perspectives in Ecosophy,' the paper examines how, through the aforementioned analysis, the 'Guru-Shisya' trope emerges in the context of the ecosophy presented in the novel, foregrounding the relevance of Indian philosophy in providing new vantage points to understand critical posthumanism. The concluding section summarises the arguments presented in the paper and emphasises the need to explore critical posthumanism by integrating the philosophy of the East for a much more interconnected world.

ECOSOPHY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The term, 'ecosophy,' is the combination of the Greek words 'oikos' (environment of the earth) and 'sophia' (wisdom) that centralise "wisdom of the environment" as opposed to a mere awareness of the environment and the ways in which environment is exploited. The usage of the term is credited to Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher who is involved in the development of the concept of deep ecology. Naess later preferred to use the term, 'ecosophy,' to refer to a "philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium" (Naess, 1973, p.99) which is generally understood from the following explanation:

A philosophy as a kind of sofia (or) wisdom[that] is openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction. The details of an ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only the 'facts' of pollution, resources, and population, but also value priorities.

(Naess, 1973, p. 99)

Naess therefore recoins and reformulates 'deep ecology' to signify the pragmatic characteristics of the movement. This approach stands out from the more basic "shallow ecology" that restricts the meanings of the term solely to forms of activism used for safeguarding the environment, without considering its deeper purpose (Drengson, 1997, p.6). The movement that subsequently aimed at enacting changes through active political and quotidian involvements was

highly humanistic. Nevertheless, deep ecology did have considerable political impact that resulted in raising the environmental awareness we see today (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018, p.129).

Posthuman ecosophy on the other hand as initially developed by Gregory Bateson is not technophobic, but integrates technology into our ecological thinking. Moving away from the humanistic understanding, Bateson (1972), in his work, “Steps to an Ecology of Mind” discusses the interconnectedness between communication, cognition, nature, and human thoughts, emphasising the systemic understanding of living systems. Further, Guattari and Deleuze expanded the idea of ecosophy in the 1990s. Guattari's specific ecosophy is explicitly political, aiming to address environmental and social issues through the convergence of three interconnected ecologies: the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity. It is an empowering framework in opposition to the capitalist lifestyle as made evident in his work, *The Three Ecologies* (1989/2000). In comparison to contemporary knowledge of and involvement in sustainability, creating awareness here does not simply employ a “guilt-inducing manner” and is not human-centered (Cole, 2021).

Braidotti adopts the Guattarian standpoint and her ecosophy focuses on the ecological dimensions of the posthuman condition, emphasising how contemporary ecological crises are linked with issues of subjectivity, knowledge, and ethics. It also recognises the influence of technology on human subjectivity and the relationships between humans and machines. However, her posthumanism focuses more on the transformation of subjectivity, embodied knowledge, and the ecological aspects of the posthuman condition. Ecosophy, according to Braidotti, is a “vitalist ethics of mutual transspecies interdependence” that “crosses transversely the multiple layers of the subject from interiority to exteriority and everything in between” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 92). That is, ecosophy refers to the linkages combining various life forms, transcending and encompassing all aspects of individual beings, ranging from their innermost nature to their outward manifestations and everything in between. The rhizomatic subject or what Braidotti calls a nomadic subject, therefore, is not unitary but interconnected and is “transversal, trans-individual, trans-species, trans-sexes...it is a subject in movement” (Braidotti, 2019, p.80). Braidotti further emphasises this through the zoe-centric worldview or life force that emanates through all things living and non-living and others. It is the task of the fourth section to elaborate on zoe-centrism and its related concepts.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A wealth of studies on the works of O.V Vijayan have fortified Malayalam literary criticism as these focus on the creative vision and modernist aspects of his literature that was unprecedented in the Malayalam literary scene. Vijayan's well-known critic Rajasekaran (1994), identifies the liberal humanist aspects of his works (particularly *The Legends of Khasak*) and explores the psychoanalytical facets in his works as well in Malayalam. Ecocritical and linguistic/translation features of Vijayan's works also receive scholarly attention. Anand (2005) explores the ecocritical aspects of the novel, *The Legend of Khasak*, studying the symbolic and societal importance of nature. Vinod (2009), however, demonstrates how the interpretation through a mere ecocritical lens poses the threat of overlooking Vijayan's craft of history-making in a spiritual ecosystem and the universality of his work such as *Madhuram Gayati*. He further explores Vijayan as a mythologist and historian. Jacob (1995) delves into how his works integrate Indian philosophy and legacy while Harikumar (2010) probes the neo-advaita (renewed non-dualism) in the fiction of

Vijayan. Balakrishnan & Dennis' most recent work (2021) focuses on connecting Vijayan's quest for truth in connection to the American movement of Pragmatism.

Pertaining to research on ecosophy in literary representations, Rodney Rice's (2011) interesting study explores the ecosophical becoming of Joseph, the protagonist of Steinbeck's novel, *To a God Unknown*. Rice avers how the protagonist acquires a non-anthropocentric outlook towards life in the novel where he realises that human is yet another cog in the interconnected world. This outlook or experience as Rice emphasises is possible only when one deviates from the conventional human thinking process. Yet another engaging study by Sarah Bezan (2015) sheds light on the process of becoming even in death in the novel, *Being Dead* by Jim Crace through a vitalist materialist philosophy of Deleuze and Braidotti. Bhattacharjee and Sinha (2021) explore the Buddhist philosophy represented in the *Jataka* tales in light of ecosophy, creating new ecological consciousness and understanding of non-human entities.

In summary, scholars and critics (mostly of Malayalam) have approached Vijayan's literature from diverse angles, including modernism, liberal humanism, psychoanalysis, and pragmatism. Various theoretical frameworks offer nuanced perspectives on Vijayan's literary works, revealing the multi-layered nature and meanings of his contributions to literature and human life. This shows his relevance in the contemporary times as well. On the other hand, employing ecosophy as a theoretical concept in literature has received limited attention but is a field of growing interest. Here, Vijayan's *The Infinity of Grace* with its deeply philosophical undercurrents and subjectivity that is closely knit with nature, presents a compelling literary landscape for investigating the ecosophical tenets of critical posthumanism.

METHODOLOGY

The paper primarily uses the theoretical framework of Braidotti's Critical Posthumanism. Posthuman critical theory "unfolds at the intersection between posthumanism and postanthropocentrism" (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018, p. 339). Seen in this light, posthumanism reimagines the western ideal of man, while postanthropocentrism reimagines the species hierarchy and human exceptionalism (Braidotti, 2017, p.9). The prefix 'critical' also demarcates between the humanistic transhumanism and the critical posthumanism that ideologically is antithetical to the transhumanism. From the critical posthuman lens of Braidotti, the concepts of zoe centrism, embedded and embodied becoming, and Nomadic subjectivity are used for a parallel reading of the chosen text.

One of the key ideas that Braidotti puts forward as mentioned above is that of 'zoe'. It refers to a concept related to posthumanist philosophy and feminist theory. The term, 'zoe,' comes from the Greek word 'zōē', which translates to 'life' in English. It encompasses not only living beings but also global, material, organic, and even inorganic aspects. It is also pertinent to mention the contribution of the Giorgio Agamben in this regard. In his work, *Homo Sacer* (1998), he delves into the distinction between the two ancient Greek words for life, "zoē" (essential life shared with other animals) and "bios" (culturally enriched life, one lived by a citizen with political awareness). "Bios" is a hierarchy on which the ancient Greek democracy also operated. Agamben views modern democracy as a call for the rights and liberation of "zoē," implying that "zoē" has infiltrated "bios." This signifies that the basic existence, or having a body, has transformed into a political subject in the modern state governed by the rule of law.

The Braidottian understanding of zoe emphasises the interconnectedness and relationality of all entities wherein the boundaries between human and non-human, organic and inorganic is almost negligible. It is a life force that extends beyond human-centric concerns. In contrast, "bios" refers to the specific lives of individuals, their narratives, and their social existence. Braidotti in the feminist materialist sense uses the concept of zoe to advocate for a more inclusive and ecologically oriented understanding of subjectivity. She critiques anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism, arguing for a relational and interconnected perspective that acknowledges the inherent diversity and complexity of life.

Secondly, Braidotti's idea of symbiotic becoming refers to a mode of existence that highlights the interaction between two different organisms living in close physical proximity leading to mutual transformation. Entities influence each other through their interactions, leading to constant changes and adaptations within the dynamic web of relationships. Braidotti has earlier discussed the question of nomadic subjectivity in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (1994). Here, Braidotti finds a convergence of ideas between feminist conceptions of a posthuman subjectivity and Gilles Deleuze's positive discussion on the decline of phallogocentrism, particularly his emphasis on rhizomatic thinking. Both feminist and Deleuzian perspectives emphasise the importance of reshaping our understanding of thought and subjectivity as processes characterised by intensity, multiplicity, and discontinuity, rather than adhering to traditional, linear modes of thinking (p.110).

By embracing symbiotic becoming, Braidotti advocates for a more ethical and sustainable way of engaging with the world. She also calls it the "process of becoming-minoritarian or becoming nomad" and "it rejects the self-appointed missionary role of Europe as the alleged centre of the world" (Braidotti, 2013, p.53). Nomadic subjectivity recognises the importance of the body and the material world in shaping individual and collective experiences. It depicts the lived and embodied experiences of individuals as they engage with the world. It embraces hybridity and diversity, blurring boundaries between different categories such as gender, race, and species. In Braidotti's own words:

The posthuman nomadic subject is materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded – it is firmly located somewhere, according to the radical immanence of the 'politics of location' that I have stressed throughout this book [*The Posthuman*]. It is a multi-faceted and relational subject, conceptualized within a monistic ontology, through the lenses of Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari, plus feminist and post-colonial theories. It is a subject actualized by the relational vitality and elemental complexity that mark posthuman thought itself.
(Braidotti, 2013, p. 188)

Thus, these concepts of zoe, symbiotic becoming, and nomadic subjectivity are inseparable contributing to understanding the egalitarian posthuman future that Braidotti is assertive of reaching. They form the integral tenets of her ecosophy. The chosen text bases itself within the Indian spirituality and philosophy of which nature and ecosophy form an integral part. The paper studies the subject formation of the protagonist Kunjunni and other characters along with the instances and select incidents which describe the ecosophical tenets. This parallel reading attempts to bring a connection between the ecosophy of posthumanism and the Indian environmental philosophy. The analysis further scaffolds a Guru-Shishya trope, a relationship that provides a novel vantage point to understand human becoming and subjectivity.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

EMBEDDED AND EMBODIED BECOMING: A PARALLEL READING OF ECOSOPHY AND VIJAYAN'S *THE INFINITY OF GRACE*

Embedded spirituality even in the grotesque realism preoccupies the works of O.V Vijayan. More than revealing the harsh realities of the world in which we live, Vijayan's spirituality peeks into the suprarational meanings of human life. Balakrishnan and Dennis, in their parallel reading of Vijayan and William James observe how both in their respectable fields of work "were fighting to restore and revive the spirit of humanism that was rapidly losing hope and faith in the ideals of 'pluralism, tolerance, and individual freedom'" (Balakrishnan & Dennis, 2021, p. 273). The revival of such a spirit of humanism can also be understood through the critical standpoint of posthumanism as according to Braidotti, "it [critical posthumanism] promotes an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject, as defined along the canonical lines of classical Humanism" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 49).

While discussing the ecosophy of the novel *The Infinity of Grace*, it is also imperative to touch upon its spiritual elements. The specific forms of spirituality that the novel portray do not belong to any institutionalised religious system, but they center around Kunjunni who undergoes existential angst and spiritual revelation aided by multiple experiences that he finds himself in. Spirituality here detaches itself from the rigid institutions called religion. According to Philip Sheldrake, spirituality also refers to "an important expression of how people understand what it means to be human" (Sheldrake, 2012, p. 68). This view aligns with the critical posthuman concept of reinventing humans who are not fundamentally flawed but has been affected by the eurocentric, white, male standpoint of thinking. Vijayan also draws from various Hindu texts in his works, employs their metaphors and philosophy to convey deeper meanings of life. The Indian philosophy is closely associated with spirituality of which ecosophy forms an important part. However, discussing in detail about spirituality lies beyond the framework of this paper.

The zoe-centric ideology put forth by Braidotti (2013) which "connects human to non-human life so as to develop a comprehensive eco-philosophy of becoming" (p. 49) shows a proximity to the ecosophical view of the Indian tradition. Nature forms an indispensable part of the vedic and puranic texts. The Indian thought also explicates how humans comprise of the same five elements or *panchabhootha* that sustains the Earth (air-oxygen, water, fire-ideal temperature, earth-vital minerals and chemicals, sky- mind). Further, the environmental philosophy bases itself on the principle that all entities of the Earth are part of *Brahman* (Ultimate reality/God) and are worthy of ethical consideration and respect. The individual essence or soul is called *atman* which is also connected to the ultimate reality. Crawford claims with reference to *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad* that:

General idea is that the individual atman is one with the universal *Brahman*. The *Brahman* force is manifest uniformly in the divinities of heaven, and in human and animal and plant life on Earth. Hence the Hindu philosophy can provide the basis of an environmental ethic.

(Crawford, 1974, pp.149-150)

The Brahman reveals itself in two ways, such as, unconscious matter or *jada* and conscious life *jiva* (Ravikanth, 2021). The concepts of *Anekāntavāda* and *Syādvāda* from the philosophy of Jainism is also of relevance here. In accordance with the doctrine of *Anekāntavāda*, the world is in a constant state of change and exhibits a multitude of facets. These various facets or viewpoints are contingent upon factors such as time, location, and the inherent nature of the subject.

Additionally, they are influenced by both the perspective of the observer and the characteristics of the object being observed. Anekāntavāda ultimately leads to the concept of Syādvāda, which emphasizes relativity. According to the doctrine of Syādvāda, truth varies according to different perspectives. Such fluidity of subjectivity and non-anthropocentric attitude have always been the essence of Indian philosophy. It very well acknowledges the interconnectedness of nature and humans (Ravikanth 2021).

The following textual analysis will shed light on the theoretical concepts of ecosophy discussed in the previous section and their similarity to Indian philosophy.

In the prologue of the novel *The Infinity of Grace*, the protagonist Kunjunni is seen at his ancestral home where there is “rust upon the hinges, termites nesting on the ceiling, and along the corners of the walls, cobwebs like garlands of memory. Kunjunni disturbed none of these” (p.329). The detachedness and objective attitude of Kunjunni when experiencing the world and the entities within it, reveal his non-anthropocentric approach which is consistent throughout the novel. It is apt here to refer to the essence of Lynn White Jr.’s important essay, “The Historical Roots of Ecological Crisis” in which White observes how “What we do in and to the natural environment depends on what we think about the natural environment and our relationship to it” (White, 1967, p.1205). He was critical about the Judeo-Christian foundation of the West where the man is considered to be created in the image of God.

In contrast to the individual-centric attitude of the humanity today, the ashram of Nirmalanda, the former colonel and friend of the protagonist proves to be a microcosm of an egalitarian and interconnected society that aligns with Braidotti’s vision of a posthuman existence. The only activity that provides Kunjunni some solace amidst a sad existence is his weekend pilgrimage to this ashram. The ashram is described thus:

It [ashram] had spread in a profuse and disordered spontaneity of flower beds, wild flowers, tangled shrubbery, fruit tress, and the little grasses that were the children of the forest. On the serene waters of the lake which lay within the grounds was another profusion; migrant birds: stork, crane, duck, ibis and teal. At the heart of those expansive and unpeopled grounds stood in the main house of the ashrama, wrapped in the coolness of its mud walls and the breeze that rose on the lake.
(p. 336)

The ashram holds a significant space in the Indian tradition. An ashram is a spiritual hermitage or a place of retreat and study that is situated in a serene environment where individuals, often under the guidance of a spiritual teacher or guru, devote themselves to spiritual practices, self-discovery, and personal growth. Commenting on the secular nature of ashram, its unique place in the Indian tradition and referring to the ashrams set up by Tagore and Gandhi, Sahi states, “The ashram community would give a new direction and meaning to a creative engagement in an effort which was both political and cultural, by offering a living model of a more just and egalitarian society” (Sahi, 2018, p.82). Braidotti’s zoe-centered egalitarian world is “a materialist, secular, grounded and unsentimental response to the opportunistic trans-species commodification of Life that is the logic of advanced capitalism” (Braidotti, 2013, p.60) for which ashram serves as an excellent example.

The following mental dialogue between Kunjunni and grasses on the premises of the ashram further shows how the subjectivity becomes embedded and embodied. As Kunjunni bends over the wild plants, he witnesses the minute universe beneath which the narrator describes thus, “It seemed to him that they [wild plants] pointed down to the grass which grew at their roots. In turn, grass pointed to its own roots. There Kunjunni sees insects, at their unceasing endeavours where they were on a battle” (p.423). The experience made him bow down to the grasses:

[Kunjunni]: “O Guru, my feet trample you when I walk, I cannot move without causing you pain.”

[Grasses]: “Unni, walk on”, the grasses said.

The compassion of the grass spread to the plants, and from the plants to the great trees, and then to green cover of the mountains....

(p. 423)

The body of Kunjunni here is very much part of the nature as he experiences new knowledge from nature. This renewed sense of connection with nature is considerably distant from the trans-species commodification that we witness today. Kunjunni considering “little silvery swordfishes” (p.461) that swim in river toota at his hometown, as his ancestors and the rain as the love of his ancestors (p.450) shed light on the same. The following description of the significance of trees in the wild with futile wars as backdrop also explicates this:

Only occasionally did a soldier who broke out from rigorous battle array realize the tapasya [loosely translated as the practice of self-control and discipline to achieve a goal] of those trees, only occasionally in the heart of the forest did a predator feel compassion for its prey; only rarely did the sorrow of the Infinite know the balm of a small remission.

(p.337)

Others who missed these occasions did not realise this becoming according to the narrator, and resort to violence and wars. These instances of awareness of the self and the non-privileged position that we hold contribute greatly to our inner and outer peace paving way for understanding the purpose of our existence. At this juncture our identity also becomes fluid.

Fluidity of identity is signified in the novel by characters such as Olga, the Czech journalist, which is also revealed against the backdrop of war. She is seen coping with the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the loss of her homeland. In a conversation with Kunjunni, she recalls her roots and reminds herself how she herself was not Czech but her forefathers were gypsies from Rumania. She melancholically states, “My race has lost its selfhood in the genetic deluge of the white man, we are sunk in escapable despair” (p. 352). Soon after this, she flings open her nightgown and embraces Kunjunni and remarks in “pious anger which transcended desire”, “Oh dark man, you are my blood brother!” (p.353). A new bond of fraternity emerges beyond borders. The experiences of the protagonists and the characters here then can be read with reference to the nomadic subjectivity that Braidotti calls for. This subjectivity “rejects individualism, but also asserts an equally strong distance from relativism or nihilistic defeatism. It promotes an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject” (Braidotti, 2013, p.47).

A similar sense of awakening takes place amidst the Bangladesh liberation war of 1972, in the novel. An angry young Raicharan is chosen by his comrades to set fire to the house of a landlord, Nimoy Sanyal. However, thrice he fails to accomplish this. He explains the reason to his perturbed comrades thus: “Two cows in Nimoy Sanyal’s shed and the calves who drank at their teats... You must believe me comrades. When I saw the milk’s foam on the lips of those calves, my hands and legs went weak” (p.393). In that mission, Raicharan, according to the narrator, becomes Upamanyu, a sage from the Upanishads who lived with his guru in the forests. He was a cattle grazer whose blind devotion to the guru ultimately made him the teacher to his own guru. The reverence shown in the case of Raicharan here for the non-human and the anti-speciesist sentiment are characteristics of the zoe life force. According to Braidotti, “This vitalist approach

to living matter displaces the boundary between the portion of life – both organic and discursive – that has traditionally been reserved for anthropos, that is to say bios, and the wider scope of animal and non-human life, also known as zoe. Zoe as the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself” (p.60).

The novel thus shows how the subjectivity of the characters is connected and shaped by the specific contexts in which they live and interact where the body actively participates in the process of knowing and being. Thus, Kunjunni and others become embedded and embodied becoming humans. The analysis also shows a rejection of the Cartesian dualisms of the mind and body and, nature and culture. This questions the notion of a fixed and autonomous human subject. This viewpoint also acknowledges the entanglement of human societies and the natural world, emphasizing how culture arises from and influences our engagement with the environment. This emerges as a common thought in the Indian philosophy as well as in Braidotti’s neo-spinozist monistic ontology that considers matter as intelligent and self-organizing (autopoiesis) (Braidotti, 2018).

GURU SHISHYA TROPE: NEW PERSPECTIVES IN ECOSOPHY

The analysis of the novel brings out the important trope of the Guru-Shishya relationship or the revered teacher-student relationship that finds an important place in the East/Asian traditions, mainly in India. One of the ancient literatures of India, Upanishads takes the form of a conversation between teacher and student much like the format of Plato’s *Republic*. This is a relationship of mutual respect and sharing of knowledge and experience where there is symbiotic growth of the teacher and the student. In the prologue of the novel, Kunjunni realises how “All things grow lucid, and lustrous in the grace of the guru, which wells everywhere” (p. 328). This is what his life teaches him post his spiritual journey. He is able to listen to the *shanti mantra* [prayer of peace] from the *Isavasya* Upanishad in his mind: “May the Absolute Protect us. May we enjoy the fruit of our endeavours. We, Guru and Sishya shall strive together, without bitterness. May the light of Brahman Illuminate us. Peace, Peace Peace!” (p. 328). The last lines that ironically awakened the world to the horrors and chaos of the Modernist world through Eliot’s *Wasteland* here reflect the state of contentment of Kunjunni.

As analysed in the previous section, the wild plants and grasses impart Kunjunni their knowledge of the universe’s functioning. Other characters like Raicharan become a student of the nature, mourning deeply in its exploitation by the humanity in the name of wars. In the process, he receives a renewed understanding of human. Olga too turns Kunjunni’s guru showing him a bond beyond borders. The futile wars and death of his friend opened Colonel Balakirshnan’s (Nirmalananda) eyes to his purpose in life. Later, post realisations, he confesses to his father-in-law, “I was never a soldier” (p. 451).

Vijayan also uses characters and instances from Hindu mythologies and the lives of Indian spiritual teachers to convey the depth of spiritual experience that Kunjunni undergoes in his own life. Kunjunni’s prayer, “O Gadadhara, my Guru, your torks are in the sky!” (p. 408) at the sight of a flight of white storks, which refers to the childhood incident of Ramakrishna Paramahansa who had his first similar transcendental experience, explicates this. Thus, every aspect of nature becomes a teacher in the lives of Kunjunni and others as they resume their spiritual journeys.

Finally, Kalyani, Kunjunni’s non-biological daughter who dies of cancer provides a crescendo to his spiritual journey. The coping experience leaves Kunjunni with the greatest realization of his birth and life. As he quits his job as a journalist and subsequently confides in Nirmalananda about how Kalyani was not his daughter, he is enveloped in the moment of serenity.

He could feel the lake in front of him turning into an ocean filled by the grace of his guru, Kalyani (thus the title of the novel). He hears her voice:

'Father, are you grieving?'

'I am, my daughter'.

'Didn't Parikshit² teach you about the eternity of life?'

'He did.'

'Wasn't it only in this life that I was not born as your child? Look back. Don't you remember? I was Suka, you were Vyasa,³ father'.

(p.453)

In one of the most touching scenes of the novel, Kunjunni realises how in multiple births they were father and daughter, and that this life did not matter, transcending the biological barriers and understanding deeper connections. He finds the entire universe reverberating: "Cosmic nature hearkened to his cry. He heard millions of leaf-voices, rivers, and mountains were full of speech. Trees and plants, crystal springs and dumb stones answered reverberantly in Kalyani's voice. "Father! Oh, my father!" (p. 455). This renewed understanding of death also aligns with Braidotti's proposition that "death is not the teleological destination of life, a sort of ontological magnet that propels us forward" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 343).

Kunjunni and others, therefore, find every entity around them capable of teaching them nuances of life that they did not realise before. Nature and its entities become spiritual teachers who facilitate them to make connections with the reality they are in and be aware of their relational position in a planetary whole. This knowledge of the self, as Kunjunni says, was previously "smothered beneath the great edifice of reason which his [human] species has built over millennia" (Vijayan, 1999, p. 415). Thus, this trope of *Guru-Shisya* sheds new light onto Braidotti's idea of posthuman ecosophical becoming, challenging the western understanding of human as a subject, promoting a non-linear thinking and describing the intricacies of human-becoming.

CONCLUSION

The research paper has attempted to bring out a renewed understanding of Braidotti's posthuman ecosophy by juxtaposing its tenets with several perspectives of the Indian environmental philosophy as reflected in Vijayan's *The Infinity of Grace*. Posthumanism is the historical moment that "traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives" (Braidotti, 2013, p.37). Here, it is interesting to note how the critique of West-centered humanism comes predominantly from the West as well. At this juncture, the paper offers a parallel reading of Braidotti's ecosophical concepts of zoe-centrism, symbiotic becoming and nomadic subjectivity as one traverses the Indian novel, *The Infinity of Grace*.

The article, by tracing the concept of ecosophy, understanding ecosophy and its embedded and embodied subjectivity through the Indian philosophy as represented in the text of Vijayan, sheds light on a post-anthropocentric world. Many characters undergo transformations in the novel. Here, individual subjectivity may exemplify a product of the co-evolution across non-living

² Mythological king who was angered by the silence of the meditating saint Shamika, put a dead snake around his neck. when Shringi, the saint's son came to know of this, cursed the king to die by a snakebite. Parikshit however accepts this fate.

³ Suka was sage Vyasa's son. He went to king Janaka in quest of ultimate wisdom. The king impressed at the celebate, alerts his father that his son would leave his body if he gains the last wisdom. Vyasa however responds that he has no right to stop his son but grieves for his dead son.

and non-human entities where they also have agency. As such, this idea of human becoming and interconnectedness lie at the heart of Indian environmental philosophy. Furthermore, the paper also discusses the *Guru-shishya* [teacher-disciple] trope that emerges from the interconnectedness and analyses to demonstrate a new vantage point of examining critical posthumanism. However, the study has only primarily focused on Braidotti and has chosen only a single text of Vijayan for the ecosophical background the novel presents. *The Infinity of Grace*, as a multilayered novel, delves deep into the human psyche and contributes to the idea of what it means to be spiritual. Ecosophy or a deep consciousness of nature and our position in relation to it is an integral part of Indian spirituality. It opens new vistas in the reconceptualisation of what it means to be human, challenging the traditional image and position of human “as the measure of all things.” This lies closely to the essence of a critical posthumanist attitude that the present biocapital world needs.

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