

A Comprehensive Literary Review on the Posthumanism Reflected In Philosophy and Literature

Dr. Kavita Tiwade¹ Mrs. Shubhada Sachin Yadav²

¹ Associate Professor, Department of English, Vivekanand College, Kolhapur (Autonomous)

² Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Sciences, School of Engineering and Technology, Dr. D.Y. Patil Agriculture and Technical University

Talasande, Kolhapur.

Abstract:

Posthumanism is an opposite philosophical conception to humanism. It is an umbrella term that covers different philosophies like Antihumanism, Cultural Posthumanism, New materialism, Transhumanism and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Takeover. It has significant and relevant implications in the present as well as the future of mankind. Beyond postmodernist studies, the theory of posthumanism has been developed and expanded by several cultural theorists. Posthuman or post-human is a concept originating in the fields of science fiction, futurology, contemporary art and philosophy that denotes a person or entity that exists in a state beyond being human. The common and general theme of posthumanist study is to understand the process of posthumanisation and identify its critical impact on human being. The term Posthumanism is applicable to the extensive range of theoretical aspects of science, technology, philosophy, literature, critical theory and sociology. In the sphere of Literature, Posthumanism has acquired a significant position in science Fiction and Digital Literature. The present research is an attempt to make a comprehensive literature review on the reflection of the post humanist approach in philosophy and literature.

Key Words: Posthumanism, Antihumanism, Transhumanism, Science Fiction, Digital Literature, Philosophy, Technology, Futurology, Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Introduction :

Posthumanism is a theoretical concept which is considered as a reaction to the challenging inherent assumptions within the humanistic and enlightenment thoughts. Posthumanism represents an evolution of thought beyond the contemporary social boundaries and is predicated on the searching of truth within the postmodern context. It rejects previous attempts to establish 'anthropological universals' that are infused with anthropocentric assumptions. The common and general theme of posthumanist study is to understand the process of posthumanisation and identify its critical impact on human beings. Posthumanism attempts to explicate how change is enacted in the human world due to tremendous technical advancement. The posthumanist study deals with the questions subsequently emerging with respect to the current use and the future of technology in shaping human existence.

The term Posthumanism is applicable to the extensive range of prevailing theoretical aspects of science, technology, philosophy, literature, critical theory and sociology. Posthumanism attempts to explicate how change is enacted in the human world due to tremendous technical advancement. The common and general theme of posthumanist study is to understand the process of posthumanisation and an attempt to identify its critical impact on human beings. The term Posthumanism is applicable to the extensive range of theoretical aspects of science, technology, philosophy, literature, critical theory and sociology. Posthuman is a concept originating in the fields of science fiction, futurology, contemporary art and philosophy that denotes a person or entity that exists in a state beyond being human.

Posthumanism: Invention of Theory :

Posthumanism is a philosophical term that was first invented by the postmodern theorist **Ihab Hassan**, in his article entitled *Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture?* (1977). He used the term posthumanism to describe an era of the techno-scientific revolution, in which 'the human form - including human desire and all its external representations - may be changing radically, and must be revised. Ihab Hassan has used the popular mythological figure of Prometheus as a metaphor to indicate the emergence of 'Posthumanist Culture.' Hassan argues about the '**Death of Man.**' He considers that in posthumanist culture; death of man is associated with the both death of Humanism and the rise of the machine. In this article, Ihab Hassan describes Posthumanism as, "Humanism may be coming to an end as humanism transforms itself into something one must helplessly call Posthumanism."

Philosophical Posthumanism:

Posthumanism is an opposite philosophical conception to humanism. The philosophical strand which relies on the Cultural posthumanism examines the ethical implications of expanding the circle of moral concern and extending subjectivities beyond the human species. Advocates of the posthuman discourse contend that new developments and technology have superseded the conventional human model put forth by Enlightenment philosophy. Theorists who complement as well as contrast Hassan include Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, cyberneticists such as Gregory Bateson, Warren McCullough, Norbert Wiener, Bruno Latour, Cary Wolfe, Elaine Graham, N. Katherine Hayles, Benjamin H. Bratton, Donna Haraway, Peter Sloterdijk, Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, Evan Thompson, Francisco Varela, Humberto Maturana, Timothy Morton, and Douglas Kellner.

Posthumanism in Literature: Science Fiction :

In the sphere of Literature, Posthumanism has acquired a significant position in the genre Science Fiction and Digital Literature. Recently, the writers of science fiction have amazingly created a new posthuman world in their fictional world to justify the drastic, dangerous and horrible effects of technical advancement on human beings. The literary genre, Science Fiction has many sub genres

like Time Travel, Cyberpunk, Superhuman, Social Science Fiction, Space Opera, Hard Science Fiction, Soft Social Science Fiction, Military Science Fiction, Anthropological Science Fiction, Alternate History, Comic Science Fiction, Apocalyptic Science Fiction, Feministic Science Fiction, Bio-punk, Diesel-punk, Steam-punk, etc. All these sub genres strongly relate with the posthuman themes. Film adaptations of some Sci-fi novels on posthuman themes have created a horrified but marvelous effect on the audience.

Literary creation of extraterrestrial life, space travel, parallel universe, futuristic setting, futuristic science and technology, paranormal abilities, technological advancement, scientific innovations ,aliens, supermen and other mutations, men like God and God like men, robots, hominids, sentient machines and artificial intelligent, prediction of wars near and far, imaginary living ways and ways out, natural disasters and manmade disasters, uses and misuses of science and technology and possible new world are the characteristics of Science Fiction. Moreover, the works of 'Posthuman' authors have attained a word-winning, best- selling status and achieved notable awards and prizes. Posthuman literature reflects the symbolic hybrid i.e. a mixture of human and non-human characters which has finally been accepted as the tale of the dark future humanity or dangerous end of humanity.

Literary Review on Posthumanism in Philosophy and Literature

"As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end" - Michel Foucault

The great philosopher **Michel Foucault** marked posthumanism within a different framework that separated humanism from enlightenment thought. In the most popular philosophical work, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Foucault reports about the birth and forthcoming demise of Man as an object of study for science and philosophy. The above thought-provoking quotation reflecting the emergence of posthumanism is the part of the conclusion of his book *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*.

"Where humanists saw themselves as distinct beings in an antagonistic relationship with their surroundings, posthumans regard their own being as embodied in an extended technological world."- Robert Pepperell

The great philosopher **Robert Pepperell** has written a book *Posthuman condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain* first published in 1990 which is often replaced for the term Posthumanism. The philosophical work Posthuman Condition argues that it is very difficult to tackle the questions about the concepts of human existence, inherited from humanism in this posthuman era of intelligent machines, organic computers Synthetic creativity, genetic modification. These technical miracles have proven human superiority but ironically these inventions are causing the 'The End of Man'. Human beings are really proficient in creating entities that surpass our own intellect and skills then the penalties for humanity are nearly unimaginable.

N. Katherine Hayles, a scholar of the history of technology, cultural studies and literary criticism, writes about the struggle between different versions of the posthuman as it continually co-evolves alongside intelligent machines in her book *How We Became Posthuman*. According to Hayles, posthumanism is characterized by a loss of subjectivity based on bodily boundaries. Hayles's view of posthuman is often referred to as technological posthumanism. She deliberates her view on posthumanism by translating human bodies into information. The extensive use of technology in contemporary society and in the upcoming future complicates this relationship between human and non-human species. *How We Became Posthuman*, provides an indispensable account from the birth of cybernetics to artificial life of humanity. She discusses the arrival of virtual age and unknown destination of humanity and tries to investigate the destiny of embodiment in the information age.

Ted Schatzki, a great philosopher, suggested two philosophical varieties of posthumanism as objectivism and an emphasis of social practices over individuals. Science fiction authors like Greg Egan, H. G. Wells, Isaac Asimov, Bruce Sterling, Frederik Pohl, Greg Bear, Charles Stross, David Simpson, Neal Asher, Ken MacLeod, Peter F. Hamilton and authors of the Orion's Arm Universe have created an outstanding mark with their works related to posthuman futures and themes. Many researchers across the world have studied posthumanism. Hence, posthumanism has been welcomed as a new theoretical standpoint that has the potential of inspiring scholars studying many distinct fields ranging from cultural studies to education and from sociology to literary studies and arts. Such inspiration will inevitably affect the literary analyses that will be conducted in the future. Here it is intended to review the relevant literature regarding the research topic.

Ricardo Gil Soeiro in his project work, *Posthumanism: Posthumanist Literary Imagination* aims at the exploration of the ways in which posthumanist literary imagination contributes to the critical awareness of the limits of traditional anthropocentric and humanistic assumptions. Posthumanism is thus drastically stimulating boundaries between the human and the non-human, the self and the other, the organic and the technological domains. The present project is significantly conducting case-study analysis of paradigmatic literary works reflecting post-dualistic and non-hierarchical issues such as otherness, subjectivity and ethics. This project offers a multi-layered posthumanist approach for re-thinking of far-reaching debates on the future of humanism and a prompt reassessment of posthumanist theory.

Arda Arikan, in the study on Posthumanism, *Posthumanism and Literary Theory* published in 2019 discusses posthumanism. According to him Posthumanism is a literary theory which focuses upon its relationship with other contemporary theories from a historical and philosophical perspective. This posthumanist spirit has affected people who are already aware of oppressive and hegemonic discourses of post-colonialism that oppress and silence the disadvantaged such as ethnic or religious

Research paper © 2012 IJFANS. All Rights Reserved, UGC CARE Listed (Group -I) Journal Volume 11, Iss 11, Dec 2022
minorities and LGBT members, peace builders and activists struggling for the rights of refugees all are represented in various literary texts.

Sunyoung Ahn explores the great cultural and political significance of the posthuman concept in early twenty-first-century novels. These representations are noteworthy due to their capacity to expose the questions like transgress attitudes of human privilege, and notions of the future of humanity and cultural construction of human identity in the most famous work *The Human against itself: Posthumanism in Contemporary Novels*. Thinkers of posthumanism have taken up these questions very enthusiastically for the research and discussions. The primary argument is that human superiority over nonhumans is an illusion and consequently human superiority is an illusion. It is further explained that the power dynamics and socioeconomic landscapes in which humans assume the superior position of holding power over nonhumans are rejected by posthumanism. The eminence of the human in the world is significantly abridged as their trajectory of life is contingent upon the dynamic and material reality.

The life-affirming posthumanism demotes the human subject and allocates excessive high level to all nonhuman things. The human, however an essential part of the life, is not considered as the dominant figure of the universe but merely a part of the larger environment. Humans can never dominate it entirely. The persistent mission of the posthumanist scholarship is an attempt to eradicate the human from the center of the earth for the ethical remediation purpose. In posthumanism, the human is still considered as the independent subject in the universe which is capable of detaching itself from the surrounding world.

Posthumanist Aspects in Select Novels of Kurt Vonnegut by J. X. Herbert, Dr.Suresh Frederick portrays Posthumanism as an emerging anthropocentric philosophy that investigates the impact of science and technology on humans. This paper is a critical analysis of Kurt Vonnegut's selected novels *Galapagos* and *The Sirens of Titan*. Kurt Vonnegut has used some fictional and prophetic scientific elements which predict the impact of scientific and technical inventions on human lives. Kurt Vonnegut deals with space travel and human life on Mars in *The Sirens of Titans* with a posthumanist perspective. Advancements in technology and its excessive use gives birth to antihuman bodies which is a very dangerous thing for humanity This synchronising aspects of posthumanism in the novels of Kurt Vonnegut's have been evaluated and widely explored in this research work.

Posthumanism is an 'opportunity' with their imminent challenges for the future of the humanities. These challenges refer to the loss of traditional values or transformation of traditional subjects and objects of humanist perspective into posthumanism. This view is signified by Ivan Callus, Stefan Herbrechter & Manuela Rossini in their research work *Introduction: Dis/Locating Posthumanism in European Literary and Critical Traditions*. Accepting these challenges might expand the scope of humanities; like rebirth of the humanities in new forms such as the medical

humanities, digital humanities, the environmental humanities, the neuro-humanities etc. These disciplines can be grouped under the umbrella term of ‘posthumanities’ and play a crucial role in providing guidance and critical commentary for all posthumanist practices in diverse domains.

The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television is edited by Michael Hauskeller, Thomas D. Philbeck and Curtis D. Carbonell. This handbook is structured in eight parts. The Part I is titled as ‘Paving the Way to Posthumanism: The Precursors’ stresses upon the intellectual influences which have given birth to the posthumanist discourse. The concepts of Deleuzian posthumanism like ‘bodies without organs’, ‘desiring machines,’ ‘individuated entity’ ‘transhumanist notions of the self’ are critically acclaimed and highlighted. The second part titled as Varieties of People-to-Come: Posthuman Becomings focuses on the imaginative factors related to the different ways of the posthuman and transhuman future which is already in the process. The third section Machines: Posthuman Intellect focuses on the Rise of Artificial intelligence (AI) and its consequences. Part IV, Body and Soul: Posthuman Subjectivities concentrates on virtual reality and actual reality.

Part V Better Humans: Posthuman Capacities addresses technological modification represented in film and television as a phenomenon of human enhancement. Part VI is Creating Difference and Identity: Posthuman Communities. This section explores the social dimension of posthumanism with the community of human, non-human and post-human creatures. This section is an attempt to find reliable solutions to the question -What kind of communities are possible and/or desirable in a posthumanist world? Part VII -Us and Them: Posthuman Relationships concentrates upon Anat Pick’s statement about narratives of screened animals. The last section is Part VIII – More Human than Human: Posthuman Ontologies. This final section examines the construction of the posthumanist frameworks with strong evidence through the use of SF examples, ontological influences and themes.

Reading Posthumanism: Contemporary Fiction and Critical Theory by Luke Hortle studies the recent theoretical debates about posthuman and posthumanism. Posthumanism is carried out by both literature and theory. In a conceptual framework it tries to explore the prominence of the posthuman in fiction. The central argument or theme of this thesis is the cultural and political work related to the posthuman characters and themes shown in the novels. It argues that novels about the posthuman theme interfere with theoretical projects within the Western cultural imagination. This thesis broadly investigates the persistent portrayal of the posthuman as a queer figure in the selected novels. This queer manifestation of the posthuman is aggressive in its commotion of any normal sense of the human future. The complexities and ambiguities underlying in cultural, traditional literary works with human as a central theme are the main issues related to the detailed textual analysis of the posthuman in contemporary literature particularly novels and film adaptations.

Conclusion:

Thus many researchers, philosophers, literary authors, literary critics and scholars of various domains of knowledge have reflected their prominent opinions about the emergence of Posthumanism as a reaction to humanism. The above review is an attempt to signify the dark future of humanity in the era of meticulous advancement of science and technology. The above review of philosophical works, literary works and research works stress upon the arguments such as ‘human versus non-human’, ‘natural versus artificial’, ‘alive versus non-alive’ and ‘biological versus mechanical’. This view predates most currents of Posthumanism which have developed over the late 20th century in somewhat diverse but complementary domains of thought and practice.

References :

1. Atwood, Margaret. *The Year of the Flood* United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing.2009
2. Badmington, Neil. *Posthumanism Readers in Cultural Criticism*: Palgrave, Macmillan.2000.
3. Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Pantheon.1971.
4. Pepperell, Robert. *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain* by Intellect Books, Bristol, U.K., 2003.
5. Hayles, N. K. *How we became Posthuman* .74th ed. University of Chicago Press.1999.
6. Soeiro, Ricardo Gil. *Vibrant Matter: Posthumanism as an Ethics of Radical Alterity*. *Revista 2i: Estudos de Identidade e Intermedialidade* 2, no. 2: 191–204.2020.
7. Arikani, Arda. *Posthumanism and Literary Theory*.
5th International Language, Culture and Literature Symposium. ISBN: 978-605-84052-6-4.2019.
8. Hortle, Luke. *Reading the Posthumanism: Contemporary Fiction and Critical Theory*.https://figshare.utas.edu.au/articles/thesis/Reading_the_posthuman_contemporary_fiction_and_critical_theory/23239505.2023.
9. Badminton, Neil. *Posthumanism: Alien Chic and the Other Within*. New York, USA: Routledge. 2004.
10. Badmington, Neil. *Posthumanism*. *Routledge Companion to Science and Literature*, edited by Bruce. Rossini Clarke, Manuela. New York, USA: Routledge.Bogue, Ronald. 2011.
11. Ahn, Sunyoung. *The Human Against Itself: Posthumanism in Contemporary Novels*. University of Minnesota.2015.
12. Frederick, Suresh. Herbert, J. *Speculating the Posthuman Scenario of Man vs. Machines in Kurt Vonnegut’s Player Piano*. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 22503-2511.2021.

13. Callus, Ivan. Herbrechter, Stefan. Rossini, Manuela. Introduction: Dis/Locating Posthumanism in European Literary and Critical Traditions. European Journal of English studies. Vol.18. Issue 2. European posthumanism.2014.
14. Hauskeller, Michael. Philbeck, Thomas Carbonell, Curtis D. Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television. Palgrave Macmillan Publications.2015.
15. Deleuze on Literature. London, UK: Routledge.Bogue, Ronald. 2007.

Webliography:

www.britannica.com

<https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle>

https://ardaarikan.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/2/9/10295113/posthuman_lit_theory.pdf

<https://en.wikipedia/wiki/multiculturalism>

<https://www.enotes.com/topics/multiculturalalalim>

<https://www.post-humannovel.com>