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Finding Humanity through Posthuman Ethics: A Comparative Study of *Frankenstein*, *The House of the Scorpion*, and *Enthiran*

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Abstract

Post-humanism decentralizes human existence and its supremacy. It embraces the human body in a 'non-human' way and produces the reality in an 'unreal' way. According to humanists, humans are supreme and powerful, but the post-humanists give importance to the inter-connectivity and interdependence of human and non-human entities, and by embracing the hybridity, posthuman ethics reconfigure the definition of a human being. This paper tries to explore the posthuman ethics with a comparative analysis of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), Nancy Farmer's The House of the Scorpion (2002) and the film Enthiran (2010), directed by S. Shankar. This study engages the posthumanist thinkers like Rosi Braidotti, Cary Wolfe and Donna Haraway. In this paper, we can find how a creature, a robot and a clone pose a challenge against the anthropocentric hierarchy and call for a posthuman ethical understanding. This paper also explores that humanity belongs not only to a biological body but also to compassion, ethical behavior, and shared vulnerability.

I. INTRODUCTION

The origins of human-centered thinking can be traced back to ancient Greece, where Protagoras, a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, rhetorical theorist known for his 'relativism' philosophy said that "Of all things the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not" and it later simply known as "Man is the Measure of All Things". But in the medieval period, the Christian theologians introduced the hierarchy between God, man and nature. First comes God, then man and lastly nature. This structure placed humanity over the natural world. On the

other hand, in the age of enlightenment (17th-18th century), thinkers like Immanuel Kant, René Descartes and others prioritized human autonomy, rationality and consciousness as central to human existence, which paved the way for modern humanism. In the 20th century, we can find a significant change that takes us away from humanism to post-humanism, from certainty to uncertainty. This idea of posthumanism is not a total rejection of Humanism but raises a question about human exceptionalism. Humanism has always been neglected even Jonathan Swift in his masterpiece *Gulliver's Travels* satirizes the

human. After his visit to Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and Japan, he finally goes to the land of Houyhnhnms and chooses the talking horses, not his fellow human beings, Yahoos and after returning to home, he spends several hours of a day with the horses in his stables. Post-humanism changes our so-called idea of humans. We always use the binary system, but Derrida removes the binary opposition through his 'Deconstruction' theory. Philosopher Donna Haraway argues that the fusion of human and technology will not physically enhance humanity, but will help us to see ourselves as interconnected rather than separating us from non-human beings. Braidotti said that machines and monsters are hybrids that break down the boundaries between human and non-human, natural bodies and the artificial things blurring the ontological categories and to rethink about the human in the posthuman era. This paper will examine how post-humanism advocates a transformation from an autonomous individuality to relationality, from rigidity to fluidity and from dominance to interdependence through characters like Chitti, the robot in *Enthiran*, the creature in *Frankenstein*, and Matt, the clone in *The House of the Scorpion*.

II. FRANKENSTEIN

Mary Shelley published her gothic novel *Frankenstein* in 1818. It is also science fiction, where we find a scientific creation created by Victor Frankenstein for his scientific experiment. Victor invented a monster and injected all human qualities into its robotic body. Its engines made it like a man of flesh and blood. All its emotions, passion, and anger are electrified by its input devices.

Frankenstein has achieved more fame and popularity in the 21st century than in the 19th century. In the age of post-humanism, we can easily relate to the techno-scientific production. This novel shows how a humanoid behaves like a man, with all emotions and expressions, and how much he seeks love and attention. We can also see this creature's other side of love because it becomes angry when its longings are not fulfilled. The monster's unfortunate condition is believed to be

comparable to Mary Shelley's life. She was very much devastated by the relationship between her parents. The death of her child and the suicidal case of her mother made her upset and lonely, like the monster, who also behaves like a madman when his creator neglects him and becomes ferocious when he feels lonely.

The creature is quite cautious about its appearance; it hides itself from the masses when people fear it. We know humans are the seekers of love and attention; they need a partner to fulfill their physical and emotional desires, but it looks strange when a humanoid demands a partner as a companion. Victor fears the spread of their generation and rejects the proposal. The monster becomes angry like a human being, and threatens his master as-"It is well. I go; but remember, I shall be with you on your wedding night." (206)

Narcissism can be seen as a central aspect of Humanism and we find it within the character of Victor Frankenstein. He invented his great scientific product, a monster, but he forsakes it within his laboratory, and when he returns, the beast flees. The monster seeks the love and attention from its creator, but he does not pay heed to it. In chapter 9, the monster expresses his grief by saying, "Remember that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous"(114). He wants a companion, but Victor refuses. On the other hand, we can see that Victor does not provide any name to his monster; instead, he calls it 'wretch', 'fiend', 'devil', 'demon', 'creature' and 'it', etc. The monster is a 'vile insect', 'abhorred monster', 'wretched devil', 'fiend', 'abhorred devil' to him.

Therefore, a significant conflict arises between human emotions and non-human physiology. Humans have a boundary wall; they are mortal, affected and exhausted by disease and death. On the other hand, there is no boundary in the post-human world; death and disease cannot touch them. The monster is completely filled with "human desires to

overcome humanity.” It does not want to live “within the boundaries of human.”

In *Frankenstein*, we find that Victor’s creation exemplifies the figure of the posthuman ‘Other’, a being constructed beyond natural embodiment whose rejection by human society exposes the ethical failure to recognize vulnerability, relationality, and compassion beyond the boundaries of biological humanity. At the end of this novel, we become confused, thinking about who the real monster is- Victor Frankenstein or the creature- because his treatment to his creature transforms him into a monster.

III. ENTHIRAN / ROBOT

‘*Enthiran*’ or ‘*Robot*’ is a Tamil language science-fiction film, written and directed by S. Shankar, released in 2010. This film shows the bonding between a machine and a human and its effect upon the anthropocentric world through the lens of post-humanism. The film mainly revolves around the central figure, Chitti. He is a robot with super advanced artificial intelligence, who teaches us about post-humanism and the significance of becoming a human. He wipes out the partition line between human and non-human and brings them under the same category, or on the other hand, we can say it enlists the non-human entities.

Vaseegaran invented his humanoid and made it attractive by giving it a physical appearance. He welcomes it with a song- “O naye insaan dharti pe aa...” (Maran & Shankar, 2010) “Oh new human, welcome to this world...in English”. This song emphasizes the hybridization (human & machine) of its character. It is his brainchild and the result of ten years of effort. He teaches it how to walk, smile, fight, dance and converse with people. This robot is Dr. Vaseegaran's doppelganger, which is why his mother named it Chitti. It becomes quite remarkable to think that a chip set of some programmes can make a machine into a man and become energetic with only two units of battery charging.

Humans are more ambitious, money-minded, selfish, and always keen on self-satisfaction. Chitti helps Sana pass the exam,

but she is caught by the professors and asked about Chitti. She denies knowing Chitti, which makes Chitti realize that humans always lie to save themselves, but machines cannot tell a lie.

The civilized human beings now do not agree about the existence of God. They lost their respect for their Creator, but Chitti is quite different. When Chitti is asked whether he believes there is God or not, he says that his creator is standing before him; that’s why he believes that God is present and his creator is his God; thus, Vaseegaran becomes his father and Sana his mother. Nevertheless, the twist is that Chitti loves Sana. Here we find Freud’s Oedipus complex in the character of Chitti. He finds his mate in the mother-like figure, Sana and regards his father as his enemy. Then comes his ‘mirror stage’ when Professor Bohra puts the red chip into his body and faces the mirror after his bodily transformation and recognizes his evil power. Thus, the character of Chitti has been humanized.

In the posthuman world, there is no gender discrimination. For this, Chitti is an expert in all fields, as he can cook different delicious items, dance in different styles, decorate the room, sing, and perform operations such as delivery as well. Naturally, in other films and novels, these typical works are not shown being done by any heroes, as our society has bound these types of works within the boundary of women’s sphere, but Chitti has broken down these typical social norms and throws a challenge to our male-dominated society.

Vaseegaran actually creates Chitti to give him to the Indian army. He brings him out to see how he behaves with the outer world of human beings, how he treats the external environment. Sometimes, he makes mistakes, and his master scolds and teaches him again. He takes the lesson of what is good or bad and how to deal with the human world. The most important scene that we find in this movie is when he saves a girl, Selvi, from fire, who was bathing at the time and was naked. Chitti goes and rescues her, but the girl says that she is naked. In reply, Chitti says that he is also naked, so no need to be worried about it. When the girl comes before the public and the mass

media, she escapes and dies in a car accident. Vaseegaran scolds Chitti and says, "She is naked," but Chitti replies, "But she is alive". From this it is clear that to a humanoid robot the life is most important than her nudity but we, the humans are much more concerned about the nudity, specially of a woman, not about her life and women cannot come nude to save herself though she is in an endangered condition because our so-called ideal society will be ashamed of it. So, once again, we find a vivid picture of how the non-human becomes human and the human becomes non-human.

The turning point of this movie appears when Professor Bohra denies Chitti in an evaluation, as Chitti wanted to stab his master, Vaseegaran. Professor Bohra argued that this humanoid robot lacks emotions and feelings; it does not know whether to kill or not, so it cannot help our soldiers. Now, Vaseegaran modifies Chitti's neural schema and enables it to express emotions, but it brings the opposite result into his life. Chitti falls in love with Sana when she kisses her iron cheeks, and this touch of soft lips creates a sensation for her. His love for Sana ultimately brings his destruction. Vaseegaran chops every part of the robot into pieces and throws those body parts in the chemical corporation's dumping yard. Chitti dreamed of marrying Sana and living together. Later in the movie, Chitti told Sana that he would produce artificial orgasm, and they would become the first parents of robot-sapiens, the child of a human and a robot. Love makes a human into a machine and a machine into a human. Professor Bohra transfers Chitti into a destructive nature by upgrading his software through a red chip. Now he goes against his master and murders several police officers. He creates several replicas of himself using Bohra's droids and occupied AIRD. At the end of the movie, Chitti goes to the former form and says adieu to this human world when the red chip is put out. Before it, he said that so many people among us are wandering with the red chip of anger, envy, greed, fury, etc. For machines, we can easily put them out, but for human beings, we cannot take them out.

We, the human beings, are always misbehaving with these humanoids and teaching them to tell lies, misbehave, and break

the rules. Chitti breaks the boundary between human and non-human and also raises the question mark regarding what it actually means to be a human being. It wants to reshape and redefine the concept of humanism in the light of technology and challenges the so-called concept of humanism and its ethics.

Donna Haraway in her most prominent book, *Communist Manifesto*, builds an ironic political myth in which 'animal and machine' simultaneously live together in this world. She argues about the interaction of human and non-human bodies: "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." (Haraway, 149)

The character of Chitti is quite like Victor Frankenstein's monster, and it's assumed that S. Shankar was very much influenced by Mary Shelly's novel *Frankenstein*. The relationship between humans and machines shows different socio-cultural suppression, problems, anxiety, psychological distress embedded within technological modernity.

IV. THE HOUSE OF THE SCORPION

Humans are the sovereign, extreme position seekers, greedy for power, and the most important thing they possess is the extreme level of desire to live long. All these things we find in *The House of the Scorpion* in the character of El Patrón. This desire for survival leads a man to do anything for his life. The character of El Patrón is quite like Michael Jackson. Both of them desire a long life. Michael Jackson took a minute process of scientific technology in his scheduled lifestyle to prolong his life. He wanted to live for 150 years, and it is believed that to live long, he slept in an oxygen chamber. He was always under the observation of some renowned doctors. His foods were always examined before he ate. He had twelve doctors who looked after him from head to toes. But on 25th June in 2009, he surrendered to death, the ultimate truth. He wanted to challenge death, but death challenged him back. He wanted to control his life, but life itself controlled him. In this science fiction, El Patron also made a clone for himself and wanted to harvest his clone's organs when

he learned that clones are not born, they are harvested, and he will use them when his organs are damaged.

El Patrón, the king of Opium, shares identical DNA with Matt, who was originally created as a clone for organ harvesting. However, Matt's journey reveals an internal conflict between his selfishness and morality. Matt understands Patron's cruelty and decides not to help him. His free will instigates him to flee from the Opium state, and finally, his free will overpowers the pre-plan of his master. Here we also find the clash between science and identity. The scientific progress can transplant and provide a life, but is unable to provide an identity. Patron's desires are fully fulfilled, but does he have any identity? He has completely lost his own identity and suffers from an identity crisis. Clones are constructed as biologically human yet socially othered, We have already seen in *Frankenstein* and in *Enthiran* that the exceptional and non-normal humans are not accepted in our society. Matt suffers from his identity because he always bears a tattoo on his body, reads as 'property of the Alacran Estate' that reinforce the marginal status.

Mr. El Patrón is very much self-centered and a power seeker. He does not want to lose his power. He wanted to sustain the slavery system even after his death. So, when he died from a heart attack, he had made the poison ready to drink by all of his family members on his funeral day, so that even after his death, everybody respects and serves him. However, after his death, the whole country goes under lockdown, and in this situation, only Matt's DNA signature can solve this problem because he is genetically identical to him. The activist, Esperanza, says- "One of them –the copy- has to be declared a un-person. But when the original dies, the copy takes his place." (367)

Matt embodies the dehumanising impact of biopolitical control as he is treated merely as a commodity. Although Matt and Patrón share their genetic blueprint, their perspectives to life are different from each other that predominates the idea that identity is not solely determined by biology but instead shaped by relational and environmental factors. Nancy Farmer says, the

ethical implications of technology completely dependent upon human choices. Ultimately, Matt's journey from a mere clone to compassionate leader offers a posthuman redefinition of humanity.

V. CONCLUSION

In the age of technological advancement, we are now living in the hyper-real world. It's a condition when we are really confused about distinguishing between the two fields- what is actually real and what seems to be real. The robot itself becomes the reality rather than depicting the reality. We feel a stronger connection with the hyper-real world than the real world, as the post-humanist robots are becoming more human than the actual human being and want to be liberated like other human beings. These post-human creatures are the simulation of reality that mingles the virtual reality with the physical reality, and we also want to engage with it without bothering about what the reality actually is. Now the concept of post-humanism has been changed, it has become broader than the former and also provided a broad and new idea to the meaning of life that leads to an entity, mingled with life and technology. Cary Wolfe in the book "*What is Posthumanism?*", argues about post-humanism that it is "a new theoretical model for biological, mechanical and communicational processes that removed the human and Homo sapiens from any particularly privileged position concerning matters of meaning, information, and cognition" (xii). From the above discussion, we can say that the techno world has its beauty, and we need the observation power to feel that. It criticizes the human-centered ideologies by saying that non-human entities can also have ethical thought and emotional connection. These works encourage a broader ethical perspective that values the posthuman as part of the moral community.

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