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A Study of Arun Joshi's The Strange Case of Billy Biswas as Posthuman Epistemology

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Abstract

The primary aim of this paper is to unfold the mystic strangeness of the character of Billy Biswas by foregrounding the fact that he is a perfect example of multi-subjective consciousness and posthuman identity. The narrative is proliferated with images, ideas, and actions that point to the explicit cues of the posthuman vision of the central character that aligns with the "ecophilosophy" of critical posthuman discourse, which postulates "a strong sense of collectivity, relationality, and hence community building" (Braidotti 49). Critical posthumanism as an advanced philosophical and methodological approach critically examines the themes/ideas/representations where life and matter, human and nonhuman, human and ecology, human and machine, and multiple life forms co-evolve and are "constituted by and constituted of" symbiogenetic connections (Nayar 11). The critical posthuman ideas offer creative and critical tools to dispel and displace the conventional humanist idea of human agency, which consolidates the political, cultural, and social dominance of man over other life forms, including animals and the earth. The novel serves as a typical example of and a literary representation of posthuman alertness, and its diverse themes and thoughts manifest a sense of multiple belongings and collective relationality. The paper attempts to establish the fact that the novel The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a posthuman representation of a world where all dialectical oppositions collapse and, therefore, fuse the nature-culture diversities and congeries into a monistic paradigm.

Keywords: Critical Posthumanism, De-territorialisation, Dis-identification, Primitive Force, Symbiogenesis

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Introduction

This paper inquisitively reconfigures and re-evaluates the strangeness of the central character in Arun Joshi's The Strange Case of Billy Biswas by examining it through the posthuman lens. The objective of the study is to employ some of the strategic and critical ideas of posthuman epistemology and new materialism to analyse the novel and its central character as the perfect example of posthuman ideals, along with the emergent ecophilosophy of new materialism. The paper engages with the critical and methodological insights of these new paradigms of creative and alternative thought and practice, which help in reconfiguring and interpreting the novel as a monistic assemblage of all life forms where any exclusive and transcendental position has been denied to human beings. Billy Biswas, the central character of the novel, ironically distances himself from any such primacy and relegates his position to a new level where humans do not flaunt any sole agentic force. The novel constitutes manifold events and acts of consciousness which can be assessed as posthuman subjectivity. The paper also postulates that any attempt to limit the character of Billy Biswas as a self-contained and self-constituting figure whose entire crisis is psychological and existential is unilateral and disoriented. A large number of assessments deal with either the dialectical themes to explain the identity issues or they rely on those humanist ideas that focus more on individual skepticism. The majority of these assessments have pinned down the character of Billy Biswas as an existential humanist whose primary and ultimate goal is his dire quest for his personal freedom and, therefore, in a sense, projecting his value of life above everything. Several academic works increasingly resonate with such recurrent themes of identity crisis, alienation, self-realisation, freedom, etc., which contradict his open and radical approach to life. Billy Biswas has been substantially projected as an individual dejectedly working to integrate his self-

understanding and autonomy. Such themes explicitly align with the tenets of existentialism. In the words of Thomas Fynn:

> In arguing that existentialism is a humanistic philosophy, Sartre means that it places the human being at the centre of its attention and the apex of its value hierarchy. . . he insists that the ultimate value, the goal of our endeavours, should be the fostering of the freedom of the individual, by which he means the enhancement of his or her concrete possibilities of choice. That creative freedom, he implies, should not be sacrificed to any 'higher value, whether it be the 'class' of the Marxists or the 'God' of the religious believers. (47)

Several critical responses lead us to understand that the character of Billy Biswas is emblematic of humanist and existential typology, and the novel operates at a dialectical dualism. The existentialist themes like alienation, soul searching, identity dilemma, spiritual discontent or estrangement, and quest for a meaningful world become the dominant explanations (Leena 348; Urmil 42; Sharma and Rajput 543; Vatsa and Gaur 64; Mendhe 324). Whereas, the dialectical themes like west versus east (Barche 97), civilised/modern vs. Uncivilised/primitive/ancestors, material vs. tribal, self vs. other, physical vs. spiritual, romantic vs. superficial etc. have been predominantly discussed under the category of nature-culture binary (Ganshyam 98; Faizan 56; Lakshmi and Reddy 95; Prasad 107; Mathur 425; Anapurna and Ram 165). These numerous works either evaluate the personal crisis of Billy Biswas or portray him as reeling under the dialectical duality. Any such attempt to read the character of Billy Biswas merely as an agent pursuing individual, psychological, or ontological aspirations risks diluting a deeper understanding of his radical position as a posthuman subject. Rather, Billy Biswas profoundly embodies his posthuman awareness of what

Braidotti calls "a colossal hybridization" — a vision of multiple belonging (65).

Conversely, the present paper arguably propounds the idea that his character embodies an anti-humanist position, situating him in a multi-subjective and multi-identity world or, in the posthuman terminology, an "embodied and embedded subjectivity" (Braidotti 82). The humanist notion, which renders primacy to the themes of self-identity or self-containment, is grounded in the erroneous presuppositions of classical humanism, which fosters the identical themes in existentialism also. M.A.R. Habib recapitulates and corroborates this fact by citing Lacan's explanation of self and its philosophical precedents:

> As Lacan states later in his paper, one such philosophy based on the pre-assumption that thought or consciousness forms a coherent unity is existentialism, which erringly grants the ego "the illusion of autonomy." (590)

Such humanist assumptions entrench the dialectics of self and other where such dialectical projection prioritises the importance of autonomous self and its identity goals at the cost of ignoring the other forms of existence. Therefore, the present paper proposes that Billy Biswas must be subject to a new explicatory discussion underpinned by the emerging critical ideas/theories like posthumanism and new materialism. The paper explicitly traces and identifies multiple positions and layers that affirm and assert the posthuman ontology that characterises the whole discourse of the novel. Billy Biswas, radically and critically, manifests the instantiation of posthuman perspectives like "embedded embodiment" and "a colossal hybridization" (Nayar 20; Braidotti 65). Such phrases conceptualise an essential spatial-temporal dimension enfolding multiple subjectivities and a vital network of human-animal-the earth. To represent such vital

interconnections, this paper relies on the critical thoughts of two posthuman thinkers and critics, Rosi Braidotti and Pramod K. Nayar, who have put forth the critical, philosophical, and methodological approach to foreground the posthuman perspectives. Both Rosi Braidotti's The Posthuman (2013) and Pramod Nayar's Posthumanism (2014) offer critical insights into posthuman epistemology. The paper employs the posthuman theoretical notions including "colossal hybridization," "symbiogenesis," "nomadize subjectivity," "dis-identification," "multi-species citizenship," "posthuman ethics," and matter with "agentic capacities" etc. (Braidotti 49, 54, 65, 190; Nayar 67, 171; Coole and Frost 9).

Posthuman Epistemology

Posthuman investigations critically and strategically argue for displacing and rejecting the post-Cartesian and modern philosophical idea of human centrality as the only pivotal agency that presupposes its transcendental character over non-humans to "control and configure the passive nature of the matter" (Coole and Frost 8). Modern philosophical tendencies emerging from the European Enlightenment empowered the human as the sole agent, flaunting the exclusive capabilities of being "rational, self-aware, free and self moving" who strategically normalises and exploits matter in an unprecedented way (Coole and Frost 8). Rosi Braidotti finds the entire European "civilizational model" rests upon the discriminatory "cultural standards" which negatively fosters dialectical oppositions to forge racial and gender differences to privilege white male supremacy. She finds posthumanism as a radical approach to render a more positive and emergent response to the modern philosophy that enthrones the human, particularly male, white and able-bodied as the universal agents (13, 24). Braidotti calls her posthuman vision and writings a critical and constructive defiance determined to impair and dislodge the destructive notions of selfish individualism and male exclusivity privileged to the western

male anthropos. Such privilege positions were already boldly challenged in the feminist critiques for such male authoritarianism (77). Rosi Braidotti insists on re-looking at the dominant high humanistic principles that have been a corollary of Europeanised anthropos that ordain the "boundless capacity of humans to pursue their individual and collective perfectibility" (13). Such self determined assurance entails the unchallenged and unquestioned expansion of their biological, cultural, and moral capabilities which further consolidate the humanist notion of human-centric teleology driven by human reason. Rosi Braidotti argues that the humanist ideals solely stand for self-possessed hegemony, self-regulating and autonomous reason which easily transfers its teleological and ontological subjectivity into the norms of culture and its standards (13). She explicitly explains this ontological rigidity as an ingrained attitude of humanism: "Humanism historically developed into a civilizational model, which shaped a certain idea of Europe as coinciding with the universalizing powers of self reflexive reason." (13)

Such self-reflexive reason arguably transcends itself as a "distinctive" and universal character which coincides with "Europe as universal consciousness" (Braidotti 15). The humanist ideal of self-autonomy, over rationality and morality becomes two supplementary coordinates which dismiss any scope of being severed from humanist orthodoxy. She puts forth this European anthropos as a flagship notion which vehemently propagates a hegemonic binary of self and other prompting serious conflicts of identity and difference (15). The otherness stands in stark contrast to the subjectivity consisting of self ordained consciousness, universal rationality and ideal ethical standards which treat the notion of difference as essentially lower, "inferior" or as in the words of Pramod K. Nayar, "less than human" (15, 23). Rather, the notion of difference/otherness was seamlessly transitioned into imperialised, racialised, marginalised and "naturalized" binaries reflected through the

humanist paradigm of "ableism" and "speciesism" (Braidotti 15; Nayar 13–14). Rosi Braidotti sternly makes a valid point:

> We are all humans, but some of us are just more mortal than others. Because their history in Europe and elsewhere has been of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, these 'others' raise issues of power and exclusion. We need more ethical accountability in dealing with the legacy of Humanism. (15)

The phrase "ethical accountability" suggests a need to rethink and reformulate the humanist ideals towards "an ethical appreciation of all bodies," which can restore a multi-dimensional world with "a colossal hybridization" (Braidotti 15, 71, 65). Pramod Nayar likewise asserts the need to reconsider and renew the old paradigm of exclusivity of universal rationality and specific capacities with ethical grounding and responsibility. Nayar's posthuman vision leads to blur the borders among human, animal, machines, and living and non-living matter. Posthumanism, as Nayar articulates, foregrounds the vital conceptualisation dissipating any "ontological liminality" that "situates the human above the various other life forms" (12–13). The idea of "ontological liminality" as discussed in the posthuman discourse deals with the problems of "categorizing" and assigning the label of "demonization" to those forms of otherness which through their different functions and environment look "diverse" and "monstrous" (114–15). Nayar points out the deep "human anxiety" of fear and insecurity reflected through the literary and aesthetic expressions about those non-human features which are shown through the divergent figures of "monsters", human-animal hybrids, impaired or mutated figures and racially different life forms (114). These physiologically and environmentally different life forms which are structured as "other" can be "categorized" as "aboriginals," "savages," "disabled bodies," including tribals, minorities and so on (Nayar 114–15). Since such human and

animal figures are entrenched with the marks of "diverse" functionality and features, they are predisposed to severe violence, dominance, governance, exploitation and control (Nayar 115). Since they accrue such liminality between human and non-human categories, they are subject to the whims of human imagination and representation. Braidotti also finds such human whim as exclusionary and a process of "metaphorization" which she uses particularly in the representation of animals/others measured through the moral binaries (69). Thus, Posthumanism is, as Nayar emphasises, a "radical reworking of humanism" where a new existential and discursive grounding prevails with new congeries of human-nature and human-machine hybridisation (13). Another important posthumanist perspective, which is ingrained in the above characteristics of posthumanism, is the ethical tones of empathy and care. Our "shared mortality and vulnerability" demands our greater response of mutual respect and dignity of life (Nayar 21). Such congeries do not form mere mechanical assemblage or enhancement of life forms; rather, they serve, as Rosi Braidotti points out, "as a democratic move that promotes a kind of ontological pacifism" (86). She further elaborates it as an acceptable redressal wherein these "monistic premises" augment a more compassionate aspect of subjectivity (56, 86).

Posthuman Concepts and Thoughts in the Novel

Some of the posthuman underpinnings are crucial to evaluate the strange case of Billy Biswas, whose character and life events assimilate and represent posthuman values. The posthuman perspectives such as symbiogenesis, human-ecological synthesis, or, as Rosi Braidotti puts it, "deterritorializing" and "becoming the earth," are connected with these, and the "politics of response and responsibility," which entail the ethics of empathy, selflessness, and mutual dignity (Braidotti 66; Nayar 48). Symbiogenesis is a biological concept wherein the biological studies have traced the human origin of life or the

origin of the human biological cell in association with "symbiotic evolution of life" (Nayar 62). Referring to the recent development in cell theory, biologists like Lynn Margulis and Marcello Barbieri, as quoted by Nayar, propose that the origin of complex life forms on the earth has a common origin. Lynn Margulis proposes that "the mitochondria, an oxygen respiration organelle in eukaryotic cells, were "a free-living" bacterium whose functions evolved symbiotically in various eukaryotic cells, which further led to the evolution of complex life forms" (Nayar 62). The genetic material with its genotype and the ribotype processes is transformed into proteins, and is the foundational biological setup common to all eukaryotic cells of all living organisms (Nayar 63). Therefore, having this shared genetic origin, these living organisms were "networks" of relational interactions (Nayar 63). They became autopoetic in later stages, where they developed their independent phenotype. Symbiogenesis is the co-evolution of all life forms and, as Nayar extrapolates this idea from S. Kauffman, the "genome is seen to have evolved such that it can interact with the biotic components of its environment" (Nayar 64). Nayar finds this hybridisation to be an important feature of posthuman realisation:

> (Human is. . .) The consequence of hybridization and exchange of material and immaterial data, such as in the genetic code, across species, skin, and function of animals, plants, and humans. The human in this critical posthuman outlook is a 'dynamic hybrid' of 'ontologically different elements' (Jones 2006:572) (Nayar 20–21).

Critical posthumanism sees the human as a congeries, multi-species in origin and whose very survival is founded on symbiotic relations with numerous forms of life on the earth. Critical posthumanism sees co-evolution, symbiosis, and feedback responses as the determining conditions rather than

autonomy, competition, and self-containment of the human (Nayar 20). Rosi Braidotti also sheds light on the posthuman condition of inclusivity and "vitalist materialism" (56). She finds it more essential to reject any unitary and exclusive categories of anthropos which have been working to create boundaries of identities based on dualistic categories comprising intrinsic and extrinsic polarities (56). She cogently formulates the Spinozian concept of monistic world where formalising any distinction based on "matter, the world and the humans" is fatally threatening (56). Rosi Braidotti proposes repositioning and reconfiguring the human attempts which must reflect the "post anthropocentric shift" towards a new human-animal and geo-sensitive horizon (81). Posthumanism asserts that the earth is "a dynamic and sustainable notion of vitalist, self-organizing materialists" (Braidotti 81). This notion of the earth reinforces the fact that human subjectivity is not an effect of its isolated "transcendental reason", rather it co-processes with the other life forms which are the essential "assemblage" of "non-human agents" (Braidotti 82). The earth is a multispecies planetary assemblage which unhinges, as Rosi Braidotti points out, all dialectical differences and posits "immanence of relations" (81, 82). The concept of "zoe egalitarianism" is not distinct and separable from the concept of becoming the earth. The congeries of human-animal-the earth undergo the process of "deterritorialization" or "dis-identification" which will reinforce the subversion of any hierarchical order or ranking among the continuum of human-animal-nature (Braidotti 71, 89, 88, 92). This egalitarian approach will dissipate any attempt of dominance of Man (Braidotti 88). She augurs that the "deterritorialization" will pave the way for renewed and reimagined landscapes and defamiliarise the normative values upheld by the dominant institutions operating with the "dialectics" of difference and otherness (88). The concepts of "defamiliarisation" and "deterritorialization" are the key notions of posthuman sensibility (Braidotti 89, 88). As a posthuman

strategy, both the concepts are the radical repositioning of a posthuman subject who critically distances and abandons the human "arrogance" and "transcendental exceptionalism" which anthropocentric notions have infused into Man through the established habits of his thoughts and representation of the other (86). These concepts reinforce a critical culture of challenging and displacing anthropocentric ideals of "dialectical schemes of opposition" and "established dualism" hinged through the humanist notions of Western ideologies of white men and their habitual thought systems which promote differences and demarcations based on gender, race and environment (71). Defamiliarisation and deterritorialisation will be conceptual tools to bridge the gaps caused by such violent divisions. Braidotti cogently explains:

> The conceptual frame of reference I have adopted for the method of de-familiarization is monism. It implies the open-ended, inter-relational, multi-sexed, and trans-species flow of becoming through interaction with others. (89)

The third theoretical underpinning is the ethical responsibility which identifies "responsibility toward all forms of life, toward difference" (Nayar 48). It promotes the sense of embedded empathy. Since all life forms share their origin and carry "messy, intertwined histories," they carry "imitative responses conditioned through embeddedness in a community of several species" (Nayar 47–49). The imitative responses refer to the biological foundations wherein the recently discovered nature of "mirror neuron" in the primates proposes the mutual empathic and understanding brain functions (Nayar 60). Sharing vulnerability and mortality will further transform our understanding of mutual care and the ethics of empathy. In a different rephrasing, Rosi Braidotti points out that the empathetic values set the more "significant goals" for the posthuman subject (78). Genetic development and

symbiogenesis confirm the development of innate codes of emotional communication and inbuilt moral goodness among all human and non-human categories (Braidotti 78). Diana Coole and Samantha Frost also reject any such sole privilege to "human intelligence," whereas human intelligence should not be taken into account without seeing it within the "spectrum of vital materialization" (21).

Posthuman Subjectivity in the Novel

Billy Biswas, the chief protagonist, while answering a question about his choice of living in Harlem, a place of black people, defiantly says that he finds this place to be "the most human place" and "white America" for him was "much too civilized" (Joshi 9). Billy Biswas defiantly diminishes any centring of "white America," which is quintessentially a paradigm of the humanist ideal of perfect or universal man. Nayar explicitly identifies such "whiteness" as the typical universal standard which has always been prioritised over gender, differently abled bodies, ethnic groups, other races, etc. (Nayar 23). He writes:

> Critical Humanism treats humanism as a politically significant philosophy because it enabled Europeans, upper classes, professionals (like medical doctors or psychiatrists) to categorize individuals as inhuman or sub-human and confine them or deny them rights. (23–24)

Identifying Harlem as the "most human place" is Billy's defiant rejection of humanist ideals promulgating a "civilizational model", which Rosi Braidotti points out, is the inherent feature of European enlightenment eliciting "anthropocentric, gendered, and racialized" model which upholds "aesthetic and moral ideals based on white, masculine, heterosexual European civilization" (13, 68). Though Billy Biswas belongs to an affluent class in India, he decides to live in a place which ontologically is polemical to the binaries of black/white, slave/master, inferior

race/superior race. Harlem turned out to be an optimal place with exclusive and humanised coexistence. While Billy and the narrator share the apartment in the slums of Harlem, the intrigued narrator chanced upon asking about Billy's passion for anthropology, which was his favourite academic subject for his thesis and his real life. He says that all he wants "to do in life is to visit the places they describe, meet the people who live there, find out the aboriginals of the world" (Joshi 13). The most crucial phrase of this answer is to "find out the aboriginal of the world," which in fact implies his greatest desire to familiarise his life with the oldest or the divergent civilisations still living in the oldest places of the earth (Joshi 13). He is nowhere specifically pointing out that such expeditions are to be confined to India only. The subsequent chapters introduce Billy Biswas' sudden disappearance from modern civilisation into the remote places of the earth among the human and non-human inhabitants. Such intended absorption in the wilderness with the tribal human beings and non-human projects the posthuman sensitivity of Billy Biswas, and such an act is "enmeshed in an environment" whereby Billy Biswas abandons all his European rationality, along with racial or gendered (his self-masculinity) bias (Nayar 141). This all of a sudden disappearance was attributed to a kind of personalised and psychological force—a theory explained and supported by Tuula, a European friend of Billy Biswas and a psychiatrist in an American hospital. She calls it Billy's "great force, urKraft, a… a primitive force" (Joshi 22). However, later on, the subsequent chapters unravel that his personalised force was no less than his posthuman urge for a "nomadic subjectivity" or an attempt to eliminate the traces of personalised "self" to redraw the territories with no boundaries which longs to integrate with "the aboriginals of the world" (Braidotti 49; Joshi 13).

This urge of "primitive force" to live among "the aboriginals of the world" has significant posthuman connotations and can be interpreted in the posthuman concept of symbiogenesis. Billy's

desire is not confined to the "aboriginals" of India. Rather, his vision is more enlarged and composite with the "geo-centred perspective," a phrase Braidotti uses for all posthuman voices (81). Billy's posthuman vision is not confined to living and marrying a tribal woman and cohabiting with the community. His vision, or to say, his "primitive force" is enforcing him to identify the entire wide gamut of "aboriginals" which include humans, nonhumans, and matter. Such a desire for "aboriginals" analogically corresponds with the concept of symbiogenesis. In fact, such a "primitive force" is a universal force that tempts all human beings to unite with the roots (origin of symbiogenesis). Its validity and legitimacy can be further corroborated by juxtaposing it with two other divergent opinions. The first logical positioning comes from the Freudian notion of 'death instinct', an important somatic processing in human psychology:

> We may suppose that the final aim of the destructive instinct is to reduce living things to an inorganic state. For this reason, we also call it the death instinct. If we suppose that living things appeared later than inanimate objects and arose from them, then the death instinct agrees with the formula that we have stated, to the effect that instincts tend towards a return to an earlier state. (Freud 6)

Freudian theory of the wistfulness towards the "return to an earlier state" (6), which is the inorganic state, is tangent with the posthuman notion of organic complexity, where even the inorganic state is an inalienable constitution of human identity. As Pramod K. Nayar points out, this naturalised hybridisation, which had been theorised in the biological investigations as "symbiogenesis":

> If humanism posited a self-contained, exclusive and bounded human, critical

> posthumanism recontextualises the human into its setting (both organic and inorganic), and locates the human structure, functions and form as the result of a co-evolution with other life forms. (21)

Since both organic and inorganic carry the same genetic history and origin, and Freud too connects this instinctual inevitability with the primitive state, which is none other than the primeval inorganic state, or in a more open phrase, is the planetary dimension where all life forms shared their growth. Billy's idea of visiting and meeting the" aboriginals" is not merely a human connection. Rather, it stands for wider human psychological-ecological complexity. Such a human-ecological complexity is a posthuman condition.

The primitive force finally dislodges Billy from this inclusive and unitary "white America" to a new planetary dimension, which later turned out to be his original home stay - the Maikala Hills (Joshi 9). The hills range across the dense saal jungle covering the highest peaks. This "aboriginal" wild state is just not a neutral ecological setting where Billy makes his personalised entry to its life. The notion of "white America" is also metaphorically extended to Billy Biswas' stay in India after completing his doctorate from Columbia University. He was constantly reeling under his agitated mindset after his direct interaction with people like his father, who had donned high administrative and juridical caps and always undermined Billy's idea of life. His wife, too, became a disappointment. Both always advocated and symbolised a contemporary world which is entirely based on the westernised sense of life, unitary and dialectically different. This contemporary world of his father and wife is fully engrossed with "the making and spending of money" (Joshi 87). This contemporary world is a typical Western model that stands on the pillar of exclusionary anthropocentric ideals, contaminating human identity. Billy in

one of his letters to Tuula explains his dismissal of such human identity:

> I see a roomful of finely dressed men and women seated on downy sofas, and while I am looking at them under my very nose they turn into a kennel of dogs yawning (their large teeth showing) or snuggling against each other or holding whisky glasses in their furred paws. (Joshi 87)

Billy identifies such "finely dressed men and women" as remnants of European rationality (Billy's father was "the Indian ambassador to a European country" and in a posthuman sense, it is a serious cause of the "dialectics of otherness" (Joshi 11; Braidotti 68). The image of "dogs yawning or snuggling against each other or holding whisky glasses in their furred paws" explicitly informs us of the new emerging class of capitalist and corporate groups who are directly responsible for controlling and governing the socio-cultural and institutional categories. Billy sternly asserts:

> What need would there be of psychiatrists, research foundations, learned societies, great scholars, scientists, ministerial advisers, ambassadors, generals, had the world not initially been hung on the peg of money? (Joshi 87)

Critical posthumanism too sternly stands out against the "advanced capitalism," engendering unrelenting threat and oppression against vulnerable life forms, including humans of different races and classes, animals, and the planet (Braidotti 41). Billy's insinuation of the "finely dressed men and women" tends to show the effect of massive homogenising of the Indian elite class, which is constantly turning into a consumerist class. The metaphor of "whiskey glasses in their furred paws" speaks out about the proliferation of profiteering and individualism

"hung on the peg of money" (Joshi 87). The metaphor of "dogs" for all such people is an ironic distancing and dismissal of them from the tribal people's approach to collective social life, which stands contrary to the alienating idea of individualism, consumerism, and ideological conformism. Rosi Braidotti points out how the capitalist system, through its consumer fetish, creates individualism which effectively aggravates "uniformity and conformism to the dominant ideology" (61).

Billy Biswas emerges as a vocal critic of any attempt to dehumanise other people; or, in posthuman terms, he rejects "the structures of exclusion" (Nayar 115). Any human attempt that projects any ontological liminality is contrary to Billy's notions of life. He has evolved a posthuman sensitivity towards fellow people who are generally treated as "infrahuman" or "less than human" based on their race or ethnicity (Nayar 14, 23). His posthuman sensitivity is evoked when he finds that one local ethnic group called "Banjaras," which literally stands for nomadic people, were called "thieves" and "whores" by Meena Biswas' young cousins who had become partial Americans (they cherish "American pop record") (Joshi 55). Billy, without any hesitation, dismisses any such racialised attempt by literally abusing them and calling them "bourgeois prig" (Joshi 55). Billy's condemnation of them as condescending for treating others as inferior or abnormal reasserts his posthuman subjectivity which demolishes the structures of "categorizing" and "metaphorizing" (Nayar 115; Braidotti 69). Billy's wilful and stringent snub against this racial chauvinism reinforces his posthuman subjectivity which in fact stands for his defamiliarising act. Such social hierarchical valorisation against the "Banjaras" was dismantled at least at the personal level of Billy. This overreach can be taken as a progressive step towards establishing a sense of "panhumanity" and "dis-identification" (Braidotti 40; 88). Braidotti lucidly explains the characteristics of this idea of "panhumanity":

> This indicates a global sense of interconnection among all humans, but also between the human and the non-human environment, including the urban, social, and political, which creates a web of intricate interdependencies. (40)

Later on, after his prolonged disappearance from the social map of city life, he was found among the "aboriginals" of "Maikala Hills," which include humans, nonhumans, and the raw nature. This transformation into a renewed identity is the posthuman dynamics of "defamiliarization" and "deterritorialization" (Braidotti 88–89). His dynamic merging with the different others enhances him to a new level – a priest, a healer, and a community leader who mediates between interdependent geographical zones of town and wilderness. This new repositioning is emblematic of a life "embedded" with wholeness and integrity. Critical posthuman discourse defines it as a model for "community building and empowerment" and "embedded embodiment" by shunning "ontological liminality" (Braidotti 54; Nayar 20, 12).

Billy Biswas' posthuman approach cannot be merely limited to his sensitivity towards other human beings marginalised and dispossessed of any dignity. Rather, his scheme of posthuman thinking widens to include all stakeholders apart from humans. The other life forms, in terms of animals, wilderness, and the earth, have been set in the symbolic and folkloric backdrop. The notion of disparate forms of life and their disengaged connections on the earth is entirely dumped. The folkloric series entails the mutual participation of all stakeholders, where the nature-culture bifurcation dissipates completely. Billy's re-emergence presents a new monistic world of multi-agential subjects. Superficially, it seems that Billy was keener to join the cultic practices of the tribal group that organises frequent wild dancing, singing, drumming, and orgies. Had it been the case, he would have exited from the dense forest long ago. Any attempt

to associate Billy's sexual liaison with Bilasia, a tribal woman, would end in a flimsy perception of his entire approach to community life, which is based on inclusivity and the ritualistic tradition of celebrating human-nature symbiosis. Had it been a merely erotic urge, he would have come back to his city life as he used to come back from Bombay, where he had an extramarital affair with a young girl, Rima Kaul. It was more complex and deeper. The effort here is to establish the fact that his genetic calling was so overpowering that he was forced to accept the fact that the human genetic apparatus has its impulsive desire to reintegrate the inner world with the outside world, as the biological theories like "symbiogenesis" declare. Symbiogenesis defines the origin of life forms and their evolution as "regulated not only from 'below' (i.e., from our genome), but also from 'above' (from the environment)" (Nayar 65). Taking further cues from immunological studies, Nayar lucidly postulates the posthuman notion that the human is not a "bounded, coherent and autonomous self" (Nayar 67). Immunological studies consolidate the fact that "Identity therefore is not based on the substance (the material, presumably bound) of the organism, but on its continuity with the world outside" (Nayar 66).

Such an idea of posthuman consciousness is very much deep-seated in the character of Billy Biswas. Billy, through his anthropological studies, probably has learnt the tenable facts of new sciences that human psychology is not a self-contained ego. All his regular expeditions and field work in the Maikala hills and beyond do not happen merely for any academic excellence. His sexual urge for Bilasia underpins his passionate side that turned out to be a community source to enter this enlarged and interactive world of Nature. Billy loses all reason in his city life when he ultimately visualises the actuality of his primitive (genetic) force. He knows it well that all such interaction is not delusional; rather, it apprises him of his innate characteristics based on common intelligence and empathy. This common

intelligence is not based on any transcendental "reason" which humans have projected as the exclusive foundation of their self-identity, rather this form of intelligence (emotions and moral nature) is genetically imbued and networked with the "informational codes" of others to interact in "multiple ways with the environment (Braidotti 60):

> The moon was nearly full as today. Its light was everywhere, drenching the tree-tops, softening the stone, bathing the bush with mystery. From where I sat, I could see the stream, its water shining like so much mercury. The dry bed beyond, as far as I could see, was empty and nearly purple. The line of the trees that marked the farther end of the river bed was silent and yet terribly alive, as these trees have a way of coming alive at night. They all seemed to be waiting and watching and staring at me. It was as though I was not Bimal Biswas, graduate of Columbia, the only son of a Supreme Court Judge, husband of Meena Biswas, and father of a handsome child; it was as though I were not all this but the first man on earth facing the earth's first night. A furry little animal came out of a bush and sitting on its hind legs stared at me full in the face. Its eyes were friendly and fearless. "Come", it said. 'Come to our primitive world that will sooner or later overcome the works of man. Come. We have waited for you. (Joshi 110-111)

The subsequent reading proves even more revelatory: the collective voice of nature becomes a cosmic echo, which is, of course, translatable into the posthuman concept of "vitalist materialism" that "enfolds within the subject as the internalised score of cosmic vibration" (Braidotti 55–56). Of course, at the individual level, such wistfulness can be seen as the Freudian idea of human wistfulness to mingle back with the primitive inorganic state. In posthuman thinking, it is what Rosi Braidotti

calls “the recognition of trans species solidarity on the basis of our being environmentally based, that is to say embodied, embedded and in symbiosis with other species” (67). This transformative intelligence of Billy Biswas is based on his acceptance of mutual, co-evolved, and equally valid intelligence of all kinds of life forms. From the posthuman vision, he develops his network of intelligence with the intelligence of nonhuman entities. Rosi Braidotti affirmatively points out that intelligence is not an exclusive agency of human beings. In fact, the living matter inherits its own “bars of information” or “informational codes” (Braidotti 60). Diana Coole and Samantha Frost also acknowledge the fact that the tendency to mark the matter as inert or in the “state of equilibrium” is untenable (13). Any such tendency is based on the conventional ideas of classical physics and philosophy, which failed to recognise the matter as “exhibiting immanently self-organizing properties, subtended by an intricate filigree of relationships” (Coole and Frost 13).

Another important perspective that features in Billy’s posthuman vision is his sensitivity and sensibility of mutual sharing and coevolving. Such an inclusive approach of Billy definitely turns him into a posthuman subject, and according to Rosi Braidotti, this is the realisation of “the ethics of becoming” (49). The accrual of multi-subjective sensibility turns him out to be more ethical, empathetic, caring, and critical. Of course, his new interconnections do not intervene in his caring approach to the world outside. His merging with the new life forms has enhanced his capacity and agency, which is the direct result of the network he has found. He, with his enhanced intelligence, cures the incurable migraine of Romi Sahai’s wife, who ultimately proved fatal for his life, as she reveals his presence to the world, which Billy had abandoned. It is pertinent to note that the new agential capacities were not imminent to him before he became aware of his enlarged vision. Numerous instances corroborate the fact that he is now fully interspersed with a new

creative model based on "collectivity" and "community building" (Braidotti 49). Moreover, his perfect bonding and awareness with the local tribes, animals, ecology, and planetary objects make him a posthuman "nomadic" subject (Braidotti 49). The "nomadic subjectivity" or his understanding of "deterritorialization" ensures his dismissal of all kinds of dialectical oppositions and self-interested vision (Braidotti 89). His new belief in the parallel trans individuality recurs throughout his meeting with the tribal people, animals, and ecological forms. He "defamiliarizes" himself with the established codes of life and habits of discrimination. He critically takes an opposing stand against all forms of institutions that focus more on differences and maintaining dialectical positions in these differences. He severs his ties with the world, which covets material growth and is based on the notion of civilian supremacy over everything. The world, which is based on dualisms like nature and culture, self and other, civilised and tribal, rational and irrational etc., stands on multiple territories and boundaries, prompting disengagement from institutional discrimination and capitalist profiteering. Billy dismantles any such fixed boundary or territory that creates an inclusive world of identical people. Billy turns down the cultural identity of his class and social background and becomes a "nomadic" subject, and such an identity is a combination of "non-unitary subjectivity with ethical accountability by foregrounding the ontological role played by relationality (Braidotti 93). Any such conscious and creative paradigm stands for the Deleuzian idea (as Braidotti finds it a better posthuman model) of "deterritorialization" and "dis-identification" (Braidotti 88–89). He distances himself from the existing world, which maintains differences based on race, sex, and nature. He breaks away from the world, which creates binaries and opposition, and joins a primitive world that undoes any kind of dualism and assembles into the monistic earth.

Billy also assumes a very responsible role of a folkloric priest, he turns out to be an important link not only with the world flaunting power through local government and the armed forces, but also a critical interlink among the divergent congeries like stars, Chandtola hill, the Moon, and the people there. His astronomical intelligence predicts the rain forecast, which assures his enhanced capacity and his networked subjectivity. Once, he also sent away a tiger that had caused fear among the people. His telepathic mediation resolves all such man-animal conflict. He has acquired an understanding of a "transversal entity" which encompasses the human, our genetic neighbours, the animals and the earth as a whole" (Braidotti 82). Nayar similarly formulates this as "a network of connections, exchanges, linkages, and crossings with all forms of life" (14). His critical stance is an attempt to "dis-identify and disengage from the closed circuits of humanist anthropology. His posthuman intelligence finds out that the folkloric culture of the tribal people is not a mere cultic and collective orgy of the community. Rather, it is creative human-nature unification through the participation of all. Bakhtin elaborately explains the folkloric phenomenon as the collective coordination of all members of the earth:

> The time attracts into its orbit, it will not permit any unmoving or static setting. All objects—the sun, the stars, the earth, the sea, and so forth – are present to man not as objects of individual perception ("poetic perception") nor as objects of casual daydreaming, but exclusively as part of the collective process of labor and the battle against nature. (209)

Later in the end, when Billy dies unnaturally and untimely, the entire congeries of people, land, animals, and ecology fall apart. The narrator notices, "After Billy's death, there was a rumour that Chandtola (a moonlit hill) had ceased to glow" (Joshi 222). He also failed to find out the triangle of stars whose

knowledge Billy had shared with him. The narrator burns his fingers with a cheroot while he searches "one side of the silvery horizon, but there was no sign of the triangle of stars that I was looking for" (Joshi 222). Billy Biswas was the conduit among such multi-species and subjectivities.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, both the novel and the character of Billy Biswas, have a critical message. When Billy was gunned down, his last words were "you bastards" (Joshi 213). He swears at the gunman who had pierced him with a bullet. Notably, his vocative stands for plural. Of course, the sense implies his resentment and disappointment against all, including his parents and wife. However, in a somewhat philosophical sense, the ending implies that people who have disengaged themselves from the true link of life and its divergent but embedded congeries are not true and legitimate offspring of the earth. They have severed their naturalised ties with their "genetic sources" and estranged their authentic link with the "multispecies origins and multispecies evolutions" (Nayar 68). Billy Biswas had understood that mere scientific insights from anthropology would not lead him to his transversal goals. He was well aware of the fact that anthropology has to be combined and processed with "cosmology" for the "holistic approach" to life within the enlarged network of human-animal-the earth (Braidotti 48). One cannot approach such an inclusive assembly of life forms, without eschewing one's individualism. Therefore, this paper intends to establish the fact by undermining the idea of Billy's individualised life goals. Billy Biswas's short life is a radical attempt to position himself as the non-unitary, self-distributing and luminal to other stakeholders of the earth. He definitely rejects the culture-nature bifurcation where cultural coordinates take precedence and undervalue the idea of difference originating from others.

In a nutshell, the paper has attempted to reassess Billy Biswas as a significant posthuman voice. He radically shifts away from the binaries of nature and culture, civilised and tribal, city and wilderness, and so forth. He ensures at his individual level that nature and culture should intersperse and become non-exclusionary and non-imperial domains. Billy's inherent affinity with ecology and its human and non-human characters firmly positions him as a paragon of the posthuman subject.

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