

Post-humanistic Future and Society 6.0 in Indian Science Fiction Literature: A study of S. B. Divya's Machinehood and Samit Basu's The City Inside

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between posthumanism and Society 6.0 in the context of the contemporary Indian English science fiction. In the era of Society 6.0, AI, biotechnology, and digital ecosystems are transforming the concept of identity, labour, and ethics in the human-machine symbiosis. This study attempts to critically discuss the educational texts on posthumanism philosophy of S.B. Divya's Machinehood and Samit Basu's The City Inside in the context of these techno-social changes. In Machinehood, the authors talk about the merging of biotechnology into the human body and the ethical issues that AI humans must confront when attempting to be recognised, and The City Inside looks at algorithmic monitoring, digital labour, and scattered virtual subjectivities. They all discuss themes of drug abuse, surveillance capitalism and the gig economy, in addition to having a more general discussion of humanity in an era of rapid technological advancement. The study claims that Indian science fiction provides a different set of lenses through which to view the posthuman future on a global scale through the lens of Society 6.0.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Artificial Intelligence, Gig Economy, Surveillance Capitalism, Algorithm monitoring

Background

The Japanese government had officially announced 'Society 5.0', a 'super-smart society', in its 5th Science and Technology Basic Plan (2016) in which cyberspace and physical space fully merge by incorporating the use of AI, IoT, robotics and biotechnology. Unlike the previous industrial societies (hunting, agriculture, industry and information), Society 5.0 was seen as a human-centred socio-technical era aimed at solving complex problems such as ageing society, climate change and sustainable development. As a growth strategy, the Japanese Business Federation (Keidanren) advocated for the concept of Society 5.0 – big data, innovation ecosystems and inter-sector digitalisation (Keidanren, 2018). It has been placed in the international arena as a model of development "for people" (Deguchi et al., 2020).

The Japanese government's 2016 white paper on Society 5.0 says that it is a society where "cyberspace and physical space are connected and where the society, through this connection, brings economic development and social problem solutions to balance" (Government of Japan, 2016, p. 3). In other words, Society 5.0 is a society that is integrated through digitisation, with the ultimate goal of maximising human life through the use of big data, robotics and artificial intelligence. But the idea is techno-utopian, since it regards the integration of digital as a natural process leading to equality, which has been noted by scholars (Harayama, 2017). Therefore, the concept of Society 6.0 has been analyzed here in the light of the idea of shift from human-centered to posthuman society where the barriers between ecological system, machine system and human system are becoming blurred.

Even the human-centric paradigm might not suffice to face the systemic crises and technological trends that are taking place. Industry 6.0 is becoming more and more prevalent in research agendas and strategic planning. Although it remains theoretical at this point, it hasn't yet been adopted by institutions, nor is there a consensus definition for it. An illustration of how industrial paradigms

usually evolve conceptually before going into operation is the rise of Industry 6.0. Industry 6.0 carries along the management fashion cycle, but also creates a space for pending conflicts over value, autonomy and sustainability. (Madsen, Berg, Slatten, 3)

Technology and society have been a constant theme in science fiction, which celebrates and amplifies current fears into possible scenarios. The concept of Society 6.0, a techno-social paradigm, imagining a stage after Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0, towards human and machine symbiosis, has gained momentum in recent years. Industry 4.0 was dedicated to automation and Society 5.0 was about balancing technological intelligence and human creativity. In Society 6.0, the notion of the human and non-human actor is merged through biotechnology, artificial intelligence and digital networks. This shift is raising important questions: What are the implications of being human in the age of technological progress, intelligent machines, algorithmic government?

As theorist Donna Haraway (1985), Rosi Braidotti (2013), and N. Katherine Hayles (1999) suggest, the human subject becomes more fragmented, hybridised and interconnected with the technological systems that surround them. The posthuman condition is characterised by humanity's reconfiguration in relation to non-human others, machines, networks, animals, and the environment- rather than its extinction. Post-humanism enables us to perceive literature as a place where speculative futures play out these transformations and bring to the fore what is possible and what is not, particularly through the prismatic lens of Society 6.0.

Yet, despite being largely ignored by its western counterparts, Indian science fiction has emerged as an important venue for imagining technology and societal changes. The authors such as S. B. Divya, Samit Basu, draw Global Post- humanism within the regional cultural, political and economic settings. Machinehood (2021) by Divya and The City Inside (2022) by Basu are examples of Indian Sci-Fi delving into visions of Society 6.0, with the former describing a society of post-biological humans and the latter examining how algorithms are used to police society, the economy of influencers, and the fragmentation of subjectivity into digital objects. Together they illustrate the ambivalence of posthuman futures through the interweaving of the threats of technological dominance with the possibility of symbiosis.

Introduction

The 21st century has seen a dramatic transformation of the human-machine interface (HMI) due to the recent rise in digital technology, biotechnology and artificial intelligence (AI). Policy initiatives such as the Japanese Cabinet Office's vision of a "super-smart society" (Japanese Cabinet Office, 2016) have envisioned a society in which the physical and digital worlds are interconnected to enhance the welfare of humanity. Speculative talk has begun to consider another level, 'Society 6.0', in which boundaries between human and machine are becoming increasingly blurred and where human and machine are now living side by side rather than in a complementary manner, but rather together in an interdependent way, with 'Society 5.0' focusing on a technological order that is human-centred. This transformation brings up pressing philosophical, cultural and ethical issues: What is human in the presence of biotechnologies and algorithms? How is labour, autonomy and politics redefined in the age of intelligent systems?

A critical perspective for examining these issues is provided by posthumanist theory. In a modern techno-scientific context, "human" is a "category" that is destabilized by scholars such as Hayles (1999), Braidotti (2013) and Haraway (1985). Hayles' conception of the posthuman subject is one who is caught up in systems of embodiment and information, while Haraway's cyborg metaphor focuses on the hybrid, networked nature of being. The posthumanism that Braidotti champions is an affirmative posthumanism that calls for ethical and ecologically responsible coexistence with nonhuman agents. These perspectives illustrate how literature can be a space of speculation for imagining and challenging techno-social futures in the context of Society 6.0.

While posthuman imaginaries are a prevalent topic in SF studies across the world, Indian English SF has not received adequate attention in this regard. Recent scholarship has begun to pay attention to the hybridity and cultural specificity of Indian sci-fi films, which combine local socio-political factors with foreign speculative motifs. But there is not much research on Indian science fiction authors specifically

in terms of the issues of labour, surveillance, artificial intelligence and posthumanism in the context of Society 6.0. This paper aims to fill this void by analysing two recent works, one *The City Inside* (2022) by Samit Basu that discusses the critique of influencer culture, algorithmic surveillance and digital subjectivity, and the other *Machinehood* (2021) by S.B. Divya that discusses biotechnological enhancement, gig economies and AI rights.

This investigation is based on three research questions:

How does the concept of posthumanism, surveillance and technology anticipate Society 6.0 in each of the stories of *Machinehood* and *The City Inside*?

2. What are the challenges that these books raise related to the use of artificial intelligence, monitoring and improvement of social-cultural environment in India?

3. How do these stories contribute to broader conversations on posthumanism and ethical issues of technological futures worldwide?

According to the present paper, Indian SF is not simply westernizing Indian science fiction narratives of AI and biotechnology, but it also critiques them through posthumanist theory (Hayles, Braidotti) and postcolonial interpretations of technoscience (Ganapathy-Doré, Johnny). Instead, it rethinks them in a manner that highlights issues of human dignity, human power and governance in the Indian imagination of the posthuman future.

Indian Science Fiction and Society 6.0

Indian science fiction has long been a breed that has traversed both cultural contexts and modernity. Though Euro-American science fiction often focuses on space travel, technological singularities, or dystopian futures, Indian science fiction has tended to centre its stories on social inequality and political control, ecological crisis and cultural hybridity. This contextual background is essential to reading how Indian writers imagine futures that are also clearly linked to Indian socio-political systems and yet are very relevant to the global arena. In contrast, Indian science fiction paints a more pessimistic picture of Society 6.0, which portrays technologies that reinforce power, labour and surveillance hierarchy and opens up possibilities for a posthuman re-imagining of agency, rights and ecological responsibility.

The concept of Society 6.0 is an adaptation of Japan's Society 5.0 vision, and a useful lens to look at Indian sci-fi through. In the speculative scenario of Society 6.0, the introduction of AI, biotechnology, and digital ecosystems (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999) will transform subjectivity, politics, ethics, and productivity. Here, the distinction between "human" and "machine" disappears and results in a posthuman symbiosis, raising critical questions of rights, autonomy and power.

Indian science fiction is in a rather special position to be involved in such a conversation. On one side, it has similar concerns with digital surveillance, the ethics of artificial intelligence, and the swift development of technology. Conversely, it brings these issues to particular Indian contexts, unstable gig economies, caste and class-based exclusions, authoritarian politics and omnipresent digital technologies in everyday life. In this manner, Society 5.0 and the imagined society 6.0 is culturally critiqued in Indian Sci-Fi. In turn, Jameson (2005) argues that science fiction offers a "cognitive mapping of the present through the projection of imaginary futures" (Jameson p. 289) from a more speculative cultural vantage point. The presence of such ideas in texts such as Divya's *Machinehood* and Basu's *The City Inside* suggests they reflect the anxieties or concerns of the present day, such as the gig economy, surveillance, and the climate crisis, in differing ways in the Indian context. As Yamamoto (2023) puts it in his review of Indian SF, "These are works that reflect and refract global concerns in a context that is distinctly socio-political and Indian" (Yamamoto p. 14).

Machinehood (2021) by S.B. Divya, for instance, challenges the validity of AI entities claiming rights and paints a picture of the commercialization of human bodies through the biotechnological enhancement. Though this aligns with the envisioned human-machine symbiosis of Society 6.0, Divya mentions the exploitative system of global capitalism, enabling this convergence. Likewise, in *The City Inside* (2022), Samit Basu's work explores the digital subjectivity in the context of state surveillance and the neoliberal influencer economy, highlighting the ways in which the posthuman condition manifests as freedom of surveillance, algorithmic control, and commodified visibility.

The Indian science fiction and Society 6.0 are complementary to one another as they both predict and challenge political-economic structures of future technologies. Indian science fiction questions how technologies interact with prevailing social hierarchies and injustices rather than just extrapolating the development of technology. By doing this, it contributes viewpoints that are aware of the political and cultural uniqueness of the Global South to the posthumanist conversation worldwide.

The book is Indian Science Fiction and Post-humanism.

Indian Science Fiction and Post-humanism

In the last 20 years, the concept of posthumanism has emerged as a key area of consideration in Indian science fiction, along with a significant critical and international interest in the transformation of the human in the age of technology. Indian speculative writing reflects local socio-political issues like colonial inheritance, inequality, system of governance, and ecological uncertainty, and participates in the larger philosophical debates about posthumanism. This is opposed to Western science fiction, which is often utopian or dystopian in the wake of acceleration of technology.

In his article entitled 'Envisioning Posthuman India: An Analysis of SB Divya's Machinehood' (2024), Johnny makes a convincing case for a posthumanist approach to Indian speculative fiction. "Multiple posthuman futures where the boundaries between humans and machines are constantly negotiated rather than permanently erased" (Johnny, p. 3) is what he claims Divya's book offers. Johnny argues that Machinehood demonstrates that the image of the posthuman in India is not singular, definite or unmediated, but rather plural, fluid, and always political in relation to labour, survival and power. Negotiation rather than resolution in the emphasis, and a cultural scepticism towards totalising futures, are emphasized, which may be related to India's complex modernity relationship.

This complexity is reflected in Ganapathy-Dore's (2024) argument that African American literature is not primarily about artificial intelligence but rather uses the technology as a plot device. AI in fiction in India, he claims, is never a mere "technology-trope, but a part of discourses of governance, ethics, and collective survival" (Dore p. 7). He situates Divya, Basu and Tanuj Solanki within "a postcolonial technoscientific imaginary" (Dore p. 9) to highlight the possibilities of a speculative literature that counters techno-dystopian panic and techno-utopian optimism. Indian SF's concerns around governance and ethics are complicated by a few worries, such as unstable labour markets, the surveillance state and unequal access to biotechnologies, all of which are represented in the notion of a human centred "Society 5.0".

On this premise, Yamamoto (2023) positions Indian SF within the global SF canon, highlighting the distinct voice of their local settings for Indian stories. Indian SF is not just a reflection of global concerns about automation and surveillance, but also a refraction of those concerns through the lens of climate precarity, state authoritarianism and cultural hybridity (Yamamoto p. 14). Thus, books such as Machinehood and The City Inside are like prisms and mirrors, casting new, culturally different, reflections and refractions of global anxieties about digital authoritarianism, automation and climate change that do not lend themselves to standardisation.

Moreover, Indian SF's concerns with labour, technology and ethics engage and resonate with global posthumanist discussions. For instance, Indian SF focuses on the group's role in technology—social justice, ecological sustainability and community survival—while Western SF focusses on the integration of the human body with the machine, as in the cybernetic and transhumanist narratives. The difference is congruent with Johnny's (2024) concept of "a communitarian imagination of the posthuman" (Johnny p. 6), as opposed to neoliberal commodification of technologies for enhancement.

It is also interesting how the gendered posthuman is dealt with in Indian SF. In Divya's Machinehood, the traditionally male gaze of technological mastery is enhanced by having a female protagonist at the centre of discussions about AI rights and human enhancement. These stories "feminise the posthuman condition by placing it in the context of care, labour, and reproductive justice," writes Ganapathy-Doré. This accentuates the Indian SF's theorisation of the posthuman as well as its appropriation of it from a Eurocentric and masculinist discourse.

The postcolonial heritage of Indian SF is intricately tied up with posthumanism. As Yamamoto reminds us (2023, p. 15), the "tensions between imported technological modernity and indigenous cultural traditions" often occur in Indian speculative fiction. The distinctly hybrid imaginaries that emerge from this tension challenge both the Western technophilia and anti-technology myths. But Indian science fiction envisions a possible alternative, a society without humans – a Society 6.0 – in which humans, machines and environments exist in a precarious, negotiated balance.

Taken together, these important perspectives offer an engaging window into the theoretical and inventive power of Indian science fiction as something beyond an echo of posthumanist discourses that pervade the globe. By surrounding technological futures with instances of inequality, governance, ecology, and cultural hybridity, Indian SF reinterprets the concept of posthumanism as an experience rather than a philosophy. This re-reading not only enriches the posthumanist discourse across the globe but also brings Indian speculative fiction to a critical juncture for imagining technologically advanced yet socially embedded futures.

Foreshadowing Society 6.0 in *Machinehood*: Posthuman Rights and Ethical Intelligence

Posthumanism challenges the traditional belief of humanism, which views humans as the pinnacle of knowledge and the ultimate creation with a unique essence and the goal of self-realisation. Science fiction stories are becoming more commonplace in the future of human, and future of nonhuman existence, in today's technological age. Posthumanist thinking focuses on the ways in which all matter is interconnected and calls into doubt traditional binary oppositions, like man/machine, living/non-living, or nature/culture. It uses a different method, focusing on relationships and implications of each of the elements. This includes not only the diverse forms of animal life on Earth but also the reciprocal interaction between humans and technology, emphasising their co-evolutionary dynamics. Thus, posthumanist discourse was born in response to the Anthropocene era and the twofold mindset in the West, which centered around hegemonic politics and claimed to include multitudes and pluralities. It challenged the illusions and claims of human superiority and about the "inter-connectedness of the Other to the self." From this research it can be concluded that the science fiction literature of modern Indian English embraces posthumanist ideas and promotes the coexistence of humans and posthumans. *Machinehood* (2021) is S.B. Divya's debut novel, which provides interesting insight into the future of posthuman India. The novel's portrayal of the "Borromean" bond between man and machines is a reflection of how they can live in harmony.

In S.B. Divya's *Machinehood*, the focus is on this complex and complicated intersection from an Indian point of view and an attempt to understand how we're changing. Divya's work is based on her expertise in computational neuroscience and signal processing and the 20 years of experience as an electrical engineer which gives her a more realistic perspective. She has created a familiar world around herself that deals with familiar issues, including privacy, freedom of movement, religion, economic differences, and more. Welga Ramirez and Nitya Ramachandran are the protagonists of the story, humans who have nothing but drugs to battle against the artificial intelligence and become 'bot nannies'. The "Machinehood" movement seeks to remove pill production from the market and promote equal rights for machines, and others. As Welga and Nithya face these challenges, the plot unfolds. The present study is focused on the Indian posthumanism perspective as shown in the book called *Machinehood*.

S.B. Divya's *Machinehood* (2021) is exactly as well wrought. The central political demand of its "Machinehood Manifesto" is to bring AIs and augmented beings into their moral sphere and give them the same rights as humans, thereby shifting to the qualitative level of a new social contract, which it names speculative 6.0. Its near-future world is based on pill-based performance enhancement, platformed gig labour, and ubiquitous automation, canonical 5.0 features. *Machinehood* illustrates the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things by creating a complex network of interdependencies, whereas social construction of differences (Braidotti p. 40) is not the case. In her revolutionary book *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti challenges the Western dichotomy.

Machinehood is a speculative Society 6.0 that is engaging with issues of human enhancement, AI rights, gig labour and surveillance, which question the optimism of Society 5.0. This is no utopia, but a society of inequality, precarity, and blurring of the lines between humans and machines. The book is therefore

a good illustration of how Indian sf has helped to shape the posthumanist conversation, by turning technological futures into "real", contested and morally charged contexts and environments.

In Machinehood, the machines have become human, swarms of cameras control the human populace, who are rated and tipped based on their performances. There is no question of privacy; "Privacy had gone the way of the dodo during Welga's childhood" (Divya p. 25), and data were accessible to authorities, as Welga explains she "had 86 permanent blood monitoring built into her body by the US military, with no chance of hiding anything" (Divya p. 73). This performative life is open to appreciation and critique and has a positive side, as it creates bonds and networks with elements around it. So, she felt secure because her people would keep an eye out for her and she would for them, Welga says (Divya p. 25). The characters in Machinehood, human or non-human, need to be read as elements in a multidimensional network and social connections (Latour, p. 3).

Andrew Feenberg (1999) argues that technology is "a scene of struggle, shaped by social interests, cultural values, and political agendas" and not neutral (p. 15). It's very similar to S. B. Divya's Machinehood, where capitalist pressures drive the development of AI-driven gig economies and biotechnology (in the form of enhancement pills) rather than the welfare of humans. At the heart of Machinehood is the pill-based biotechnology system that assists humans to enhance their productivity, endurance and cognitive functions. The novel notes that 'Pills gave her strength, speed and endurance, but it was a price she had to pay with her body and her freedom. This is a good example of the human body being a commodity as required by capitalism. These enhancements defy the concept of 'naturally human' capability and provide a hazy boundary between human and machine in the world of Society 6.0. Humanity is valued more for enhanced performance than innate ability - this is an example of "information over embodiment" Hayles' 1999 concept.

One of the keys focuses of the Machinehood manifesto is the recognition of machine intelligence as "sentient beings," which is the slogan: "We are the Machinehood. We want to be treated with respect. We call for rights. This is a sweeping declaration that treats AI as actors in ethical and political frameworks and processes, not tools. The novel questions anthropocentric privilege by envisioning AI as equal actors in society, which is a philosophy that Braidotti (2013) calls for "Zoe-centred egalitarianism. However, human resistance to these demands brings up post-colonial concerns, as Ganapathy-Doré (2024) emphasizes, Indian SF often reflects the notion of AI's connection to exploitation, precarity, and governance, rather than liberation.

The novel presents a world that is full of gig economies, productivity measuring and surveillance, in which people are classified as measurable labour units. "Your value was given by your uptime, your output," reads one. This confirms the claim made by Feenberg (1999) that technology is never neutral, but is always determined by capitalist needs. Divya puts to test the idealistic promise of integration under the banner of society 6.0, as an illustration of how integration becomes hyper-control and precarity. In this respect, the book is akin to Basu's The City Inside which is a book in which surveillance capitalism reigns in urbanization.

Divya's story explores the intersection of human and machine, examining hybrid subjectivities. AI agents are autonomous, empathetic, and ethic agents, whereas enhanced humans need biotechnology to remain competitive. Johny (2024) envisions multiple posthuman futures with "boundaries between humans and machines being constantly negotiated. The protagonist's own conflicted feelings about pills, both empowering and exploitative, as well as the Machinehood's dubious morality, whose demands for rights upend long-standing human hierarchies, are examples of this negotiation. The best example to look at the man-machine, is Welga's WAI based agent, which is a small implant in her ears. The improvements, which functioned similarly to supplements, enabled people to live more actively by keeping tabs on their health, everyday events, data, and answers to all of their questions. In this book, the relationship of man and machine is not of master and slave, but rather more akin, as Welga admits, "You know me so well. I think I'd call you one of my best friends" (Divya, p. 507). There was no one who was forcing Welga to do anything, but asking for ideas. Peter Paul Verbeek's "Cultivating Humanity: Towards a Non-Humanist Ethics of Technology" states that "the posthumanism I defend here... gives a central place to the idea that the human can only exist in its relation to the nonhuman"

(Divya p. 261). In Divya's depiction of nonhuman entities, she succeeds in portraying them as alter-ego of the posthuman beings.

The theme of identity, and the relationship between flesh and machine in the cyber world, is aptly explored in *Machinehood*. Eventually, Welga transforms into a "Dakini", a human, AI and bot living in the same body (Divya, p. 320). By creating a complex network of interdependencies, *Machinehood* denies the social construction of differences and believes in the interconnectedness of all living and non-living entities (Braidotti, p. 40) (Divya, p. 487): "to erase the boundaries between different intelligences, to let everyone fall on a spectrum rather than distinct categories." In her pioneering book *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti condemns the dualistic mind-set of the west and speaks of the need to create 'posthumanism' that will allow the 'others' of the racialised and sexualised human to break free of the dialectics of master-slave relations (Braidotti, p. 66). The Western way of thinking has a tendency to make false dichotomies: good and evil, a man and a woman, mind and body, human and machine; "Our universe works on a spectrum, and we embrace the infinite," says the neo-Buddhist leader, Ao Tara (p. 546).

Dakini also exposes the politics of "othering" in creating "others", in stating that when humans were slaves to one another, they used to find a way to rationalise their actions, making other humans different (Divya p. 530). But Dakini's takes up the concept of "companion Species" (Haraway 47) and has an awareness of post-duality which undermines the legacy of hierarchy. *Machinehood* positively frames the human-tech connection by positioning technology as an outside factor that could ensure humanity a role in post-biological futures, not an Other to be feared and rebelled against. Understanding the posthuman demands understanding the inter-connectedness of the human and technological fields. In Ferrando's concept of "post-humanity", he talks about the evolution of mankind when they go to other planets. The dwellers of the space-station "Eko-Yi", trying to achieve their ideal way of life, serve as a good illustration of this. Similar to Haraway's cybernetic definition of gender, Dakini's "agender" perspective is also connected to the ideas of gender. The word Dakini has been "used for outstanding female practitioners, consorts of great masters and to denote the enlightened female principle of nonduality which transcends gender binaries" (Divya, p. 545). In Ao Tara, the gendering is found to be futile and Ao Tara would like to state that they are "agender" and that they deserve "a chance to live and work with dignity, freedom, and equality" (p. 361).

Personhood is not taken for granted in the book when it comes to the machines. It also introduces the Bryson case thing: what about the responsibilities of the owners and designers being covered up by granting rights, or businesses being able to use "autonomous" systems to avoid responsibility? The tension is a good thing. Gunkel speaks to the convincing 6.0, which treats the question of robot rights as an issue that restructures our categories rather than an answer that we have already decided upon. It is a reinterpretation of duties and rights that is tailored to forms of agency and vulnerability, not a universalisation of "human rights" to everything. For the exact reason that thresholds are messy, the novel's suspenseful plot leaves this open-ended. (Joanna J. Bryson 2009, The MIT Press)

In the novel's technological futures, the inequalities of the world become the context. The unequal opportunities to use AI systems and enhancement pills perpetuate class stratification. AI is used as a metaphor in Indian science fiction as "governance, ethics, and collective survival," as Ganapathy-Doré (2024) states. *Machinehood* is the dramatisation of these tensions: unequal access to enhancement technologies further marginalises the global South, which is already economically marginalised. This situates the novel in the perspective of postcolonial technoscience where global power configurations are interwoven with futuristic imaginings.

In the realm of Indian science fiction or post humanism, *Machinehood* is a pioneer which has taken an inclusive approach, rather than separation. Indian SF, unlike a very large amount of European SF, is very successful in weaving together the complexity of posthumanism or the imagining of "multiple posthuman futures," as Braidotti puts it (150). Not threatening an apocalyptic technological future, *Machinehood*'s story suggests potential human futures.

Importantly, the work counsels a sense of community rather than apathy, rather than apathy because it is in the name of the posthuman. In Indian culture and tradition, it is evident that people become

truly valuable when they believe that the Universe is the unlimited manifestation of the same energy which is flowing through them.

The best way to read Machinehood is as threshold fiction. Platformed, cyber-physical and human-optimisation, it perfects the fantasy of the Society-5.0 before bursting it asunder by holding the nonhumans and infrastructures that enable it accountable for morality and the law. The book therefore marks the conceptual transition towards a more speculative Society 6.0, which is not seen as a system for optimizing society, but as one that is binding. In that sense, the book represents the conceptual transition towards a more speculative Society 6.0, less in terms of more intelligent integration and more in terms of a broader base of standing, a more participatory governance, and more limitations on capture.

The City Inside: Surveillance and Algorithmic Governance

With the City Inside, there is no place for a future that is peaceful, human-centred and oriented toward Society 5.0. It depicts Society 6.0 as a surveillance dystopia, where all means of technology are merged, but the potential for emancipation is limited by inequality, authoritarianism and commodity fetishism of intimacy. Basu situates this critique in Indian socio-political frameworks (caste violence, religious polarization, neoliberal precarity), to imagine posthuman futures in historical experiences of exclusion and resistance. In *Homo Deus*, Harari (2016) cautions that biotechnology and artificial intelligence developments could result in "the rise of a small elite with godlike powers, while the majority are rendered economically useless" (p. 45). In analogy, Schwab (2017) points out in *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* that automation and digitalization are "transformations that fundamentally change the way we live, work, and relate to one another" (p. 12), not just technological changes. These are warnings that highlight Samit Basu's dystopian issues in *The City Inside*, where surveillance technologies and fluctuating economies divide up the democratic life.

The City Inside by Samit Basu is set in a future Delhi which is eerily similar. It focuses on Joey and Rudra, two individuals living in a society under surveillance and based on algorithms, which is becoming more and more relevant in our society. Rudra is gifted with a bright future in the cricket and is an epitome of the aspirations of the youngsters of today. Professional image builder and storyteller Joey feels her life is without structure – a feeling which many can relate to. The stories intersect in a city that's collapsing and doomed, as both they and society are overwhelmed with personal tragedies and socio-political turmoil. The novel is an interesting read for readers interested in social criticism, as it offers insight into a dystopian society and the individuals trying to survive in it.

Nearly in the present day of the novel's Delhi, politics, culture and everyday life are dominated by immersion broadcasts created on social media. One of the main and most interesting themes in Samit Basu's *The City Inside* is surveillance. Joey, the main character, frequently feels as though her life is being watched over all the time by algorithms and recorded by security cameras. This sense of being monitored and tracked is a reflection of the level of monitoring in today's society. The theme of surveillance is most clearly brought out in Joey's knowing that she is being observed and her vigilant attitude while running around in the park, highlighting the presence of surveillance in all areas of life. Reality controller Joey says that "her whole life is a collection of randomly selected clips from surveillance cameras, that are controlled by algorithm." This is a capture of loss of autonomy in narration in an era of identity curation for data economics. It is here that Shoshana Zuboff's concept of surveillance capitalism, where human beings turn into "data points in a behavioral database" subject to "financial exploitation and social control," is most compelling.

Shoshana Zuboff defines surveillance capitalism as the practice of altering personal data through surveillance technologies and then profiting off of the data. Surveillance capitalism is defined as a new form of economic system that sweats the profits from the human experiences, which are perceived as raw material suitable for business extraction, forecasting and selling. It's marked by the production of items or services being secondary to a worldwide scheme of behavioral modification. This economic model features a new kind of capitalism in which wealth, knowledge and power are concentrated in unprecedented ways, and is considered "rebellious capitalism." Surveillance capitalism is a serious threat of the 21st century to the nature of human beings, as industrial capitalism did to the natural

environment in the 19th and 20th centuries. Furthermore, it is connected to the emergence of a new 'instrumentarian' power that seeks to disempower market democracy and that seeks to rule over society. The *City Inside* emphasizes the imbalance of power in human-technology relationships, as well as information asymmetry and degradation of privacy in digital contexts. The societal impacts of a data-driven economy are also explored, such as worries relating to manipulation, autonomy, and the centralization of power and wealth among a few key companies. Moreover, surveillance capitalism is a violation of basic human rights and a form of subversion of popular sovereignty, Samit Basu says.

Basu vividly paints the picture of the structural marginalisation. In some scenes, women and children are rounded up and driven from a walled-off community by militia: "women and children in rags, many children, all of them girls. What was the terrible prison they were being taken to? So, if they had lost their citizenship in the state, wasn't that an issue? Would they be taken out of their bodies? This is similar to Agamben's (1998) "bare life", or the violence of the biometric regimes of citizenship. In this place, *Society 6.0* is dystopian and not utopian: more a means of fracturing rather than uniting caste, class and religious divides; more a means of deepening than bridging difference. Dystopian novels evaluate the bad effects of consumerism and technology. In fiction works like George Orwell's 1984, surveillance is related to worry and fear of how the components of power are arranged, while in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), hyper consumption and alienation of individuals allude to a capitalist industry that appears as a device for the workers. Samit Basu's fiction, which is classified as dystopian literature, exposes the inherent inconsistencies and faults of the current political or social structures by expanding them into new circumstances. Joey analyses her motivations and recollections, just like Winston does. The readers observe that her consistent dehumanisation and loss of values is the result of an ongoing systematised programme – hyperreality to de-individualise, rob citizens of their free will: "Joey can't imagine...the freedom to criticise the powerful and corrupt in your own homes" (Basu 10).

The algorithmic intimacy of government is, of course, embodied in Joey's connection with her AI companion Narad: "Don't shut me out, Joey. There is nobody in this world who will love you more, than me. The AI represents the cyborg's paradox, as Haraway (1991) puts it, "a companion and a controller," bringing together compassion and coercion. While Divya's *Machinehood* is a pursuit of political rights, Basu's AI enters into human affective life, colonising emotions under the corporate logics.

The background to the book is the "Years Not to be Discussed," during which there was much violence, many state laws were passed, and much was censored or manipulated. Joey notes how protest and resistance have been removed from the picture: "Reality Controllers... got fired for taking a stance on the Internet... saw them fade and disappear from the industry or redeemed themselves by complete metamorphosis." This is a twist on Chomsky and Herman's (1988) idea of "manufacturing consent" in a digitally filled, gamed out political environment. Dystopia is present in the hidden and visible disciplines of visibility and engagement scores, in addition to repression. Basu examines the relationship between social injustice and computing, and the marginalization of the characters by the system of blindness designed for the purpose of handling social information as a bulk commodity, in terms of volume and velocity: "Epitemic chaos is the consequence of social information being transmitted as a bulk product through blind systems intelligently engineered for volume and velocity, and the result of the characters being marginalised by its design" (Zuboff 25).

Basu's *The City Inside* points to surveillance as being not only centrifugal in its ability to stop or limit behaviour and thought, but also as a process of surveillance. Surveillance involves the collection of information relating to individuals' health or state, or their evaluation of the reliability and accuracy of the information. This is true today as well, in the development of social and health programs that meet people's expectations, or in the marketing of products. The by-products of human data are turned into wealth by this "surveillance capitalism," frequently at the expense of other people. It has no appropriate figure to whom to rebel. Rather, powerful people and corporations with a shared identity are spread out throughout a large network of power, demonstrating that "network power is not bound spatially and not defined by dominion over a certain territory". Further elaboration on the monitoring topic and

its relevance to cities, workplaces and private space in dystopian fiction. The difference between public and private life is becoming increasingly indistinct and people are participating in and promoting a culture of surveillance which has emerged in the twenty first century. All such distortions of the truth and history corrupt characters, and dystopian literature calls us to consider the social and political implications of society by presenting a picture of a possible future that might become reality if nothing is done.

Unlike *Machinehood*, which is about rights for AI and bio enhancement, *The City Inside* is about posthumanism as an interlaced subjectivity. Some characters, such as Zaria, have algorithmic power that propels them up the hierarchy of influence, while others such as Rudra opt out of the digital tangles and go about their business as "ghosts" outside of networks. Marginalised actors are reshaping the future from the bottom up, as in the cases of Raja's underground cyber-markets, where "rogue AI is being developed to make their own gangs in cyberspace. The futures are plural, contested and deeply shaped by local asymmetries, as envisioned and envisioned by Basu and postcolonial technoscience. *The City Inside* by Samit Basu is a yearning to reclaim the following: "genuine freedom of expression, social solidarity, common sense, and the integrity of social communications are restored" (Zuboff, p. 55).

Comparative discussion of *Machinehood* and *The City Inside*

When comparing and contrasting the two different but complementary aspects of Society 6.0, the two ideas of *Machinehood* and *The City Inside* are exposed. Basu's text is a digitally immersive, India-specific posthumanism in which there is a gradual disappearance of democracy as inequality and surveillance invade the space; Divya's novel is a posthumanism that involves biotechnology with a global network, where machines request rights. Both books portray futures as divided, disputed, and intensely political, in opposition to utopian images of peaceful human/human-technology co-existence. Both *The City Inside* writer, Samit Basu (2022) and *Machinehood* writer, S. B. Divya (2021) examine the central question of what it means to be human in a world becoming increasingly defined by biotechnology, artificial intelligence and omnipresent surveillance. Their futures are dystopian visionaries of a speculative Society 6.0 about human decentring and technological infrastructures that enable and oppress rather than utopias of harmony as imagined in Japanese technocratic visions of Society 5.0.

In both texts technology ceases to be neutral, and becomes a "scene of struggle, shaped by competing social and political interests" (Andrew Feenberg 1999, p. 15). In *Machinehood*, the politics of enhancement and labour is illustrated as bodies become commodities through AI and pills. *The City Inside*, on the other hand, looks at how surveillance and algorithmic flows become the object of a commodity, even intimacy and dissent can be processed in the logic of the market.

One significant difference is the form of posthumanity that each novel focuses on. Posthumanism in *Machinehood* is biological and physical. AI life forms demand to be recognised as sentient beings, humans take pills for enhancement to beat self-governing devices. In this sense, Posthuman is concerned with rights and augmentation. As clearly as the "Machinehood Manifesto" has stated, we are the Machinehood. We expect to be treated with respect. We want rights, restating Braidotti's (2013) call for 'zoe-centred egalitarianism' and bringing AI into the political arena. Immersive and educational, *The City Inside* is a game that gamifies political life, an AI companion that takes over emotional attachments, and a curated life in "Flows. Algorithmic governance is a form of intimacy and control, as Joey's dependence on her AI Narad, who whispers, "If there's anyone in this world who will love you all your life...it's me." Posthumanism is more than a rights-based argument here: it is an agency argument because the infrastructure is breaking down.

They differ also in terms of the size and scope of their speculative visions. With biotech companies, gig economies, and AI rights movements spanning several continents, *Machinehood* depicts a globalised technological landscape. Its concerns include productivity, survival and identification of sentient, non-humans across the globe. The novel imagines "multiple posthuman futures where boundaries between humans and machines are constantly negotiated," as Johny (2024) points out (p. 3). *The City Inside* is grounded in the specificity of the Indian city, for instance, with a description of Delhi as an area of

inequality, intercommunal violence, and authoritarian surveillance. As refugees are being deported, Joey asks herself, "Has the state taken away their citizenships already? Were they to have their organs taken out? This dystopian vignette is of much interest because of the debates in India around the neoliberal urbanism, religious exclusion and biometric citizenship. Taken together these differences reveal how Indian science fiction is involved in a situated postcolonial critique (*The City Inside*) and also in a global posthumanist discussion (*Machinehood*).

However, both books stress their differences because techno capitalism is against human dignity. In *Machinehood*, workers have to adhere to the strict pill guidelines to the detriment of their health to ensure their productivity: "Your output and your uptime measured your worth. In this instance, the human body itself becomes the extract. In *The City Inside*, the focus is on influence and visibility and not on actual output. Other reality controllers who don't conform to the algorithms face being censored or erased: "Reality Controllers... can lose their jobs for taking stands online. Zuboff's (2019) criticism of surveillance capitalism, which colonises human life for behavioural prediction and control, is reflected in both situations. This is illustrated through the commoditisation of biology in Divya, and the identity through the commoditisation of affect in Basu.

The novels combine to challenge the optimism of Society 5.0. While the Japanese framework sets out to be a 'human-centred society that integrates cyberspace and physical space' (Government of Japan, 2016, p. 3), Divya and Basu illustrate the dystopian fragmentation that occurs when they do. It leads to authoritarian surveillance, divided subjectivities and political cynicism in *The City Inside*. Importantly, however, both texts make reference to alternate futures as well. Rudra's "ghost" life outside the network's hints at a subsisting resistance, and the *Machinehood*'s rights calls for a rethinking of the boundaries of humanity.

In conclusion, both volumes contribute to the postcolonial technoscientific imaginary (as put by Ganapathy-Doré 2024), a form of speculative fiction that is a medium for critique of technological futures and political-economic frameworks that shape such futures. The scientific fiction contribution is particularly a rejection of universalisation in India. In Divya's view, international debates on biotech ethics and AI rights should be viewed in the light of capitalist exploitation and labour precarity. Basu puts local Indian issues like digital surveillance, authoritarianism, communal violence, etc., into concerns about technology that plague the world. Together, they illustrate the impact of Indian SF in the context of lived experience of inequality, exclusion and hybridity, and thus the ways in which it enriches the posthumanist conversation globally.

Conclusion

Machinehood (2021) by S. B. Divya and *The City Inside* (2022) by Samit Basu are explored in this study focusing on the idea of Society 6.0 and posthuman future. Although the scope and style of the two novels vary, they both criticise the techno-utopian promise of smooth human-machine integration. They highlight the complex interconnections between biotechnology, AI, surveillance and systems of inequality, governance and labour, as opposed to seeing these technologies as neutral or liberating. In Divya's *Machinehood*, she explores the politics of enhancement pills, gig economies and the rights of AI, envisioning a future where the boundaries of the human and the machine are ambiguous, and fiercely contested. It also situates itself firmly in the global post-humanist dialogue, while its focus on human dignity, precarity of labour and the ethical recognition of non-human agency brings the theme of exploitation and inequality into the post-colonial context.

The City Inside on the other hand is a novel set in the near-future Delhi where democracy is coming into question due to algorithmic surveillance, communal violence, and the commercialisation of intimacy. Instead of enhancement, here, posthumanism happens as disorienting digital subjectivity, a subjectivity where data flows curate, monitor, and exploit human lives. In the context of post coloniality, Basu shows how issues of surveillance and digital control have specific relevance in India, where caste violence, religious polarization and neoliberal uncertainty feature prominently in his critique.

Together, these books make a great example of how SF can be used to talk about posthumanism in Indian science fiction. Rather than a utopian destination of harmonious integration, they reimagine the

concept of Society 6.0 as one that is contested, with technology introducing new ethical opportunities and deepening inequalities. As Ganapathy-Doré (2024) puts it, Indian science fiction can be characterised as "postcolonial technoscientific imaginary", which puts discussions on biotechnology and artificial intelligence in terms of lived realities of survival, hybridity and exclusion.

Further, the comparison underscores the need to blend postcolonial criticism (Nayar, Ganapathy-Doré) and posthumanism theory (Hayles, Braidotti, Wolfe). This double lens enables us to appreciate the cultural and political intricacies of Indian speculative fiction. Indian SF focuses on mundane issues of labour, identity and belonging, rather than the abstraction of ontological change found in Western posthumanism.

Future scope of the study

Based on this study, there are opportunities for further research in several areas:

1. Comparative study of Indian SF with Chinese or African SF to highlight posthumanist perspectives in global south.
2. Analysis of gendered posthumanism in Indian SF texts with a particular study of the female leads like Joey (The City Inside) and Welga (Machinehood).
3. Dissecting ecological posthumanism in Indian speculative literature, the confluence of technological change and ecological collapse.

Finally, in Indian science fiction, the future of the posthuman is negotiated, not a single, universal reality, but a plural contested cultural negotiation. In works such as Machinehood and The City Inside, Indian writers urge us to rethink the nature of human beings in a world where identity, politics and technology are all connected.

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