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“ওই ঘাসিয়ারাকে বেলো-না আমার ওই গাছ গুলো যেন না কাটে”/“গাড়িভি ঘরকা আওরাত  
 হয় ক্যা? : **Examining Rabindranath Tagore’s Bolai and Subodh  
 Ghosh's “Ajantrik” from a Posthumanist and Transhumanist  
 Perspective Respectively**

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**Abstract**

This paper attempts to show Tagore’s Bolai and Ghosh’s Bimal as the harbingers of an imagination that becomes a passage to a space beyond humanism. So then, what is posthumanism or transhumanism? Posthumanism is a philosophical school that imagines a world beyond or after humanity and transhumanism is a method to transcend human abilities and imagine a world of extropianism or immortalism. In other words, posthumanism dismantles the humanist supremacy in an anthropocentric world in order to integrate them with other non-human species and transhumanism with the aid of machinic development tries to transcend the human abilities in order to immortalize them (For example, Cryonics is a branch of transhumanism where the body of the dead is preserved in order to revive them later to achieve a better version of themselves). Tagore’s short story *Bolai* is a wonderful manifestation of the post-humanist paradigm as the eponymous protagonist seems to be in perfect unison with Mother Nature. On the other hand, Ghosh’s protagonist Bimal imagines his taxi to be his best friend and the abilities possessed by the taxi seem to transcend the human abilities there by giving it a transhumanist turn. This transhumanist turn within the text makes our perception even convoluted and we are confused whether Bimal is the protagonist or his 'mechanized friend' Jagaddal is the protagonist of the story. Therefore, through the course of my paper I wish to investigate such nuances in order to imagine a world that entails a perfect camaraderie between humans, non-humans and machines in order to create a heterotopic Post-dualist space that is beyond the dualisms such as nature/culture, social/natural or humans/machines or precisely all non-humans.

**Keywords**

posthumanism, transhumanism, post-dualism, environmentalism

At the outset, I would like to make it clear to the audience what is posthumanism and transhumanism? To speak in a very lucid way posthumanism is an imagination beyond humanistic ideals. To concretize this statement, I would like to quote from Erica Cudworth and Stephen Hobden's wonderful book *The Emancipatory Project of Posthumanism*,

The term posthumanism has been used in three principle ways: in the sense of a world after humanity; as forms of body modification and transhumanist 'uplift'; and, our own usage, in the sense of a world comprised of more than human." (The Emancipatory Project of Posthumanism, p.5)

This sense of a world after humanity is going to be the crux of my paper. Apart from that there is another term that Cudworth and Hobden use in the context of posthumanities- 'more-than-human'. In the book the term has been used to problematize the relationship between humans and the non-humans – another aspect that my chosen text *Bolai* entails. I would discuss these two ideas one by one in the light of posthumanities.

However, there is a problem in such understanding of posthumanities. In the 1990s the interdisciplinarity studies between humans and the non-humans gained force and these interdisciplinary fields between humans and non-humans are problematic in all its rubrics. (What is Posthumanism?, p.99) I will explain these nuances in a bit more detail. Let us approach these nuances not only from an epistemological paradigm but also from a methodological paradigm. In such an approach we find that posthumanist stance towards non-humans and their exploitation does not necessarily mean that we have stopped being humanist and by definition anthropocentric. On the contrary, it asserts one of the penchants of humanism called liberalism. Taking humanism politically, we understand that the pluralist approach of liberalist humanism broadens its sphere and attention and consideration towards previously marginalized groups without deconstructing the schema of the humans who undertake such pluralist approach. (What is Posthumanism?, p.99)

This problematized sphere of posthumanities throws light to the question of biopower. The question of biopower changes our idea of 'animality' or the non-humanity as Giorgio Agamben in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* points out a clear distinction between 'Bios' (the form of life of a particular group) and 'zoe' (simple fact of living common to all living beings). (What is Posthumanism?, p.100) In other words, zoe is common to all living beings, including animals, men, or gods and it

can be defined as bare life. Bios on the other hand, is particular to the human because it is related to logos, it is the life that gives meaning, it recognizes human as human. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.110) Agamben notices,

The fundamental categorial pair of western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/ political existence, zoe/bios, exclusion/inclusion. There is politics because man is the living being who, in language [logos], separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to the bare life in an inclusive exclusion. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.110)

This idea of exclusion that is inclusive is going to formulate a large chunk of my theoretical paradigm. This sense of exclusion exalts an anthropocentric exploitation of nature and it inevitably posits the human identity to the centre. But it is Bolai who de-centres this human agency and sense of exclusion with his association with nature. If it be so, then the question is why do I call Bolai, the eponymous protagonist to be a posthumanist and how he debunks 'bios' and ushers in 'zoe' with the aid of his imagination.

From Tagore's narrative we find that the eponymous hero is different from others because, he associates his emotions with mother-nature. He seems to be in perfect unison with the natural world. He can interpret the language of the wilderness and imagines the whole nature to be his own part. With the aid of his imagination Bolai ushers in a postanthropocentric turn. Now the question is how is postanthropocentrism, posthumanist? To find an answer I would refer to Francesca Ferrando's recent book *Philosophical Posthumanism* that argues that the 'post' in the posthuman is a passage that entails pluralism and ushers in human voices that have been historically subjugated. Now to speak of postanthropocentrism etymologically, we understand that the Greek word 'anthropos' meaning human, centralizes the human agency and postanthropocentrism like posthumanism entails pluralism, embodying subjugated voices, not of humans but of nonhumans. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.103)

So, how does Bolai manifest a paradigm shift in an anthropocentric world? Does Bolai's association with the nature enforce a pre-industrialized way of living? Methodologically speaking, the answer to the second question would be a clear no, because the return to pre-industrialized world is a historical unfeasibility as Francesca would put it. This sense of return entails a certain Gaia narrative that treats earth as an organic self-regulative whole. However, Rosi Braidotti argues that this narrative is based

on the dualisms such as nature/culture, environmental/social, etc. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.104) Stenger further affirms that in this hypothetical narrative the exclusion of the humans is a realistic unfeasibility and it does not guarantee a better future that is unforeseen and empirically absent. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.105)

Now, to find an answer to the first question we would have to fall back on Latour's 'sociology of the social' and 'sociology of associations'. (The Emancipatory Project, p.57) Posthumanist imagination for Latour is essentially a social space and it entails a postdualist paradigm because it does not posit social as a binaric opposition of the natural, instead it embarks a co-existence. The sociology of the social has often neglected the non-humans and the inanimates but sociology for Latour is the sociology of associations. By associations he essentially means the association between the humans and the non-humans. It is here Bolai transcends himself from the humanistic ideals of positing human race in an isolated hierarchy in the process of evolution and it is here the ideals beyond humanity has been incorporated into the text, the first definition that I had used at the beginning of my paper. Bolai is capable of associating himself with grass and trees. Tagore writes, "ঘাসের আন্তরণটা একটা স্থির পদার্থ তা ওর মনে হয়না; ... প্রায়ই তারই সেই ঢালু বেয়ে ও নিজেও গড়াতো -- সমস্ত দেহ দিয়ে ঘাস হয়ে উঠতো". (Bolai, p.1)

So, Bolai not only associates himself with the grass but becomes grass himself. This sense of association is very important because it dismantles the idea of exclusion that Agamben puts forward. It is here the second definition, i.e, 'more-than-human' comes into play. I will explain how. Bruno Latour argues the core paradox within the heart of modernity in his work *We have never been Modern*. Modernity emerged through two phases of enlightenment. Latour argues that the 'first enlightenment' the scientists produced knowledge of nature that ushered in a break from the pre-scientific past. The 'second enlightenment' challenged this naturalization through the development of the social sciences that saw human society as separated from the rest of nature. (The Emancipatory Project, p.61) This scientific development and its subsequent damage has been termed in various ways by various scholars as, 'Anthrobscene' (Jussi Parikka uses this to depict obscenity of the modern) or 'Capitalocene' (Moore uses this because the separation and exploitation of the non-human has been done in the name of capital). (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.105) It is here Tagore with the aid of his protagonist ushers in a posthumanist turn by critiquing this separation. He writes, "বস্তুত আমরা মানুষ বলি সেই পদার্থকে যেটা আমাদের ভিতরকার সব জীবজন্তুকে মিলিয়ে এক করে নিয়েছে". (Bolai, p.1) Bolai's association with the Shimul Gach (Cotton tree) has been wonderfully manifested towards

the end of the story where Tagore writes, “ওই গাছ যে ছিল তাঁর বলাইয়ের প্রতিক্রম, তারই প্রাণের দোসর”. (Bolai, p.3) Bolai in the story has been posited as the biological other because the other boys hit the trees in order to tease Bolai and Bolai with his association with the nature requests his aunt, “ওই ঘাসিয়ারাকে বলো-না আমার ওই গাছ গুলো যেন না কাটে” (Bolai, p.2) and critiques this separation between nature and human beings of a particular kind, Homo Economicus.

In another instance we find, Bolai is talking to the plants. Tagore writes, “সদ্য গজিয়ে-ওঠা কচি কচি পাতা, তাদের সঙ্গে ওর কি যে একটা বয়স্যভাব তা ও কেমন করে প্রকাশ করবে? তারাও ওকে কি একটা প্রশ্ন জিজ্ঞাসা করবার জন্য আঁকুপাঁকু করে। হয়তো বলে, 'তোমার নাম কি।' হয়তো বলে 'তোমার মা কোথায় গেলো।’”. (Bolai, p.1) This conversation also ushers in another posthumanist imagination and critiques the idea of logocentric language regarding bios as we have already found out in Agamben’s argument. The enlightenment philosophy did not only bring the modernism but also Cartesian ideal of Res Cogitans and this subjectivity of a mind-haver lies on the usage of language. Denett in his book *Kinds of Minds* argues that a mind-haver’s identity depends on the idea of what it does, meaning how it appreciates the information produced by neural networks and appropriates them into a network of signs, i.e, language and creates subjectivity that differentiates humans from the non-humans. Denett calls this ‘Cartesian Puppeteering’. (What is Posthumanism?, p.34) Here by giving voice to the nonhumans Tagore brings in another posthumanist paradigm that entails human/non-human co-existence and shunts away the ballooning existence of the human ‘Cogito’ per se. To understand this better I would like to refer to Rosi Braidotti’s book *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. In the book Braidotti suggests that, “Life is half-animal, nonhuman (zoe) and half political and discursive (bios). Zoe is the poor half of a couple that foregrounds bios as the intelligent half; the relationship between them constitutes one of those qualitative distinctions on which western culture built its discursive empire”. (Transpositions, p.37)) This idea of ‘intelligence’ has been problematic because this has again asserted a sense of superiority to the human kind and this has even more concretized the human hierarchical subjectivity and has disposed the non-humans. In other words, Braidotti like Denett argues that the nonhumans have been given the privilege of mindless vitality that carries life without any rationale control. However, according to Braidotti this is dubious because this in the name of privileging actually otherizes every other species other than man and valorizes human capability to think and reserves self-reflexive reasoning only for the human kind. This is where the Cartesian ideal of ‘I think therefore I am’ (Discourse on Method, p.23) cuts

across the idea of logocentric meaning of language that Denett puts forward. However, Tagore by showing a conversation between Bolai and the grass de-centres this juggernaut of humanistic logos that entails universalized right over language.

Now the second text that I have taken up is Subodh Ghosh's "Ajantrik". In this text I would like to take up the third definition that I have already provided, i.e. 'transhumanist upliftment'. The story has a human protagonist Bimal and a machinic protagonist, Jagaddal. However, for a transhumanist perspective I would treat them as one agential unit tied with the sense of transcendence. To understand that better, we would have to first discuss what is transhumanism?

Francesca in her book *Philosophical Posthumanism* calls transhumanism to be 'human enhancement'. The main online platform to discuss these transhumanist ideas is called 'H+' where 'H' stands for humanity and '+' for enhancement. In transhumanist philosophy this sense of enhancement is generally associated with science and technology. According to Max More, the main principles of transhumanism can be summed up as, perpetual progress, self-transformation, practical optimism, intelligent technology, open society, self-direction and rational thinking. (*Philosophical Posthumanism*, p.32) Here I would particularly discuss the idea of self-transformation. Now I would try to posit this sense of self transformation within the ambit of the text. To understand this better I would like to refer to Latour's idea of Actant-Rhizome-Ontology. Now, by Actant what Latour means is an agential unit that by its agency affects other actants. For him to act is to, "modify other actors through a series of trials that can be listed thanks to some experimental protocol". (*The Emancipatory Project*, p.57) Put simply Latour means that by acting one must affect the whole world or the existential other. Here I consider both Bimal and Jagaddal to be actants for each other because they affect each other's lives by a sense of co-existence. Bimal declares to his taxi, "কুছ পরোয়া নেই জগদদল। আমি আর তুই আছি।" (*Sreshtho Golpo*, p.21) Jagaddal has been the actor for Bimal's exaltation. For fifteen long years Jagaddal has taken care of his best friend Bimal and Bimal's acknowledgement of this has been wonderfully manifested towards the end of the story when he says, "অনেক খাইয়েছিস, পরিয়েছিস, আর কত পারবি?" (*Sreshtho Golpo*, p.24) Ghosh's treatment of Jagaddal as a human makes him even more transhumanist because Jagaddal despite being old works better than new model taxis and asserts a sense of self-transformation. Ghosh writes, "দেখতে যদিও জবুথবু কিন্তু কাজের বেলায় বড়োই অদ্ভুত কর্ম্মা বিমলের এই ট্যাক্সি। বড়ো বড়ো চাঁই গাড়ির পক্ষে যাহা অসাধ্য, তা ওর কাছে অবলীলা।" (*Sreshtho Golpo*, p.17)

Now the question is, how does Bimal transform himself? Bimal with his association with an inanimate object ushers in this sense of self-transformation where he also critiques a particular human-kind, Homo Economicus. For him, Jagaddal is not a machine for economic gains and money extraction but a ‘private matter’ and that is why he is mocked at by Piyara Singh, he laughingly says, “গাড়িভি ঘরকা আওরাত হয় ক্যা?”. (Sreshtho Golpo, p.19) Stephen Greenblatt in his essay “Towards a Poetics of Culture” juxtaposes Jameson’s idea of capitalism as a sense of false differentiation between the public and private from his essay “The Political unconscious” and Lyotard’s idea of capitalism as a sense of false integrity from his essay “Judiciousness in Dispute, or Kant after Marx”. (The Greenblatt Reader, p.21) Bimal by treating Jagaddal, the machine of his public affairs and economical gains, as his private matter critiques the false integral monologus totalitarian desire towards the new machines as well as the false derivational narrative of differentiating the private and the public due to economic prosperity.

The sense of self-transformation has been further wonderfully depicted through Bimal’s words, “আমিও যন্ত্র। বেঙ্গলি ক্লাব বলেছে ভাল। বিমল খুশী হয়ে মনে মনে হাসে। কিন্তু জগদদলও যে মানুষের মতো, এ তত্ত্ব বেঙ্গলি ক্লাব বোবোনা, এইটেই যা দুঃখ।” (Sreshtho Golpo, p.21) It is not only Jagaddal who understands the nuances of his best friend but Bimal also imagines and understands the problems of his friend Jagaddal. Bimal says, “ভারী তেষ্টা পেয়েছে, না রে জগদদল? তাই হাঁসফাঁস কচ্ছিস? দাঁড়া বাবা দাঁড়া।” (Sreshtho Golpo, p.18) He at times is almost apologetic towards his friend and says, “কি করবো জগদদল! এবার তালি নিয়েই কাজ চালা। আসছে পুজোয় কটা ভাল রিজার্ভ পেলে তোকে নতুন রেকিনের ছুড পরাবো নিশ্চয়!” (Sreshtho Golpo, p.19) This conversation not only articulates a sense of self-transformation and to delve deep into this argument I would be referring to the book *Philosophical Posthumanism*. In the book Francesca Ferrando argues on the animate/inanimate dualism and problematizes the question of life. Biologically speaking, life tradition refers to the organisms that represent characteristics such as metabolism, growth, reproduction, sensitivity, etc. However, objects or elements such as viruses dismantle this sense of life. Therefore, life can be depicted through Foucault’s definition in his *The Order of Things*. He comments, “Life does not constitute an obvious threshold beyond which entirely new forms of knowledge are required. It is a category of classification, relative like all other categories, to the criteria one adopts”. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.111) Thus, this relative category of classification means life is a notion which is culture specific and must not be concretized as an a priori. On one hand, life exceeds the notion of human, on the other it self-locates human. (Philosophical

Posthumanism, p.111) This sense of exceeding the human has been wonderfully depicted with the aid of Bimal's self-transformation.

In a posthumanist sense Bolai and Jagaddal's agential unit brings into focus the sense of animism. Now, we need to understand why is animism important? Traditionally speaking, animism bestows spirit even to inanimate objects, in this case Jagaddal. Here I would like to refer to Masahiro Mori's book *The Buddha in the Robot*. In the book Mori argues,

From the Buddha's viewpoint, there is no master slave relationship between human beings and machines. Man achieves dignity not by subjugating his mechanical inventions, but by recognizing in machines and robots the same buddha-nature that pervades his own inner self. When he does that, he acquires the ability to design good machines and to operate them for good and proper purposes. In this way harmony between humans and machines is achieved. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.112)

So, we understand that Mori comments on the relationship between human beings and the machines and deconstructs the hierarchical relationship between human and the machine. The idea of harmony between human and machines has been wonderfully manifested through the self-transformation of both Bimal and Jagaddal. Therefore, in a transhumanist paradigm Jagaddal can be considered as the promoter of artificial life. Now the question is why artificial life is important in the context of transhumanities and how does it associate itself with the notion of life? To find an answer I will be referring to Christopher Langston's work "Studying Artificial Life with Cellular Automata". According to Langston,

The study of artificial life...should not be seen solely as an attempt to simulate living systems as they occur in "nature" as we know it. Rather, it should be seen as an attempt to "abstract from natural living systems their logical form". In this sense, it should be seen as not just the study of organic life, but of life in principle. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.115)

This idea of attempting the abstraction of logical form out of the living system is very important for the argument of this paper because the sense of abstraction associated to artificial life is in alignment with the organic life form itself. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.115) To posit this idea into the ambit of the text the author says, "জগদলকে রোগে ধরেছে - বিমল প্রায় ক্ষেপে উঠলো।" (Sreshtho Golpo, p.22). This idea of the diseased machine brings in the idea of embodiment of life into a machine (artificial life).

Now, again, the question that we confront is the embodiment of life. To be diseased, the sense of embodiment is a necessity. Then the question is how the sense of embodiment is transhumanist? Phenomenologically speaking, life has to be embodied because the sense of perspective transcends this idea of life from the paradigm of organic physicality and posits into the ambit of virtuality and machinery. This is where Ghosh's text entails a wonderful transhumanist upliftment as Bimal imagines his friend Jagaddal as an embodied life and even bankrupts himself to revitalize Jagaddal. Ghosh writes, “অর্থাভাব - [বিমল] বেচে ফেললো ঘড়ি, বাসনপত্র, তক্তপোষটা পর্যন্ত।” (Sreshtho Golpo, p.22)

Therefore, to conclude, we understand that there is no need for effacement of a particular group and institutionalize a dualist approach towards existence within an oikos or ecology. To efface this dualism we have to take recourse to post-dualist approach. Here by post-dualism I mean the ontological realm, the regime that questions both the notion of ‘human’ and ‘life’ within its schema and transcends both the questions. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.183) In other words, from a post and transhumanist perspective we can access the finalized boundary between the self and the other and debunk it with the aid of posthumanist multiverse that within an ontological regime depicts ‘monistic pluralism’ and ‘pluralistic monism’. (Philosophical Posthumanism, p.183)

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