

Critical Regionalism of the Transhuman: Cyborg Politics in Anil Menon's *The Beast with Nine Billion Feet*

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Abstract

This paper reads Anil Menon's young-adult science fiction novel *The Beast with Nine Billion Feet* (2009) through Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985-1991), arguing that Menon's 2040 Pune subjects Haraway's cyborg politics to a postcolonial pressure test. Where Haraway celebrates the cyborg as a figure of boundary confusion and feminist liberation, Menon's narrative insists that in a Global South context biotechnology also functions as an instrument of dispossession, surveillance, and bio-capital. Reading the novel's key figures the bonsai as ideology, Tara's skin politics, Aditya's transformation into a Nurthi gene-hacker, and the collective dream-beast, the paper argues that Menon's fiction constitutes a 'critical regionalism of the transhuman': a practice that takes the global discourse of the posthuman seriously while grounding it in specifically South Asian historical, social, and material conditions. The paper

contributes to the growing field of Indian speculative fiction studies and to postcolonial feminist technoscience.

Keywords: *Cyborg; feminism; transhumanism; Indian science; biotechnology; postcolonial technoscience*

Introduction

In 1991, Donna Haraway declared that ‘by the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs’ (Haraway 8). The force of this claim was theoretical and political: the cyborg, for Haraway, was a figure that allowed feminist thought to escape the trap of organic essentialism and to occupy, instead, the contested borders between human and machine, nature and culture, self and other. Haraway’s cyborg was ironic, partial, and unafraid of boundary confusion. Yet the manifesto was written from within a particular moment in American technoscience the Reagan-era Star Wars defence programme, Silicon Valley’s semiconductor boom and its horizons, however expansive, carried the gravitational pull of Western political contexts. Haraway herself, in later conversations with Cary Wolfe, has reflected on the historical situatedness of the manifesto and the risks of its misreading as a straightforward celebration of technological hybridism (Haraway 210).

Nearly two decades after Haraway’s essay, Anil Menon published *The Beast with Nine Billion Feet* (2009), a young-adult science fiction novel set in 2040 Pune, India. The novel imagines a near-future world of liquid computers, emotional cars, illusion pods, and most critically widespread genetic engineering. In Menon’s ‘Synthit’ world, a corporate transhuman enclave called Nurth competes with open-source biologists for control of the human genome. The story unfolds through two sibling viewpoints: Tara, a sharp-tongued thirteen-year-old girl acutely aware of her dark skin and her missing father; and Aditya, her seventeen-year-old brother, a gene-hacker and parkour devotee who is illiterate but intellectually brilliant. When Tara befriends the uncanny twins Ria and Francis whose mother, the Nurthi leader Vispala (also known as Mandira), turns out to be a key antagonist the novel stages a confrontation between two visions of the transhuman future.

The novel’s subtitle gestures toward this planetary dimension: *The beast with nine billion feet* is nothing less than humanity itself a collective organism whose biological destiny is being fought over by corporate and communal interests. As L. Timmel Duchamp’s *Strange*

Horizons review observes, Menon's work is 'a profoundly South Asian glance at an edge-of-transhuman future' (Duchamp). This paper takes that description as its analytical point of departure.

Scholarship on Indian science fiction has expanded substantially in recent years, constituting what Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay has called a "critical boom" (Chattopadhyay 376). Suparno Banerjee's *Indian Science Fiction: Patterns, History and Hybridity* (2020) provides the most comprehensive field survey to date, situating Indian SF across four historical periods and multiple languages. E. Dawson Varughese's *Post-Millennial Indian Speculative Fiction in English* (2025) takes up the post-2000 Anglophone field specifically, identifying key tropes urban infrastructure, citizenship, bodies and biotech and treating Anil Menon as one of its central case studies. Sami Ahmad Khan's *Star Warriors of the Modern Raj* (2021) foregrounds mythology, materiality, and ideology in Indian Science Fiction. Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay's work on 'kalpavigyan' and imperial technoscience argues that Indian SF engages with a distinctive tradition that merges Western hard SF with indigenous epistemologies, mythologies, and social hierarchies (Chattopadhyay 103). More directly relevant, Suparno Banerjee's essay which is titled as *Ruptured Bodies and Invaded Grains: Biotechnology as Bioviolence in Indian Science Fiction* reads *The Beast with Nine Billion Feet* alongside Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* to argue that Indian English SF places biotechnological manipulation "frequently in a negative context, unlike in the Anglo-American tradition, where such scientific manipulations are often hailed as subversive devices" (Banerjee 58). It is precisely this divergence between the Western liberatory cyborg and the South Asian ambivalent transhuman that this paper seeks to theorise.

The present paper's contribution is twofold. First, it applies Haraway's cyborg framework to Menon's novel in sustained detail, a reading that, despite the novel's presence in Varughese's recent monograph and in Narendiran and Bhuvaneswari's transhumanist study, has not previously been undertaken as its primary analytical lens. Second, it proposes the concept of a "critical regionalism of the transhuman" as a framework for understanding how Global South science fiction engages with the global discourse of posthumanism taking that discourse seriously while refusing to import it wholesale.

Haraway's Cyborg: An Ironic Dream and Its Theoretical Architecture

Before turning to Menon's novel, it is necessary to reconstruct Haraway's theoretical framework with some precision, since the paper's argument depends on understanding both what Haraway affirms and what her framework cannot easily accommodate.

Haraway frames her manifesto as "an effort to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism" (Haraway 3). The cyborg is her central figure: a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (3). The cyborg's political utility lies in its refusal of origin stories. Unlike Frankenstein's monster, which longs for a father and a mate, the cyborg "does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden" (6). Unlike the feminist radical who appeals to a pre-patriarchal nature, the cyborg does not dream of an organic Eden. The cyborg "is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (6).

Haraway identifies three crucial boundary breakdowns that make cyborg politics possible: first, the blurring of human and animal; second, the blurring of organism and machine; and third, the blurring of the physical and non-physical through microelectronics (7-9). These breakdowns collectively undermine the dualisms nature/culture, mind/body, male/female, civilised/primitive that have historically underpinned oppression. In their place, the cyborg offers "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and responsibility in their construction" (5).

Crucially, Haraway's cyborg is not a disembodied or utopian figure. Haraway maps what she calls "the informatics of domination" a shift from organic hierarchies to information networks and insists that this shift is "simultaneously material and ideological" (21). The "homework economy" that her analysis uncovers is a global restructuring of gendered and racialised labour, in which Third World women workers are central to the very technologies that Western feminism often celebrates as liberatory. It might be the unnatural cyborg women making chips in Asia and spiral dancing in Santa Rita jail whose constructed unities will guide effective oppositional strategies (Haraway 174). This remark is significant precisely because it acknowledges the global South as a site of cyborg production, even if it does not fully theorise what cyborg politics would look like from within that site.

The manifesto's limitations in non-Western contexts have been extensively noted. Julia DeCook argues that "A Cyborg Manifesto" remains "fraught with a Western, patriarchal violence that cannot be ignored in the greater context of technology and technological

innovation” and that the cyborg identity may “uphold whiteness and Western epistemologies as the center” (DeCook 4). Nesie Dalvin’s study of cyborg feminism in India specifically finds the Harawayan model inadequate for a developing country with India’s “historical, political and cultural diversity,” arguing that socialist feminism and identity politics are more essential in the present Indian social context than a technologically inflected posthumanism (Dalvin 1). Grant Andrews’s analysis of queer cyborgs in South African speculative fiction similarly finds that technologies promising sites for social change are simultaneously “sites that bring new forms of manipulation, oppression, and control” (Andrews 128). Xiaohui Liang’s recent analysis of Chinese science fiction argues that the cyborg’s liberatory potential is “circumscribed by its entanglement with global capitalist and local patriarchal systems,” and that in non-Western narratives techno-hybridity “reinforces oppression” rather than transcending it (Liang 122).

It is within this theoretical landscape which the growing body of Global South SF scholarship has begun to map that Menon’s novel becomes legible as a sustained, fictionally mediated dialogue with the cyborg manifesto. The novel neither simply applies Haraway’s framework nor dismisses it; instead, it tests the framework against the pressures of a postcolonial setting, revealing both its generative power and its blind spots.

The Synthetic World of Pune 2040: A Cyborg Landscape Reimagined

Menon’s fictional 2040 is recognisably Indian and recognisably cyborgian. Pune’s streets are inhabited by “liquid computers”, “emotional cars”, and “illusion pods”. Skin can be modified by the application of “Perfect Skin”, a product that makes the user’s face “feel as if it were crawling with ants” before removing imperfections an uncomfortably apt figure for the bodily uncanny that Haraway associates with late capitalist techno-culture. Genetic modification is so routine that Tara wonders, with genuine ambivalence, whether she should modify her dark skin colour. The House the artificial intelligence governing domestic space polices access with an id-card system. These details construct a world in which human-machine boundaries are thoroughly porous, in precisely the sense Haraway describes.

Yet Menon’s Pune is not Silicon Valley. It is a city shaped by monsoons, by family obligation, by caste and colour anxiety, by aunts who serve chai and idlis and speak in a register that crosses Marathi, Hindi, and English. The novel’s language is itself a kind of cyborg text

spliced, multilingual, carrying the creolised cadences of Indian English. Menon's prose performs the cultural hybridity that Haraway theorises, but it does so from within a specificity that Haraway's manifesto gestures toward but does not inhabit. As Narendiran and Bhuvaneswari observe in their transhumanist study of the novel, published in *Space and Culture, India*, Menon "highlights the dangers of this emerging trend in human development through two families, where young people are subjected to genetic engineering without consent" (Narendiran and Bhuvaneswari 33). The absence of consent is not incidental; it speaks to a colonial history in which South Asian bodies have been subjected to scientific interventions from the racial science of the British Raj to contemporary pharmaceutical trials without adequate informed consent. Varughese's recent monograph identifies "speculative bodies, identities and biotechnology" as one of the defining preoccupations of post-millennial Indian speculative fiction in English and Menon's novel is paradigmatic of this concern (Varughese 36).

The central conflict of the novel is a battle over what might be called biocapital: the corporate patenting of genetic modifications versus an open-source biologics movement. Sivan, Tara and Aditya's father, is a celebrated geneticist who has become a "terrorist" in the eyes of the law because he advocates for open-source genetic commons free access to biological codes for all humanity. Vispala/Mandira, the Nurthi leader, represents the other pole: the corporate transhuman project of Nurth, an artificial island-state where selective genetic enhancement produces a post-human species. In Haraway's terms, this is a conflict within what she calls the 'informatics of domination' a struggle between two modes of coding, two visions of who controls the translation of organic life into information.

Menon's bonsai motif crystallises this opposition with particular elegance. Mali, a member of Vispala's team and one of Sivan's former students, collects and cultivates bonsai trees as a symbol of control over nature. The bonsai, a living organism shaped by human intervention into a miniaturised aesthetic form figures the transhumanist desire to manage, optimise, and miniaturise biological life. L. Timmel Duchamp, reviewing the novel in *Strange Horizons*, notes that Menon "uses the image of the bonsai to exemplify the conflict" between Sivan's ethics of biological openness and Vispala's corporate mastery (Duchamp). The bonsai is also, in Haraway's terms, a figure of the "informatics of domination" at its most aesthetically seductive: it presents domination as cultivation, control as care.

Tara's Body: Skin, Gender, and the Limits of the Cyborg Dream

Among the novel's most searching engagements with Haraway's framework is its treatment of Tara's body. Tara is thirteen, dark-skinned in a society that both officially celebrates diversity and informally punishes melanin through product advertising, the cosmetics industry, and social epithets. Her classmates call her 'kauva' crow and her aunt's friend Chitra offers, as a birthday gift, a "makeover" that would involve a "melanin touch-up". Tara is tempted, confused, and ultimately resistant. Her body is a site where multiple cyborg boundary negotiations are played out: between nature and culture, between biological determinism and technological modification, between colonial aesthetic norms and postcolonial self-determination.

Haraway's manifesto insists that the cyborg world is one where "race, gender, and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts" (Haraway 47). Tara's situation embodies this requirement. She is a Brown girl in a world where cosmetic biotechnology offers to modify her racial phenotype, and the novel refuses to make this offer simply liberatory. To accept the melanin touch-up would be to embrace a particular kind of cyborg self-fashioning but one that validates rather than subverts the colonial aesthetic hierarchy that pathologises darkness. This is precisely the kind of scenario that Haraway's manifesto, focused as it is on American feminist politics, is not fully equipped to handle: the case where the "confusion of boundaries" offered by technology is itself racialised, where the very tools of cyborg self-making reproduce colonial damage. Grant's analysis of Haraway's cyborg feminism in India makes a related point: the model assumes a social context where technology is available as an emancipatory resource rather than, primarily, as a mechanism of further stratification (Andrews 128).

The body politics of Tara's predicament resonate with what Haraway describes as "women in the integrated circuit" the position of women in a world restructured by technoscience (Haraway 34). But where Haraway's integrated circuit connects women primarily through labour and production, Menon's circuit connects Tara through consumption and the commodification of her bodily appearance. The molecular cosmetics industry is not a liberation from biological determinism but a profitable repackaging of it. Chitra's boutique is, in Haraway's taxonomy, precisely one of those nodes in the "homework economy" where the boundary between science and commerce, care and exploitation, is most thoroughly dissolved.

Tara's resistance to the makeover is quiet but significant. She does not refuse it on principle, she is curious and tempted but the novel frames her hesitation as a form of critical literacy, a refusal to read her body through the aesthetic codes that the synthetic world offers. This hesitation is, in its modest way, a form of what Haraway calls "cyborg writing" not the writing of origin stories or essentialist identities, but the practice of marking the world back, of seizing the tools that would be used against one (Haraway 40). Tara's dark skin remains; she does not resolve the contradiction but inhabits it, which is precisely the cyborg condition Haraway describes.

Aditya's Transformation: The Gene-Hacker as Cyborg Subject

If Tara's arc concerns the politics of the unmodified body in a modifiable world, Aditya's arc concerns voluntary incorporation into the transhuman. Aditya begins the novel as a parkour practitioner and virtual-reality addict, his relationship to the body already mediated through technologically augmented physical performance. Parkour the urban practice of moving through the built environment by vaulting, leaping, and running across surfaces not designed for such use is itself a practice that refuses the designed pathways of urban infrastructure, reading the city as a body and the body as a machine. Aditya's parkour represents an embodied form of the resistance Haraway associates with cyborg politics: "writing without the founding myth of original wholeness" (Haraway 41), moving through the world by creating new routes rather than following authorised ones.

By the novel's end, Aditya has undergone a profound transformation. He has moved to Nurth, worked as a gene-hacker within Vispala's research programme, adopted a nictating membrane (a third eyelid, derived from shark biology), and finally chosen a new name Zal as part of the Nurthi induction ceremony. This ceremony is explicitly cast as a crossing of the threshold into transhumanity "men and women would become transhuman and Nurthi" (Menon 270). Aditya/Zal's journey enacts the cyborg transition Haraway describes: the dissolution of a prior identity, the embrace of a new ontology that is post-oedipal as Aditya has attempted to poison his own father, and the construction of a self that is simultaneously more than human and radically partial.

Yet Menon complicates Haraway's celebratory register. Aditya's induction into transhumanity is also an induction into Nurth's corporate order. The Seasons project he joins a massive longevity research programme combining the resources of fourteen labs is

simultaneously a scientific frontier and an institutional apparatus with its own hierarchies of power and control. Vispala, for all her charismatic leadership, is a corporate sovereign; her children, Ria and Francis, are genetic products who were born without navels, unmarked by the biological trace of gestational origin. The Nurthi's liberation from biological determination is purchased at the cost of a new form of subjection: to the institutional logic of bio capital.

Haraway acknowledges that "the main trouble with cyborgs is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism" (Haraway 7). Menon's Nurth is precisely this: a transhuman project that has emerged from and remains entangled with corporate capital, state surveillance (the pursuit of Sivan involves multiple governmental agencies), and the privatisation of biological commons. The novel's ambivalence about Aditya's transformation is not a failure of narrative resolution but a deliberate ethical stance: the cyborg future is not simply good or bad, liberatory or oppressive, but irreducibly contested.

The Nurthi as Cyborg Community: Post-Gender Futures and Postcolonial Limits

Haraway describes the cyborg as "a creature in a post-gender world" that "has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness" (Haraway 6). The Nurthi of Menon's novel approximate this description with uncomfortable precision. Ria and Francis, Vispala's genetically engineered children, communicate through bioluminescent skin patterns rather than spoken language a form of communication that dissolves the boundary between body and code, organism and signal. Their colour-based language is, literally, a non-alphabetic writing, "a language without an alphabet. An image-based language" (Menon 268). This is cyborg heteroglossia the "powerful infidel heteroglossia" that Haraway imagines as the alternative to the "dream of a common language" (Haraway 48).

Yet the novel does not present the Nurthi unambiguously as a liberated cyborg community. Their post-gender world is also a world of corporate discipline, surveillance, and genetic determinism. Ria and Francis were engineered, not born; their capacities emerged from Vispala's research programme, not from their own choices. The novel raises, without fully resolving, the question that Haraway's framework tends to defer: who designs the cyborg? In whose interest is the boundary confusion engineered? The Nurthi's post-biological freedom is

real, but it is also a freedom granted by a corporate sovereign a freedom, that is, within a system of bio capital.

Banerjee's analysis of Indian SF's relationship to biotechnology is directly relevant here. His argument that Indian fiction tends to frame biotech interventions "in a negative context" reflects a broader postcolonial suspicion of scientific interventionism that has colonial roots (Banerjee 120). The Indian state's historical experience of being a site of pharmaceutical testing, of the Green Revolution's chemical agriculture, of multinational seed patents a concern directly relevant to Sivan's open-source genetics activism all of this creates a different relationship to the liberatory potential of biotechnology than the one Haraway's manifesto assumes. Menon inherits and fictionalises this suspicion.

At the same time, the novel refuses to endorse a simple return to biological or cultural purity. Sivan's open-source biologics movement is not a Luddite rejection of genetic technology but a democratic claim on it: a demand that the tools of transformation be commons rather than property. This is, in Haraway's terms, a form of cyborg politics: not the rejection of the human-machine boundary's dissolution, but a struggle over who controls the terms of that dissolution. The novel's political imagination is thus neither technophobic nor technophilic but, to use Haraway's own word, 'ironic' committed to the productive tension between these positions rather than to either's resolution.

The Dream-Beast and the Collective Cyborg: Humanity as Organism

The novel's central dream sequence, in which Aditya dreams of "the Beast with nine-billion eyes and nine-billion hearts," is its most explicit meditation on the relationship between individual and collective, organism and species. The beast is humanity itself, "Nine-billion feet moved it across the mud-scarred field, and nine-billion throats sang like whales as it moved. Its face was a wilderness of nine-billion faces" (Menon 261). This figure which gives the novel its title invites reading through Haraway's cyborg ontology.

Haraway insists that the cyborg is not merely an individual but a figure of collective political possibility. The cyborg imagines a politics of "affinity, not identity" coalition without essentialism, connection without organic unity (Haraway 13). The dream-beast of Menon's novel literalises this collective dimension: it is a figure that is both singular (one beast) and plural (nine billion individuals), organic (it has hearts, eyes, faces) and monstrous (its scale

exceeds any individual body). It moves, sings, suffers it has its own agency but it is constituted by the sum of its individual parts.

The beast's confrontation with Vispala in Aditya's dream is particularly charged. Vispala stands before it with "a right leg made of iron" and a body that is "transparent, as if made of some kind of glass," through which one can see her "adamantine heart, geared limbs and sparkling nerves of fibre optic wire"(Menon 262). She is, literally, the cyborg: a figure in whom organic and mechanical are indistinguishable, in whom transparency reveals not authenticity but artifice. The beast representing humanity in its collective, unengineered multiplicity approaches her not in hostility but in glad discovery. This is a dream of encounter, not conquest: the meeting of the engineered transhuman and the collective human.

Haraway's cyborg is "wary of holism, but needy for connection" (Haraway 6). The beast of Menon's dream embodies this paradox: it is a whole made of parts that cannot be reduced to any single part, a collective that moves as one without eliminating individual difference. Its "mottled hide pink and grey, white and black, yellow and brown" is a figure of racial and ethnic plurality held together not by identity but by proximity, by the sheer fact of sharing a world. This is the novel's most utopian image, and it speaks directly to Haraway's vision of cyborg solidarity: partial, plural, without innocence, but alive.

Critical Regionalism of the Transhuman: Menon's Intervention

The concept of "critical regionalism," developed by architectural theorist Kenneth Frampton, refers to a practice that selectively appropriates elements of a universal or globalising discourse while grounding them in the specificity of local cultural, social, and material conditions. Frampton proposed critical regionalism as a counter to the placeless abstraction of international modernist architecture, arguing for an architecture that maintains "a critical relationship to the universal" without retreating into regional nostalgia (Frampton 21). The concept has since been contested and extended in cultural and literary theory critics have noted its potential conservatism as well as its value as a resistance to cultural homogenisation but its core insight remains productive: the encounter between global discourse and local specificity is never a simple imposition or a simple resistance but a generative transformation in both directions.

Applied to literary and postcolonial contexts, a version of critical regionalism has been practised under various names what Banerjee calls the semiperipheral position of Indian SF, what Varughese describes as “expressions of Indianness” in speculative writing, what Chattopadhyay theorises as the “kalpavigyan” tradition’s negotiation with Western SF (Banerjee; Varughese; Chattopadhyay). This paper proposes the phrase ‘critical regionalism of the transhuman’ to name the specific operation Menon’s fiction performs: taking the global discourse of posthumanism and transhumanism seriously engaging Haraway, implicitly invoking the genre conventions of Western SF while insisting on the transformation of that discourse through South Asian historical, social, and material conditions.

This critical regionalism operates at several levels simultaneously. At the level of setting, 2040 Pune is rigorously localised: its weather (the oppressive Deccan monsoon), its food (idlis, chai, fritters), its social hierarchies (caste-coded educational systems, colour-based beauty norms), its linguistic texture (the creolised English of Indian urban middle-class life). This localisation is not merely atmospheric decoration; it is the substrate through which transhuman technologies are filtered, slowed, and modified. Genetic engineering means something different in a country whose recent history includes the multinational patenting of indigenous biological resources, the manipulation of farmers through proprietary seeds, and the pharmaceutical industry’s exploitation of vulnerable populations.

At the level of characterisation, Menon’s protagonists resist easy identification with either the Western cyborg myth or its critique. Tara is neither a cyborg heroine in the Harawayan mould nor a defender of biological essentialism; she is a thirteen-year-old Indian girl who is trying to understand her world. Aditya is neither a heroic hacker nor a tragic figure of technological subjection; he is a young man whose brilliance and illiteracy coexist, whose transformation into Zal, is both liberation and loss.

At the theoretical level, Menon’s novel implicitly proposes that the cyborg’s ironic political myth requires a further irony to be adequate to the Global South: the irony that liberation technologies are also instruments of new forms of colonial dispossession. Where Haraway’s irony operates on the terrain of Western feminist politics deconstructing the organic holism of radical feminism Menon’s irony operates on the terrain of postcolonial politics, where the question of who controls technological knowledge is inseparable from the question of who profits from biological commons. Sivan’s open-source genetics activism is not merely an ideological preference; it is a political position about global justice in an era of bio capital. As Andrews observes in his analysis of South African speculative fiction, the cyborg’s “queer”

potential is always constrained by the history of violence and oppression from which it emerges a constraint equally operative in Menon's Pune as in Beukes's Johannesburg (Andrews 128).

Conclusion

Donna Haraway concludes her manifesto with a famous declaration: 'Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess' (Haraway 48). The choice of cyborg over goddess is a choice for complexity over purity, for ironic coalition over organic identity, for the material-semiotic world of technoscience over the romantic world of natural feminism. Menon's novel offers a South Asian variation on this conclusion, one that is simultaneously more ambivalent and more politically specific.

The Beast with Nine Billion Feet humanity in its collective, plural, ethnically diverse, morally ambiguous wholeness is neither cyborg nor goddess. It is something that precedes both: the raw material that both the transhumanist project and its critics seek to claim. Menon does not resolve the question of what should be done with this beast. He stages it, in the adolescent consciousness of his protagonists, as a question that is inseparable from questions of family, colour, desire, loyalty, and survival. The novel's political imagination is thus not prescriptive but interrogative: it asks what a transhuman future would look like if it had to be lived in Pune, with monsoons and chai and aunts and parkour and dark skin and genetic patents and open-source code.

Haraway's cyborg manifesto remains indispensable for reading Menon's novel, precisely because the novel thinks with and against it simultaneously. The manifesto's insistence on partiality, irony, and the politics of boundary confusion provides the theoretical vocabulary for understanding what Menon is doing; the novel's postcolonial specificity reveals what remains to be theorised within that vocabulary. Together, they constitute a dialogue across two decades and two continents a dialogue that the field of Global South science fiction studies, now richly documented in works from Banerjee's historical survey to Varughese's study of the post-millennial moment, needs to sustain and amplify.

As Liang's analysis of Chinese SF demonstrates, and as Dalvin and Andrews confirm from Indian and South African contexts respectively, the encounter between Western cyborg theory and non-Western science fiction consistently produces the insight that techno-hybridity

alone does not guarantee liberation. *The Beast with Nine Billion Feet* is a cyborg only in the most expansive and ironic sense of that word: it is the species that makes tools and is made by them, that dreams of transcendence and wakes to inequality, that is simultaneously the subject and the object of its own most ambitious imaginings. Menon's great achievement is to have given this beast a face or rather, nine billion of them. Future scholarship might extend this analysis to other Indian SF authors who inhabit the same contested posthuman terrain: S.B. Divya's *Machinehood* (2021), for instance, offers a cognate critical regionalism from the diasporic perspective, while Vandana Singh's short fiction stages comparable negotiations between Western SF conventions and South Asian cosmologies. The critical regionalism of the transhuman is, in this sense, not a single author's achievement but a field's emergent contribution.

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