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## **Deconstructing Anthropocentrism: A Posthumanist Analysis of M. P. Narayana Pillai's *Parinaamam***

**Ayisha Haneef**

This paper examines M. P. Narayana Pillai's novel *Parinaamam* through a posthumanist analytical framework, arguing that the work is a pioneering example of posthumanistic literature that critiques anthropocentrism and challenges the human-animal binary. While Pillai is often categorised as a modernist writer, this study demonstrates that his focus on the alienated lives of both humans and non-humans, particularly in *Parinaamam*, reveals a deeper engagement with posthumanist perspectives. The novel's protagonist, a dog named Tommy, is presented not as a symbolic animal but as a complex subject with his own ideology and revolutionary consciousness. By giving voice and agency to a non-human, Pillai critiques human-centric institutions—from the state to political ideologies—and exposes their hypocrisies. The paper employs an analytical method to explore how Pillai's narrative blurs the lines of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, ultimately envisioning a 'zoopolis' where animals are regarded as co-beings with inherent political and moral rights. In conclusion, this paper asserts that *Parinaamam* is a seminal work that anticipates contemporary posthumanist thought by decentering the human and asking fundamental questions about our relationship with other species.

**Keywords:** Posthumanism, M. P. Narayana Pillai, Anthropocentrism, Malayalam Literature, Anthropomorphism, Zoomorphism.

## **Introduction**

A non-human being regarded as the Godfather of the human race is the stepping stone towards posthumanism. M P Narayana Pillai Malayalam literature's unique literary figure is influenced by modern sensibility in Malayalam fiction. While many of the writers from the modernity trend frequently wrote of existential crises, the voidness of life and anarchism, M. P. Narayan Pillai's works focused on the alienated lives of society we may have seen but were not interested in focusing on. Among these lives were humans and non-humans; Narayana Pillai became exceptional among his contemporaries. His pen was not necessarily reserved for human lives, but addressed every being that has ever made the world exist and sustain. Pillai purveyed it long ago through narration by the end of the 1980s, when posthuman literary theory was dormant. The main intention of this paper is to assert how M P Narayana Pillai portrayed animals in his fiction through a posthumanistic analytics. Such an analysis of his works, particularly his novel '*Parinaamam*' (Eng Trans. Evolution) can prove that M P Narayana Pillai was not a mere modernist writer but one who has exalted his posthumanist perspectives. This study employs analytical methods in order to grasp the gist of Narayana Pillai's calibre and how he perceived the agency of non-humans, such as animals, especially dogs, as much as humans, to unravel the unstained posthumanist ingrained in M P Narayana Pillai. His works could prove that Pillai was envisioning a zoopolis where non-human life forms are also regarded as equal to human beings, and how Narayana Pillai employed animals in fiction would reveal the blurring boundaries he has established that either touch anthropomorphism or zoomorphism.

## **Posthumanism in Literature**

Literature, which is widely understood as a medium for human engagement and entertainment and to convey their thoughts and emotions, is always regarded as a humanistic or human construct. 'From humans, for humans, about humans' is the common understanding held of literature. However, these pre-established notions have shifted with the literature's ecological and environmental conscious-

ness. Literature has become more oriented toward ecology and the environment. The concerns and complex scenarios of ecology have become more evident and are at the forefront of the literature. Moreover, certain fictions have been created to lobby for ecological and environmental causes. Since most of our literary and academic traditions are more inclined toward the humanistic perspective, posthumanism represents the notion that transcends the human as the centre of discourse. It critically examines the privileged position humans maintain and manage in every worldly sphere. It has emerged as a response to the increasing influence of technology, the ecological crises and evolving understanding of identity and embodiment (Graham, 2004).

Posthumanism critically evaluates the role of human beings amongst other beings, such as animals, artificial intelligence and the environment (Graham, 2004). It challenges the anthropocentric view, which regards human beings as the centre of the world. Its emergence has sparked discussions across various fields, engaging thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Ray Kurzweil, Nick Bostrom and N Katherine Hayles (Onishi, 2010). Posthumanism cannot be easily defined in the contemporary context because it comprises many ideas and approaches. More importantly, contemporary discussions are more inclined towards the possibilities and challenges of technological advancements in cybernetics, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence (Cottrell, 2016; Hayles, 1999). Therefore, in contemporary times, posthumanism is frequently understood in discussions of what it means to be human in an age defined by rapid technological change and environmental concerns (Sorgner, 2014). However, I explore posthumanism as an approach that intersects with the human and non-human world in this work.

From another perspective, posthumanism explores the interconnectedness of humans with other non-human life forms on the planet. This posthuman perspective re-evaluates the traditional humanistic myths. It challenges the anthropocentric notion, simultaneously questioning and critically evaluating the instrumental attitude of human beings towards other life forms. Posthumanism attempts to separate humans from the central role and assert that all living and non-

living beings are inter-linked, mutually dependent, and co-evolved. A major objective of posthumanism is to demolish the nature/culture binary and to state that humans are not the supreme, authoritative beings they conceive themselves to be, but exist and manage to capture all these only with the co-dependence of other living and nonliving beings. Instead of placing human beings as superior among all beings, posthumanism seeks to establish the interlinks between all species and establish as well as strengthen the notion that all living beings are companions in this universe (Nayar, 2014). From a posthuman framework, we can conceive non-human beings, such as animals, as our companions, considering their capacity to experience pain and suffering, animal consciousness, sense of their own morality and various ethical qualities and communication capabilities (Nayar, 2014). Although we admit non-human beings like animals have all these capacities and consciousness, the anthropocentric notion that is inherent in ourselves does not allow us to see them as equals or companion species to us.

However, deep inside the human species holds a blurred identity of an animal, like how humans term our unrefined and uncivilised instincts and acts as 'animal traits or animal instincts'. Nayar draws this toward the philosophical scene: "the horror that stirs deep in man is an obscure awareness that in him something lives so akin to the animal that it might be recognised" (Nayar, 2014, p. 122). For this same reason, humans find solace in quoting Aristotle, who admits that, by nature, humans are social animals. We can find the "process of socialising the animal out of the human, or domesticating the wilderness within man" in many literary works. Sometimes, the human character becomes a non-human species or vice versa. . The dichotomy of anthropomorphism/zoomorphism suggests that both nature/culture traits are not inside a watertight classification, but are somewhat fluid. Hence, posthumanism presents a compelling challenge to traditional humanistic perspectives by interrogating the established boundaries between humans and animals. Posthumanism opens the possibility to explore how animals affect humans. Suppose this is the ethical morality that classifies humans as humans and animals as non-humans. In that case, Mathew Calarco suggests that particular moralities humans think we are entitled to are also found among animals. That means "there is no

real break between human and animal regarding cognition and morality" (Calarco, 2008).

At this time, when human misdoings and disheartening deeds are furthering daily, we may find more refined moral consciousness in animals. It is all indicated that animals can be considered as the equal companions of human beings because they also have "personal preferences, self awareness, memory, the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals with a sense of autonomy, a sense of the future and an emotional life." Pointing to all these, Pramod Nayar suggests that "because animals demonstrate subject-like traits, they should be given the same moral consideration as humans" (Nayar, 2014, p. 126). Recognising this equal moral consideration to animals, we should look into how 'Zoopolis' was envisioned by Will Kymlicka and Sue Donaldson in their work '*Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*' (Will Kymlicka & Sue Donaldson, 2011). Kymlicka and Donaldson reach towards such an attempt to extend animal rights theory because they recognise and acknowledge the significance of animals in the existence and sustenance of human life (Will Kymlicka & Sue Donaldson, 2011). Throughout this, zoopolis suggests that even certain animals have distinctive claims upon us. Kymlicka and Donaldson argue that we must rearticulate and offer a more positive picture of the human-animal relation, rather than severing it; they vouch for the political liability between them. "It entails recognising animals not just as individual subjects entitled to respect of their basic rights, but as members of communities-both ours and theirs- woven together in relations of interdependency, mutuality and responsibility" (Will Kymlicka & Sue Donaldson, 2011, p. 489). In short, these authors' claims for a zoopolitic society where animals and humans have equal companionship sprang up from the posthumanistic tendencies of the age.

### **Posthumanistic '*Parinaamam*'**

Tommy the dog is the protagonist of the novel. However, the novel develops through the narration of a failed writer, and every character of the story is unshakably tied to Tommy's existence, presence, and absence. Pillai not only narrates the conflicts of the human mind

and relations but also subtly points out the animal trauma and their associated behaviour. It says: "the chained dog will be a biter. Especially the political prisoners, they either become historians, philosophers or writers" (Pillai, 1989, p. 8). Here, Pillai articulates how trauma can articulate both animal and human experiences and shape their future; therefore, Pillai does not classify them as distinct from each other. For him, the frustration of animals and humans when they are chained is equal, and they will express it the way they are trained. Exploration like this shows the boundary of internal conflicts of both animals and humans, and in his posthumanist narration, the boundary between two identities blurs and later conjoins. It is evident in the scene where club members are gathered for the dog show, the writer describes the scene: "Club's courtyard is full of cars. Dogs and humans are mixed inside the car. Some dogs are talking with humans. I even doubt if they are even dogs" (Pillai, 1989, p. 9). Here, Pillai is envisioning a fluid identity or companionship of humans with animals. It suggests the co-dependence and co-evolution of both species. Even by the climax of the novel, when the Chief Minister takes Tommy with him in his car, the reader realises that all these developments throughout the novel were for Tommy only. Here, too, Pillai states the interdependence and co-evolution of animal and human beings.

The novel does not merely present Tommy as an exceptional dog; rather, it systematically destabilises anthropocentric assumptions by redistributing agency, intelligence, and value across species. For instance, when Tommy calls the police to warn the trio, the act disrupts the long-held belief that rational communication and intentional intervention are exclusively human traits. This blurring of cognitive boundaries produces a classificatory crisis for both characters and readers, who struggle to situate Tommy within existing categories of "animal" or "human." Similarly, Tommy's orchestration of the kennel during the dog show, interpreted metaphorically as a Che Guevara-like mobilisation, attributes political consciousness and strategic agency to a non-human subject, thereby displacing humans as the sole bearers of collective action.

Furthermore, Tommy's act of urinating on Swami's bed functions as a symbolic inversion of territorial hierarchy: instead of being

confined within human-defined spaces, Tommy asserts dominance over them, rendering humans vulnerable and reactive. This inversion reaches its peak when the Naxalites demand Tommy in exchange for the D.I.G, thereby overturning conventional value systems in which human life -especially that of a state figure- holds unquestioned primacy over animal life. In this moment, the narrative radically reconfigures the hierarchy of importance, positioning Tommy as more politically and symbolically significant than a human authority figure. When Tommy was given first prize in the dog show, everyone challenged his position, arguing that Tommy is a mongrel without any pedigree, but then the writer argues that Tommy is a dog who transcended his dogness, and argues that he is a complete dog because he transcended his canine attributes and attained the fullness of human abilities. Even the Colonel underestimate Tommy's abilities, by saying "a dog is a dog is a dog", but the Colonel is even more shocked by realising that Tommy can remove his belt on his own. Through these narrative strategies, the novel not only challenges stereotypical human–dog relationships but also recentres the non-human as a site of agency, thereby unsettling the foundational logic of human centrality.

When humans always place themselves as the apex point of morality and conscience, Pillai smashes that notion with no hesitation throughout the novel and underscores that dogs are far higher than humans in moral hierarchy." He must be from a noble family, because he never steals, only eats when I say" (Pillai, 1989, p. 7). In another place, "Human servants and relatives may surrender in front of the murderous revolutionaries. However, the loyal dogs will never give an ear to Maoist principles. They can handle much of the revolutions themselves" (Pillai, 1989, p. 21). Narayana Pillai also suggests that humans are not entirely human, as he always thinks so; there is always an animal lingering inside- the police officer Kesavan Nair describes his thirty-year police service as 'barking for thirty years in Khakhi' (Pillai, 1989, p. 246). Another place, Pillai suggests that "every human is, in a way or another, a thoroughly untrained mongrel?" (Pillai, 1989, p. 477).

Throughout the novel, the reader finds that every character is after the animal to validate and fulfil their existence within the uni-

verse of this novel. Even if it is the police, the Maoist group or the Colonel and his friends, trying to capture Tommy because they have realised and acknowledged the animal capability and potential through Tommy. They risk their every resource to capture this dog, not to imprison or kill, but for companionship. Tommy's relationship with the Colonel and the Chief Minister differs from the traditional human-animal relationship. Hence, Tommy becomes the symbol of an animal community that can mobilise, protest and liberate the canine community as much as humans, or more than that. Because here, Pillai directly shoots sarcasm towards every established human socio-political association and system, from the state to revolutionaries, and they are all after Tommy to concretise their power. Such a recognition of Tommy's potential, as portrayed throughout the novel, portrays a zoopolitics where dogs enjoy their fundamental rights.

The novel's representation of Tommy can be productively read through the framework of zoopolitics as developed by Kymlicka and Donaldson, who argue that animals should not be understood as passive beings under human sovereignty but as political subjects possessing forms of agency, membership, and rights within shared communities. In this light, the early moment in which Tommy independently removes his chains and belt becomes symbolically significant: the apparatuses of restraint, typically marking human domination over domesticated animals, are here rendered ineffective, suggesting not merely physical escape but a refusal of imposed political subordination. Tommy's act can thus be interpreted as an assertion of autonomy that disrupts the conventional positioning of dogs as dependent, governed beings within a human polity. This trajectory culminates powerfully in the killing of Pooyilyan, the psychopath who preys upon dogs. Rather than a random act of animal violence, this scene can be read as a form of collective, species-based justice enacted by Tommy and his pack—a retaliatory assertion of what Kymlicka and Donaldson might term a “canine political community.” The coordinated attack signifies not only agency but also solidarity, positioning dogs as a group capable of defending their members against threats. More than that, Pillai hints at the zoopolitical perspective that he envisions in this novel through an imaginative story that is discussed between the trio, in which a dog

leads humans in a revolution and invades a country. In this story, the dog built a big palace where he spread soil on the floor to play and bushes in the lavatory to defecate. In his parliament, he appointed humans who love dogs as ministers, and some wrote poems in praise of the dog. Although this imaginative story is highly sarcastic and critical of the human political scenario, Pillai chose a dog to pose this criticism, which is noteworthy, and when we look upon this story from a posthumanistic perspective, we can see that Pillai possibly has realised the potential of a zoopolis. In doing so, the novel reconfigures the human–animal relationship from one of unilateral control to one of contested coexistence, where animals emerge as actors within a shared political space, capable of resistance, self-liberation, and even forms of justice.

M P Narayana Pillai's '*Parinaamam*', which is lauded as a political thriller, explore the socio-political landscape of the 1980s mainly through the representation and agency of an animal. How politics degraded human values and roles is intricately revealed in this work, and through a canine community representative, Tommy Pillai warns humanity of the deteriorating human values in the hands of humans themselves. When the power structure dominates humans, every discourse of man contributes to the deterioration. Since such a demeaning power structure is absent among dogs, their ethical and moral statutes are sustained. Hence, Pillai's posthumanistic perspective tackles how the civilised and progressive politics drag back the human as a moral and social being. Moreover, Pillai places Tommy-the dog-as the prototype that humans can use to model themselves. In such a manner, Pillai systematically negates an inherent notion of anthropocentrism and validates that humans are nothing but a mere co-being who are dependent and interlinked with non-human beings. Joshy George asserts this finding in his article. He says, "M P Narayana Pillai conceived dogs as the Godfather of the human race. He was so obsessed with them, in a way that he could not help the urge to write about them" (George, 2025).

### **Conclusion**

A core tenet of posthumanism is the rejection of

anthropocentrism—the idea that humans are the planet's central or most important beings. *'Parinaamam'* does this explicitly by making a mongrel dog-Tommy—the protagonist and a revolutionary leader. The novel places the dog's perspective and 'evolution' at the story's centre, challenging the traditional hierarchy where humans are the masters and animals are their subordinates. The dog's actions and thoughts are given complexity and political significance, which are usually reserved for human characters. The novel blurs the line between human and animal. Tommy is not just a loyal pet but a thinking, strategic, and rebellious figure. He leads a revolution, analyses power structures, and challenges the notion of being "a dog." Pillai forces the reader to question the fixed distinctions between human and non-human intelligence and behaviour by giving this mongrel such agency and a revolutionary consciousness. Posthumanism is a direct critique of humanism, which it argues has led to a worldview of human dominance over nature and other species. *'Parinaamam'* is a powerful critique of human-centric power structures and institutions. The dogs' revolt is a metaphorical challenge to the state's authority, the police, and various political ideologies. The novel's satirical tone exposes the hypocrisies and failings of these 'human' systems, suggesting that a non-human perspective might offer a more honest and clear-eyed view of power dynamics. This work is an example of literature that gives voice and subjectivity to the non-human. Instead of a dog serving as a mere symbol for human traits like loyalty or savagery, the novel elevates the dog to a complex subject of its own, with its motivations, ideology, and a collective revolutionary consciousness. The "dogs' revolution" is not just a simple analogy; it is a parallel narrative offering a different, perhaps more authentic, history of power.

In summary, by shifting the narrative's centre from humans to a dog and using this unconventional protagonist to critique human institutions, *'Parinaamam'* goes beyond a simple allegory. It engages with the very questions at the heart of posthumanist thought: what does it mean to be human, what is our relationship with other species, and can we imagine a world where the human is no longer the sole measure of all things? In this sense, it is a pioneering and important work of posthumanistic literature.

## Endnotes

- 1 Posthumanism is a philosophical and critical theory that challenges the traditional concept of human exceptionalism by decentering humans and rejecting rigid dualisms like mind/body and human/animal. It seeks to reframe our understanding of the self as a relational and entangled entity, deeply connected to technology, other species, and the environment.
- 2 M.P. Narayana Pillai was a journalist and writer of Malayalam literature, known affectionately to his friends as Nanappan. He is famous for his novel, "Parinamam" (The Evolution), and some short stories. Though he was awarded the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel in 1991, he notably declined it. He was a journalist for various publications, including the Far Eastern Economic Review and McGraw-Hill World News.
- 3 'Parinaamam' is a satirical Malayalam novel by M.P. Narayana Pillai centred on a mongrel dog named Tommy, who leads a revolution against his human master. The story is a profound and multi-layered allegory for the nature of power, hierarchy, and political oppression, as the dogs' revolt parallels a state police search for Maoist revolutionaries. Through this unique narrative, the novel critiques human-centric institutions and challenges conventional ideas of loyalty and authority.
- 4 Zoopolis, envisioned by Will Kymlicka and Sue Donaldson, is a political theory that extends the concepts of citizenship, sovereignty, and justice to non-human animals. It proposes a multi-species society where different animals have distinct political statuses based on their relationships with humans. Domesticated animals, for instance, would be considered co-citizens, while wild animals would be recognised as members of their sovereign nations.
- 5 Anthropomorphism and zoomorphism are literary devices that use animal and human characteristics to explore human nature. Anthropomorphism, seen in works like Animal Farm and Zootopia, gives animals human traits to satirise social and political issues. Zoomorphism, as in Kafka's The Metamorphosis, applies animalistic qualities to humans to explore themes of dehumanisation and instinct. Both devices serve as powerful tools for creators to analyse human behaviour and society.
- 6 So far, we have been exploring only how humans affect animals. Moreover, this comes from a view and consciousness that humans are only potent to affect other beings because we place ourselves somewhere at the apex of the hierarchical order. Given the recent background of stray dog casualties and human-animal conflicts in Kerala, the posthumanist perspective would be an apt perspective to explore the issue.

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