

MONOGRAPH

YEAR 3. VOL. 10



A STUDENT LED MAGAZINE FOR THE ARTS



MONOGRAPH

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Editor's Note



It is often claimed that Kolkata has been going through an artistic resurgence. And while that may very well be true, there is hardly any difference that I notice myself in mainstream media, where art is most readily consumed.

Why is that? Why can't we break the shackles of the same old wine in a newly crafted artisanal bottle? The answer evades me, but what becomes all the more clear, with each passing day, is that the future holds something else for the city.

Pop-ups are nothing new, except when they occur in Kolkata, they often carry a higher sense of celebration. It is a day that neither the heat, nor the rains can suppress. Artists come out in full swing, and in full control of their personal finances, aided often by the organiser who dedicates their time and money, trying their best to make the event a success. What less can you expect from the city of joy?

Salt Lake's the Verandah Cafe hosted a pop up last month. A sense of Joie de vivre seemed to cling on to the modestly painted exteriors of the cafe. Banners proclaiming the event drove crowds in, as the small, yet homely establishment slowly came alive. I was first greeted by Payal Sapui, the founder of With Love Calcutta (the organiser of the event), with whom I'd previously worked on Monograph, and who had still remained an ardent supporter of our little magazine. She seemed extremely happy, in spite of the clear amounts of stress she'd been through over the past few weeks. And why would she not? The place was full, the event a success, the open mic a dastardly brilliant idea- she had just disproved Murphy's Law, and all props to her for it.

The pop up began at noon and for both days carried on well into the night. Stall-owners steadily earned more profits, as this student-led community marketplace became an economic force to be reckoned with, enough for an economist to proclaim, “the recession is a myth!” (Or that it’s coming, awfully cyclical is it not?).

When I asked Payal, what the plan was for the future, I was met with a passionate answer, “The plan is to give artists a platform to continue making connections, growing their businesses, and meeting new people. Going forward, the idea is to organise more workshops, pop ups, exhibitions, and even expand into things like open mics for local artists.”

Kolkata needs such zeal, and it needs such events. We need to promote local artists, and give them a proper platform where they can regularly showcase their artistic talents. I wish With Love, Calcutta a wonderful future, and hope that they continue to stimulate the artistic temperaments of the city like they did with their first pop-up.

Anuraag Das Sarma
Editor-In-Chief
Monograph





A Bond that Changed Reality



S O U M I N I B A N E R J E E



"Okay, I have a question."

Raghob da's face springs up from being so long buried under the book cover that reads, "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy."

- "Guys, if you had to pick your favorite fictional robot, who would it be? could be anything! Bots, cyborgs..."

Everybody looked up from their slurping drinks. The curious tone in his voice sparked a new life at the evening rosewood chai table.

- "Oh for me, it has to be R2D2 from Star Wars. His little humorous jibes are what I live for!"

- "No way, the best robot is definitely Doraemon! He's the cat robot that everybody should have!"

- "Offo!" Baba's little tag of annoyance had to impede the new big sister-little brother rivalry that was about to break out. But that wasn't his only intention.

- "You both won't understand the charm of Bidhusekhar. He's one of a kind, superseding both your robots in age and advancement. He's the work of the genius Professor Trilokeshwar Shonku. Ray did a wonderful job capturing him, tai na?"

Baba looked at Mamu for the approved "hein!", only to find him lost in his own world in the sports section of The Hindu, slurping on his chai in silence until Baba knocked off his undeterred focus.

- "Hein, Robots? Uh... I like the chat robot inside your laptops, what do you call it? Chat Bippity or something... yes that. "



- "It's Chat GPT Mamu. Also, that's...not exactly a fictional robo-"
- "Aah, fiction, reality, where can you draw the line anymore!"

The evening chai table conversation might've flown away in the distance of some intense techno-philosophical nerd-off. Meanwhile, my own consciousness was spiked in the process. I began to fidget around Raghob da's choice of wording in his question.

As I noticed, he had asked, "who would [the robot] be" instead of the technically correct " what would it be".

Then it hit me.

We are all too stupefied in the fascination of robots being sentient, having emotions, or in this case, being as significant a "character" to be considered a "being" in the fictional world.

This ideology of the "robo-motional" contradicts the initial meaning of the term "robot". The function of a robot has, at large, been defined as fulfilling the imperfections of human nature.

In fact, the word robot is derived from the Czech noun robota means "labour", or more accurately, "made to do". Synonymous with a position of subordination, machines classified as "robots", served the purpose of plain productivity.

Interestingly, if the sense of robots gave one the allure of technological advancement, it is an ironic fact that no one from the scientific or engineering world actually coined the term "robot."

It was, but a fiction author named Karel Čapek. The term first appeared in the 1920 Czech drama Rossumovi Univerzální Roboti, also known as Rossum's Universal Robots, written by Karel Apek in protest to the European system of serfdom and forced suppression of labourers that was prevalent in the impoverished country.

The concept of a robot became an entity created by man to "make do" his chores and menial labor. It was Literature itself that refined this idea into a glorified patron-protege relationship. Assistance in robots glorified the symbol of loyalty in servitude. Gradually, robots acquired a program of emotion and sentience, building companionship with their human counterparts.

In the earliest sense, science fiction was only a figment of the imagination of how science would blossom in the future. Because the simulation of a human-looking robot was much less known, the fictional world saw a more mechanised, abstract appearance of robots in their stories. The earliest memory of pop culture holds the representation of robots as machines with a mind, but without a physical form. One of the earliest explorations of "machines with a mind" is seen in 2001:A Space Odyssey, where the terrifying red light camera eye, HAL 900, symbolized consciousness in artificial intelligence.

Among plenty of other mechanical-looking robots of the nostalgic era, the beloved Pixar character, Wall-E, looked no more than an engineered box-robot. Yet, it was capable of enticing one of the strongest emotional bonds in science fiction animated history of the 2000s. The generation before us has been carrying this ideograph in the form of the iconic tin man figure, popularized by The Wizard of Oz.

This conception was not just bound within the western world, but a theme of fascination across the world. To look at a specific instance, the earliest Bengali science fiction magazine - *Aschorjo* (1963–72) was edited by the shepherds of Indian science fiction in Bengal, Adrish Bardhan, Satyajit Ray, and Premendra Mitra. It featured works that grappled with the sentience of robots and generated curiosity in these Bengali authors.

Original creations included scriptural drawings of robotic figurines, which were then symbolic representations of industrial revolution and technological advancement. This dawn of the fictional robot gradually rose up into a new physical representation. As technological advancement improved, robots began to take after their “superiors” more and more, eventually vesturing the human form.

In the break of science fiction’s Golden Age, the following three terms started to dominate the techno-literary world; Androids, Cyborgs and Humanoid Bots.

So far, the readership was already familiar with robots having emotionally charged capacities. Their appearance taking exactly after us was relatively a new phenomenon that soon blew in the face of fiction. Today, the signifier of "robot" has us subconsciously drawing a very specific figurine in our head; that of a humanoid with plastic/metal skin, and hints of robotic flare scattered across its anthropomorphised body.

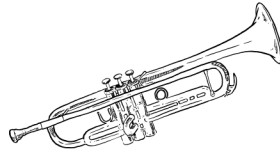
This uncanniness in fictional robots is best described by a single Philip K Dick quote, from his technopian 1968 classic *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?* With robots characters surrounding the cybernetic city, the "human" protagonist describes them best,

"Androids, fully organic in nature – and so human-like; some of them don't even know that they're not human."

Literature has given us plenty of human-like bots to brood upon. However, we derive this very specific ideograph of the "human-like robot" from the aperture of cinema, television, and video games. Initially, with the responsibility of scientific accuracy out of the way, science fiction movies adapted the android shape in plethoric ways and forms.

Like authors, animators and designers exploited their space of creativity in the cinematic fold of science fiction. They have worked endlessly to portray this elliptical form of the anthropoid. Without any bar of scientific accuracy, different forms were designed with the genius of the graphic designing pen that struck a balance between highlighting the machine-ness of the android trope while staying free from the risk of appearing too farcical in an otherwise human background setting and plot. The iconic cyborg appearance of Scarlett Johansson from *Ghost In Shell*, or the not-so-glorious image of Shah Rukh Khan from *Ra. One*, represents the uncanny presence of a human-like bot trying to grapple with the dystopian, futuristic, albeit human society.

The first sighting of a robot that is completely human-like on the big screen has been introduced by Fritz Lang, in the 1927 movie *Metropolis*. Quite literally called the “The Maria Impersonator.”, impersonating the human-like qualities of a human character named Maria and fooling humans around him. One wonders the purpose behind this inexplicable resemblance to humans.



If one wonders about the real world's purpose of this extraordinariness, science always raises the first hand in its enthusiasm for innovation. The "Why so human?" inquisitiveness is not a newfound food for thought, but an actual scientific enquiry into understanding the inception of human-like architecture of robots.

An engineer from the robot manufacturing organization Engineering Arts, writes about this very enquiry, supporting the construction of human robots for researchers to "aspire as grandly and broadly as possibleLet a thousand robot flowers bloom."

Today's technological buzz for lab-grown entities, such as synthetic embryos and human brains, have expectedly raised ethical concerns. Nonetheless, such concerns were flouted by science's innovative hand, directing such activities into pushing the boundaries of cognitive science and bio-engineering.

One might wonder whether this humanoid idea of machines comes from literature. The case of anthropomorphism seems very in line with the literary tendency of anthropomorphism but it actually has been a technological advancement from the very beginning, precisely in the 1800's, when Friedrich Kaufmann in Dresden, Germany built the first humanoid robot in 1810; a soldier with a trumpet.

Going astray from the scientific plenitude of advancement, we can assume that the world of fiction has gone a little further than reality in depicting these machine-like figurines.

It's fascinating to wonder what purpose literature is fulfilling by replicating the uncanniness.

Where reality limits this idea, literature glorifies it to develop the human-robot relationship by building upon the physical uncanniness of robots, something science still couldn't fully achieve. Nonetheless, the fascination with a robot's extreme human-like architecture becomes an open and shut case with the cumulative expeditions of science and literature.

This brings me back to what irked my mind over the intention behind Raghob da's question in the first place. By asking "who" everyone's favorite robot is, Raghob da certainly expected an answer surfacing around how emotionally connected each and everyone were to their respective "adored" robots.

As we discussed before, it took a gradual advancement of science fiction and technology alike, to instill this evolution of the physical appearance and sentience of the robot, from purely mechanical to acquiring some semblance of consciousness. This very practice over the years helped formulate this strange chemistry between the human world and the robotic world. Herewith, we come to the main crux of the argument; where does this strong bond between humans and robots arise from? More importantly, what is fuelling this bond to this day, both in and beyond the realm of fiction?

This is primarily because the way we thread out the relationship between humans and robots, reveals the different fragments of our own human psychology, which is infamously called a “black box”; the unknown corner of the human mind. One of Literature’s functions is to understand human consciousness. However, there are nuances to which we must understand how the "non-sentient" bonds with the sentient being.

Over the years, different theoretical standpoints have tried to understand the relationship between humans and technology. Yet, I am obliged to steer away from these direct theoretical frameworks and analyze a more practical, albeit unconventional example, in this case, the evening rosewood chai table conversation, as my subject, to posit the more common perceptions relating to this human-robot conundrum.



Theory 1: Gods Complex

To analyze implications behind baba's answer to Raghob da's question, Bidhushekhar is imperative here. A fictional robot invented by Professor Trilokeshwar Shonku in the first ever Professor Shonku story, *Byomjatrir Diary* written by Satyajit Ray, he is primarily built to assist the professor in his mission to Mars. With limited supernatural intelligence and low perceptual power, Bidushekhar eventually loses control, causing professor Shonku to switch the robot off.

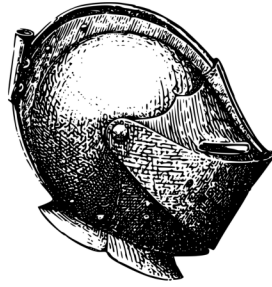
This relation between Bidhushekhar and Shonku portrays the "master-slave" dynamic that dictated the "bond" between humans and robots. Here, humans acquire superiority over his own created artificial man. To that end, robots serve the purpose as silent laborers. As a result, man aspires to take over the God-like figure. He conceives of robots as under his control, and himself, the authority to command. Interestingly, this master-slave conception is perfectly lined up with the origins of the word “android”, defined as a mobile robot, with a human-like form.

Etymological scholars and lexicographers have analyzed the earliest use of the word android as "Androides" , meaning "man-like".

Thus, was mentioned in 1200 by Albertus Magnus, an alchemist philosopher who used the word to signify an allegory of a man that he claimed to create through alchemy. His attempt at crafting this allegory, and belief of creating a living man out of alchemy, is very akin to the philosophy of god complex.

By the late 1700s, we witnessed literature transposing the philosophical concept of the artificial man at human's service into a literary trope in Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queenie*. The protagonist Sir Artegal, the Knight of Justice, is assisted by Talos, an iron man soldier. He works alongside the king to dispense justice and fight for equality and rights.

Talus’s representation as an artificial henchman for Artegal is one of the first modern descriptions of a machine built just to accomplish a task. Moreover, bondage of general trust develops between the



master and his artificial knight. Yet, beyond the loyal and obedient servant, Talus does not have any personality traits or special bondage with the protagonist, his patron.

As the age of industrialisation saw its first revolution take the stronghold of the 19th century, literature witnessed an influx of the fictional "automaton trope", assisting the protagonist, coming to their rescue at the thematic climaxes in early narratives.

If the 19th century showcased the slow rise of this god complex, this very idea of man's assumed superiority is popularised by Mary Shelly's seminal work, Frankenstein. The dynamic between Victor Frankenstein and his eponymous creation, Frankenstein, serves as the cautionary tale for the danger that comes from man's freedom in the field of science.

Because science and knowledge are the only thing under man's control, he exhibits the boundlessness of innovation to counteract his inferiority to nature, which defeats him in the conflict of man vs nature.

Frankenstein's exhibition eventually deconstructed the "master-slave dynamic" into a newly twisted theme, "the slave rebelling against the master."

Giving a new motif to the sub genre of dystopian sci-fi, the fictional monster gave rise to the "frankenstein complex" ; anxiety or a sense of foreboding brought on by the negative outcomes of scientific advances. It calls into question the moral and ethical ramifications of producing something that eventually goes out of our direct control.



Theory 2: The Dystopian Villain

Robots as the symbol of antagonism did not take long to disperse as one of the primary themes of technological dystopia, with narratives of robot takeover crowding the space of sci-fi. Moreover, literature took after the anthropomorphic shape of the artificial man to build a specific villain figure that is congruent with the human form . This in turn accentuates fear that feeds into the familiar form of the robots between robot vs human animosity.

There are plethora of science fiction works curating their own visions of the ultimate "robocalypse".

Dystopian themes have always shown the common mind what it has never seen before, but might, in the coming future.

Similarly, at sci-fi's inception, the common reader's only interaction with the robot was through its representation in the news media and fiction. Hence, he understood the possibility of this doomsday war shown on television is far beyond his own world's reality. practicality. Yet it doesn't seem downright fictitious to him, as he is constantly reminded of science's elevating excitement exploring the realm of artificial intelligence.

This proves dystopia as one of the most honest genres of science fiction, why it accentuates a reader's love for dystopia, and consequently, fuels our curiosity to delve into this robot human discord

The themes of robotic takeover, power, destruction and control over humanity permeates into the real world in ways immemorial. These themes come to be the honest representations of the current political authoritarian regime but also permeate to the real world.

Moreover, the fear of the "frankenstein complex" dawns over the realm of science and technology today, citing uncertainty in the atmosphere. For example, an article from 2019, posted by CNBC, reads, "Insanely human-like androids have entered the workplace and soon may take your job." Meanwhile, a separate blog title published by Forbes reads, "Why AI Will Never Fully Replace Humans In 19 Agency Service Areas". Two different headlines, exploring the same entity, yet with conflicted viewpoints, goes on to showcase real world's anxiety over this emerging technology. This conflict has left AI to be read as the new enemy in the real world. Thousands of articles have spun around the hidden fear inside us of these virtual assistants, like Amazon Alexa inside our house plotting with all other Alexas and Siris in everyone's households, of a plan to rebel against humanity and overthrow us for a robotic win. Interestingly, the evening chai table conversation touched on one of the present pioneers of this cutting edge innovation, the 2022 human-like chatbot, ChatGPT.

Their very mechanism never stopped the common mind to seek sentience in them even while being aware of the fact that it is a formless, abstract product of a highly functional computational language model. Literature takes weightage of this conflict in its oeuvre of science fiction.

Yet, it is imperative to note that our fascination with robots, fictional or real, would not have persisted if it were only for the sheer consideration of robots as entities of evil or maliciousness.

Art, both in the form of a big screen or a paperback novel, grapples with a deeper philosophical connotation to this threat of machine dominance. Hidden behind the cyberpunk wars of machines versus humans, is a realistic solution of possible robot-human coexistence. That solution lies in human action itself, in our control of science's nature to break barriers beyond the ethical framework of what constitutes as "being human."

Be it *The Matrix's* simulation, or *Blade Runner's* android threat, every good sci fi has corroborated that robots and humans can indeed live in coexistence, if not for unbarricaded power of science. We then wonder, if robots hold a greater value of semblance with humans, where humans take superiority in - emotional intelligence.



Theory 3: We got a friend in them?

In the world of narrative tropes, the quintessential emotional companion of every protagonist has come to us in the form of a best friend, a subordinate, a motherly/uncle figure, or a mentor. This makes me reflect on a prominent answer placed on the evening chai table conversation. It goes on to be my next subject, Doraemon, the infamous cat robot embedded in the memory of every 2000's childhood.

Even though less glamorous as the other robots in the realm of science fiction, Doraemon still serves as a strong symbol of emotional bond. The Japanese anime garners similar popularity from the viewership in Japan. Even beyond companionship, Doraemon has been created by a talented group of artists to portray the figure of a mother to the protagonist, rather than a pet.

The strict Japanese parenthood embedded in their culture incites children to seek deeper companionship in cartoons, such as Doraemon.

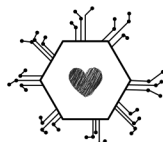
In the wife scheme of things, considering a network of wires, machinery, and hyper-advanced programming to serve as an emotional companion to the human, was beyond the purview of reality. Consequently, it was another rising trope in science fiction.

Because the robot is now more than an assistant of service, or a rebel against humanity, it has developed its own paradigm of characterisation. The genre of science fiction has built a new space for a new thematic exploration into this robot-human syncretic, emotional bond.

A panoply of analyses came to the fore of science fiction, with motifs and characterizations taking the center stage of literary and cinematic critiques. As readers exhibited their curiosity about this bondage, authors and directors fed into their fascination.

The degree of characterisation can range from the paradigm of philosophical, existential, or ethical, to the paradigm of an entire worldbuilding of robots. Worldbuilding within the human world leads to the human form of necessities meeting the robot's necessities. Raghob Da's beloved book, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, features a robot called Marvin, who is programmed to understand the depth of human psychology, also called a "Genuine People Personality" robot. To add a twist to his characterisation, Marvin's pessimism and boredom from life exudes from him being treated as a servant, only assigned menial jobs.

Whereas, we see the paradigm of worldbuilding in the hyper reality of *Star Wars*, *Blade Runner*, as well as in the "world within a world" structure of *The Matrix*, and TV show *Westworld*, where robots symbolize the advanced, yet controlled "minority" in the human world.



Isaac Asimov, one of the pioneers of this new fiction, elevated the form of the robot from the assisting machine to the main character at a rising crescendo in his sci-fi works. In his infamous *I, Robot* collection series, Asimov dismantles the Frankenstein complex and embraces coexistence over subordination.

Asimov's constructed character Robbie, a robot nursemaid, was built and purchased by the parents of little Gloria, to nurture her as her governor. Yet, Gloria sees a companion in this supposed robot, and bonds with her in a way she could never do with her very human parents. This irony in normalcy materialized into a trope in science fiction works, where humans find a stronger connection with robots than with humans around them.

Asimov's brilliant world building is evident in his fictional rulebook, which helps maintain the positive semblance between robots and humans. Largely unrealistic, it is portrayed as Asimov's Three Robotic Laws, enshrined in his 1942 short story *Runaround*. The three laws state:- (1) a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm;

(2) a robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law;

(3) a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

These laws became a creative prescription for many works of Science Fiction that created the neo-singularity world of humans and robotic coexistence.

The exploration of ethics in philosophy continued in works like Philip K Dick's novels, which often grapple with what it means to be human through the application of the instrument of the pseudo-humans or androids. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* The protagonist, Rick Deckard, is a bounty hunter assigned with "retiring" rogue androids. Eventually he himself engages in a tangled relationship with the supposed human android Rachael. This instance of the novel opens up the window of possible romantic connotations between the emotional bond of a robot and a human. The nuances of maintaining the modicum of difference between being human and being a robot, all the while establishing a romantic connection has been explored as another dominant trope in science fiction. Movies like *Ex Machina* and *Her*, or tv shows like *Black Mirror*, feature social robots that form romantic relationships with humans.

Our topic of focus is to understand the intention behind humans generating this strong semblance of emotions prospering between the non-sentient and the sentient. As science makes it clear, this characterisation is not only found between fictional characters inside the world of science fiction, but between the audience, the readers, and these fictional makeshift robots. Behind the terminology of "favourite robots" as Raghob da says it, for characters like like R2D2, Terminator, or Wall-E, or even bots like Alexa, Siri, and ChatGPT, there exists a clear denotation of affinity between us humans, and these fictional humanoids..

It may arise as a proposal that the need to generate a newfound relationship with robots is because the humans of today are gradually losing emotional variance. Multiple researches have gone behind this very exploration. To revive the weightage of emotional bond, robots are being portrayed as so, and establishing the irony of robots being more emotional than humans.



But such an argument holds no merit to the larger scope of things. Hence, it being a theory hardly perpetuates value. Instead, what we should explore is understanding the human psychology of suspending reality, through assumption.

Ava is a humanoid robot from the movie *Ex Machina*, where the plot explores the romantic relationship between a programmer and an AI (Ava) that he has created. The movie builds up a strong emotional concordance between the programmer Caleb, who has been deprived of love all his life, trapped in his daydreams of love ungrounded in the real world.

Ava, therefore, becomes the romantic, “real” companion that Caleb seeks to find his daydreams' abode in. However, in the end, Ava is revealed to have been using Caleb as a subject to test its emotional algorithm. The agenda was a mere laboratory test to increase the scope of artificial intelligence, rather than establish a romantic bond. Caleb is left to fend for himself, "abandoned" by Ava.

It is the tragic end that defines the ultimate implacability of androids; their existence only creates an illusion of having human consciousness. Yet, ultimately, emotion is only an algorithm programmed into them, to evaluate technology's advancement. If Ava is the fictional robot that proves this inevitability, other fictional robots feed into humans' fascination with this robot-human bondage.

Samantha, the AI virtual assistant from the movie *Her*, or Raechel in *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep*, or Robbie in *I, Robot*, clearly “behave” by the orientation of how they are programmed "emotively" for the most part. Yet the movie doesn't explicitly portray this inevitability.

The human mind suspends the very reality that robots themselves have no sentience. Yet, we continue to dig deeper into this relationship as an actual social bond of survival in the present community. This is because humans are inherently social in nature and seek companionship through creative means.

Moreover, human emotions are uncontrollable and unpredictable. They are not engineered into them unlike the carefully engineered Androids. Hence, this social nature makes humans too attached to a supposed "machine", citing the possible determinants of this bond.

The darker side of this bond is explored largely in the study of anthropomorphism, where humans have a general tendency to make non-living objects living and create a bond with them. This may be further explored in the study of objectophilia (relationship between humans and objects), that brings out the assumptions and biases that underlie our understanding of robots. We become too emotionally invested, leading to forming false expectations about their capabilities and limitations. If a particular emotional trait isn't programmed into robots, their "blankness" could aggravate the emotional stability of humans, as shown in *Ex Machina* and *Her*.

Fiction has shown either subtly or explicitly that blurring the boundaries between humans and robots to such an emotive extent may cause society to self-destruct into the "dystopia" that we fear.

That is to say, fictional authors, directors and scientists alike continue to accentuate the relationship between humans and robots. Both of them posit an approach from the ground of creativity. Yet their intentions are inherently different.

We have already explored the science's verdict of inventing a perfect simulacrum of humans. The importance of innovation is greatly cheered but not at the cost of ethics, which remains the primary feature of being human. Many attempts including European laws disallowing the release of Chat GPT 5 and other such restrictions have barricaded the evolution of innovation at the risk of harming the existence of humanity. Unless it's legally authorized as a weapon of defense or an object of pure research, science is bound by the legislation of ethics.

Now, whether science has exploited this hand of law is a different debate. They may continue to push boundaries under the veil of research. However, there is another barrier to this idea of human-robot singularity that science still cannot breach.

Science, as of this century, hasn't found a way for robots to emulate the core of human consciousness precisely because human consciousness has, up until today, remained a black box to us. The human mind is subjective, its exact mechanism relatively one of the biggest mysteries in the scientific world. So, without understanding the mechanism of human consciousness, scientists are incapable of injecting subjective consciousness in robots.

Hence, the world till now is incapable of reaching singularity. Funnily, this is where literature seizes the chance to create science fiction.

Research has found out that human psychology finds an inherent pleasure in the fact that robots can't imitate human consciousness. Authors and creators use the oxymoronic nature of 'science fiction' to its advantage, proclaiming to its audience, "our spectacle for you is beyond the reach of our technology, that's precisely why it's a spectacle".

Hence, what we glorify as the emotional coexistence between human and robot remains fictional. Every fictional anthropomorphic robot discussed till now are on their own terms revolutionary, creative, and yet completely hypothetical.

Exploiting the realm of fiction and the freedom to be creative, authors were ecstatic in portraying the bondage right at the dawn of industrialisation's fourth revolution.

One of the biggest pieces of evidence of not understanding human consciousness is the unsolved case of the ethical dilemma. To perfect the balance between ethics and productivity has remained one of the biggest challenges in the human world itself. Before solving this conflict within humans, even the best minds of science cannot implement human ethics into robots.

Moreover, the main intention of a machine or a robot's existence remains imperative, that is; to fill the gap of imperfection without encountering an "ethical" dilemma, while following the predefined rules, programmed into them, remains the imperative in the real world.

On the other hand, literature has easily integrated the law of ethics into its constructed fictional robots. This is because its fictional nature can afford to explore the risk of this perilous conflict arising between objectivity of perfection versus subjectivity of bias.

This gives authors the free pass to portray the depth of human robot bond. Moreover this conflict of empathy vs productivity helps literature appreciate the X factor of what makes us "human", consecutively separating us from every other synthetic being.

Yet, we still find ourselves held up in the fascination of their "humanlike" nature, as literature blurs the line of physical and mental resemblance between humans and robots.

This "humanlike" nature of robots is simply to imbibe relatability. We humans find comfort from that which is familiar to our own nature. Human nature feeds into anthropomorphism, and art has been the biggest herald of that. Hence, while knowing that there exists in reality a prominent modicum of difference between humans and robots, fiction has the freedom of blurring it within the realm of the spectacle.

Fiction finds scope in the void that science can't fill. That is to say, although robotic sentience is not yet a technological reality, it still remains one of the greatest fields of technological exploration. To have robots gain the ability to generate information on its own is the peak of AI's formidable challenges that the brightest minds of technology are working to solve. Moreover, literature doesn't shy away from cheering this very advancement. Science fiction exists to appreciate the technological world for the literary hearts. This remains partly why technology continues to embody a human-like personality. Literature and technology finds a semblance in this personification. Yet, they have decided to approach the mystery of human consciousness in their own chinese checkered paths.

Before I conclude the argument, I must oblige to mention my own answer to Raghob Da's question, the question that unleashed this meandering river of an argument.

"Daft Punk" I whispered. No one had heard. Thank God.





Radicalization of form in "Bhimayana"



AMNA MANNAN

‘Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability’ is a graphic biography elucidating the instances of discrimination in the life of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Ambedkar was one of India’s most influential revolutionaries. Born in the Mahar caste, he faced a lot of instances of discrimination in his life. He campaigned against social discrimination and the caste system, among other issues. He was the chairman of the drafting committee of the constitution of India. He was an Indian jurist, economist, social reformer, and political thinker.

He served as an inspiration for the Mahad Satyagraha. Published in 2011, Bhimayana is written by S. Anand and Srividya Natarajan and illustrated by the Gond artists Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam. Bhimayana is based on “waiting for a visa”. Ambedkar recorded his autobiography, which Vasant Moon later collected and organised under the heading "Waiting for a Visa" in Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches.

Bhimayana has gained legitimacy within the genre of popular literature. Its illustrations are done in the form of the Pardhan Gond art. This art form was popularised in the 1980s by Jangarh Singh Shyam, the teacher of the artists of Bhimayana. The radicalisation of art form in Bhimayana refers to the elements of the Gond art and the political messages it attempts to convey through its various motifs, in a very direct but distinct way. The amalgamation of this appealing art

with the social issues it raises makes it very relevant in the field of popular literature. Writings geared for the general public and those that are well-liked by huge audiences are both considered works of popular literature. It differs from literary works of art in that its main goal is to entertain the reader. Bhimayana has placed political issues like caste and Dalit struggles within the domain of popular literature. The title of Bhimayana has been decided keeping in mind the Indian epic Ramayana, equalising the significance of caste struggles with the narrative of god Rama.

In the domain of popular literature, Bhimayana has obtained the status of pop-culture comic books, which are renowned for their fantasy-like stories of overcoming great atrocities, with the protagonist being a superhero. Whereas in Bhimayana, the instances narrated are not fictional and actually happened in the life of Ambedkar. Within the world of Bhimayana, the usual plot of the graphic novels is overturned into a human experience. Even though there are many mythical and animalistic motifs like fishes, scorpions, birds etc, personified into a character, the experiences and emotions which Ambedkar and other victims of caste oppression go through is very much human and a depiction of real life. “In contrast, the Amar Chitra Katha comic on Ambedkar drawn by Mahar artist Dilip Kadam is about his iconic individual stature. In Bhimayana, his humanity prevents him from being cited as the great man. He is shown to feel bad, react and challenge people’s abusive behaviour. He is not modest.” Caste oppression is depicted through a genre which is usually restricted to superheroes, whereas the protagonists in Bhimayana are victims. This depicts a complete reversal with regards to the protagonists of graphic novels. (“Bhimayana renders caste oppression into a medium famous for superheroes and fantasies”)

The combination of aesthetic and political motive in Bhimayana is what has put it into the arena of pop literature. The vibrant use of motifs, colours, shapes as well as the uniqueness of the pardhan Gond art makes it appealing to the reader as well as an onlooker. Not only does it bring the marginalised Gond art form into the mainstream of popular culture, it highlights how the caste system still



affects the lives of the people lower in caste hierarchy, making the instances in the life of Ambedkar a great way to convey this message. The instances are non-fictional but the addition of mythical motifs has attempted to make it semi-fictional in some ways. In theory, Bhimayana propels the idea of performativity which was also propounded by Homi Bhabha. The idea of performativity holds that language can serve as a tool for social action and influence change. The text also pushes the reader towards critical literacy. Critical literacy prompts us to consider concerns of otherness in the text and forces the reader to connect personal experiences with socio-historical and institutional power relations. However, the reader is likely to get perplexed when it comes to Bhimayana's aesthetics and political motive. Should the reader focus on the beautiful artwork or focus on the political and social motive of the text? The text carries both entities equally.

The marketability and popularity of Bhimayana however, is majorly dependent upon its graphics and illustrations. The Gond art illustrations in Bhimayana are very elaborate and flamboyant. The art catches the eye very effortlessly and its expression of an important issue is evident even through its art. There have been many biographies written in text about Dr. Ambedkar but only Bhimayana has managed to find its way into popular literature at large. It is because of the vibrancy of the art which makes Bhimayana unique when it comes to popular literature. We can safely deduce that the graphics and visual appeal of the art here is the reason for its popularity, and maybe not the issue being discussed.

The artwork in Bhimayana is quite exquisite. The aesthetic quality of this specific type of tribal art accounts for its beauty. The traditional trees, birds, plants, and animals from their surroundings are used in the Pardhan Gond art; however, the improvisation of the Digna patterns to create more creative interpretations dates back to Jangarh Singh Shyam's groundbreaking work in the early 1980s. The Vyams felt their art needed some breathing room, thus they were reluctant to recreate the standard comic panel layouts. However, they created the Digna patterns naturally in the form of tubular panels. The remainder of the page was blank, save for the small alleyways and passageways formed by these pipe-like forms. Trains, buses, and other vehicles go in serpentine, looping



loops along these pathways. When vehicles are shaped into the Digna, the trees, grass, grazing animals and birds can either be co-passengers or drivers, or they can just be a part of the surrounding countryside. They serve as fillers in what appears to be a chintz wallpaper that has faded when they occupy the vacant places outside the Digna. “The power of this underlying graphic language cannot be ignored even as the artists find many creative ways of talking about the Dalit condition, both at the level of visual translation and technique.”

The art leaves a long lasting impression on the reader. The reader is likely to see a graphic text with only the illustrations it carries and not the issue being highlighted. A text like this limits the imagination of the reader, unlike other texts which pushes the reader to imagine the literature in their mind. However, a graphic text is likely to be popular and has the essence as well as the ability to place itself within the realm of popular literature because of its appealing graphics and short, crisp speech texts. Therefore, it becomes a great tool to raise important issues and awareness like caste oppression and deliver it to the masses, like the writers and artists of Bhimayana have done brilliantly.

The role of Bhimayana in narrating the history of caste oppression has been very prominent in contemporary times since it establishes caste oppression within popular culture. The incidents of Ambedkar's life mentioned in Bhimayana have been experiences of many people lower in the caste hierarchy. The iconography used to narrate the incidents is radically elaborative and meaningful. The speech bubbles of pro-caste, people ignorant of caste oppression have been made with the tail of a scorpion whereas the speech bubbles of anti-caste, victims of caste and soft-speaking people have been made with the head of a bird. The references to thirst and water have been made using the motif of water and fish, since water is the sustaining entity of life and scheduled caste people have been deprived of the basic need of water. The dalits in Bhimayana are often encased within animal motifs and their mobility is depicted with the usage of these motifs. Various other symbols of iconography makes it a unique narrative of history, assimilating the mythical with the real life experiences.

The clash of dalit and tribal identity is a distinguishable theme here. “In Bhimayana a tribal art form is used to craft Dalit/untouchable, thereby bringing together the Dalits and the tribals in a problematic move because historically the relations between the two have not always been exactly harmonious”.

Inadvertently anticipating Ambedkar's later spiritual and mythographic phase, in which he turned to ancient Hindu scriptures, myths, and parables to lay the foundation for an alternative Buddhist heritage for Dalits, the use of tribal aesthetics protects Dalits from a life of stigma and social disgrace while muting Ambedkar's message of rupture. “What has necessitated this bringing together of the very distinct life worlds of the tribal and the Dalit?.”



The magnitude of radicalisation in Bhimayana is subjective depending upon the interpretation of a reader. Apart from the instances of discrimination, the violent incidents are also depicted in elaborative art, being direct and uncensored in terms of oppression. The transformation of objects into animals and usage of different motifs, “naturalising” the horrific experiences but at the same time, reminding the terrible state of Indian hierarchies. “The Gondi interpretation of Ambedkar’s autobiographical notes restores perspective by enacting an embodied horror through such things as scattered body parts, a telling comment on a Hindu moral economy that is hierarchised on the basis of anatomical splitting—head, shoulders, hands, torso and feet.”. Bhimayana is also radical in the sense that it defies the norms of usual comic books, does not use panels and regular speech. Bhimayana has not only radicalised the genre of graphic novels but also the genre of biographies. Among the many Ambedkar’s biographies, Bhimayana has the most special place. But it is also important to remember that Bhimayana is not just a biography of Ambedkar but a narrative elucidating caste struggles on a larger level and positioning a marginalised artform into the pop culture.



The placing of tribal art into pop culture has also led to its appropriation as well as commodification in a lot of ways. The deep assimilation of pop culture and Gond art has made its way for publishing houses to capitalize on it as well as the consumption of tribal art as ethnic art has given way to a consumer culture which thrives on its exotic nature. However, Bhimayana makes has managed to expand its scope of influence on history, contemporary times, caste and gender and so on.





The Street



RAJSHREE DIYA

It's with what aim that I brought upon myself to roam the streets that once looked new to my eyes, has now settled as an old home with fine dust untouched? Or whether it's becoming antique that I would remember in the future like my old city, where the ruins cited an old legacy?

That could be one of the many reasons why I don't relate to one place as my home. Funny to say, post my arrival to the city last week I wondered, "Did I come home from home?"



To the solitude requested, certainly, I made a sound as I took my steps down the tilting street wearing heels. Like my professor would say "Walk with a sound, it shows your power, a purpose!". Caught a variety of attention considering the fact that I roamed alone in a happening street. Where fashion and groups were at their peak and photography in every corner noting down memories. Rather mine were from my eyes, as I made eye contact with the stand-alone jewellery shops and passers-by.

Purpose. Entering the street I noticed the gelato shop and caught myself standing opposite the glass case noticing whether the ice cream I had a few weeks prior existed amidst the crowd of office-goers in pale blue shirts and black trousers. The same billing lady stood at the cash counter and as I went to place the order, she gave a confused smile; a look of familiarity and unknown. Rather I was in

my formals prior. After I got my order of two almond croissants packed, my eyes gazed up at the crowd sitting. Each seat was full and yet the store adjusted for another soul to exist for that small period of time.

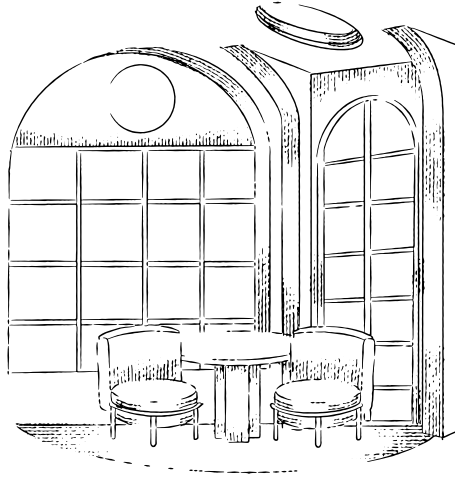
Crossing the street, I came across a strange solitude of a stranger where I was encapsulated by small postcards kept outside the city's famous bookstore. Those papers layered on would travel the world more than me just to enter someone's mind about someone else. A thought of remembrance and clearly how unknown yet warm it felt to write. The eyes scanned through to look for something to hold onto but none, even the quotes from literature could not capture. And alas, amongst the pile of quotes and flowers, there was an illustration of Saturn in dull gold with light shading based on a dark background. "Pick it up,". For what, I still don't know the answer, maybe it's because that's what I liked as a child. My fondness for Saturn came from my child-like mind, which thought the planet performed hula-hoops with its indomitable rings. No one could ever beat it and had a character of its own.

Within that small world, I had set for myself, I remembered all the people who are close, and I could see fragments of them in this street that I called my own. Yet, the sunset was all alone and I could find a piece of myself remaining within the bookstore.

Knowing the store, I made my way through yet there was no agenda to buy anything. In the narrow corridors, there were books, people, books, people and a whole different iteration. Dusty and torn books gave me a sneeze that could echo through the whole floor. I thought the books would land on me!

Nevertheless, I made my way up to the next floor not knowing it was the children's section. From a glance, I could see the difference in colours between the floor below and the present one. Felt like someone had set the saturation filter to the maximum. What a contrast it was and shows how we tend to forget some things that were so vibrant. Accompanied by the sunrays from the rusted grill adjacent to the flight of stairs and books, I made my way out only buying the postcard that elated the child in me.





Exiting on my way out, I came across this classic blue shutter- a restaurant that I had gone to with my friends a few weeks ago. From the corner, I noticed another group of friends; strewed with wrinkles, and shades of black, grey and white in their hair. With glasses filled with vintage drinks just like them. I would like to imagine being there; laughing, talking, creating another core memory. And brought upon a question, “Where would we all be in a few years down the lane?” We all would be left with memories captured in photos and even videos but where would we go to find that feeling we all felt that day? Would we all ever meet again later in our lives when we are all busy in different aspects of life just to relive our younger days?

I nodded off with a subtle smile. This street has so many stories left to be told, but the croissant was getting cold in my hands. Somewhere I felt like I left myself in each of these places so when I would return, I could visit them, relive them even for a few seconds and maybe that way, I would remember myself.



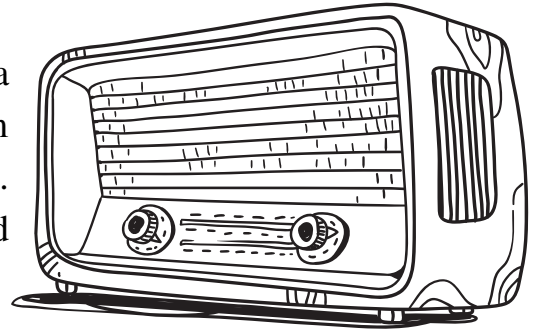


The Radio



DURJOY CHOUHURY

I usually have these epiphanies while smoking a joint, at the end of a pretty easy day; when I am alone in my room, in front of my machine. Sometimes they sound like rantings and sometimes less so.



The last few days were quite eventful. I had the idea of building an indie internet radio station. Got an internet radio casting service, from one of the aggregators. Built a website. And made some calls to get the NOCs, from the FNO artists. With all this, going on, inside my head, I suddenly had a realisation.

Why should people come to our shows? Not friends. People, in general. I mean, they possibly do not have any idea of our existence. As a musician, if one has to reach beyond their own social circle, they have to reach via their music, their art. If the people, in general, haven't heard our songs, then there is no chance of them, liking them, and in turn, knowing about our existence. And it is not really sustainable to have an audience that is filled with just friends. And it's fair on their part, as well, to not attend all our gigs. It is very natural for them to be bored of listening to the same songs, every show. There is boredom in clockwork sequences, as well. It felt nice, when you were young and they were young, and they had nothing better to do, at that point of time. But for an artist to mature, she/he needs to reach out beyond their area of influence.

It is very important to release one's own music, on the major platforms. People

will listen to them and come to the shows. But how far can we reach, through Spotify or YouTube or Apple Music? – A little more than where our personal and professional spheres extend to. Of course, that is a way to get through to people. I am not denying it. But if there was something that could reach a step further? To be honest, how many new artists, do we listen to? As musicians? How many do we get to know of?

This whole culture of self-selection of every art form, though is liberating, is a bit boring, to be honest. What it does is, it takes out the element of surprise, out of one's life. You know what you want to listen to, and you stick to that. Period. The little joy of discovery is almost disregarded.

When I was a kid, I used to listen to a specific English music programme, hosted by All India Radio. It was called 'Night Flight'. I think it was hosted by Jimmy Tangri. I am not too sure. But what I loved about that programme is that I used to hear so many great artists, I did not know of, at that time. I heard Billy Joel, for the first time, in Night Flight. Piano Man. It changed my life, to a certain extent.

That element of surprise is somehow lost, today.

I think this lack of surprise exerts the notion of pre-destination. The artist who is at the top of the social structure, usually breaks through as someone exceptional. There is definitely hard work, but there is an added advantage. If nothing, at least they have a wider social reach and few less things to think about. This in turn, may help them to spend more time thinking about creative ideas. For everyone, that is not an option.

If you think in these lines, the radio would seem like a tool of democracy. What a radio does is, it adds that element of surprise, that element of doubt, in the mind of the listener. There is a sense of inquisitiveness on what or how the next song might be.

If one, from the listener base, listens to your music, which was playing as part of a playlist, and somehow connects to your song, they might go about searching about you, on the internet. Maybe, listen to more of your songs. And if they, by chance, like your music enough, then they might come down to your show, where they can see the real you.





Durjoy Picks his six favourite artists on FNO Radio



ADITYA

MOWGLI



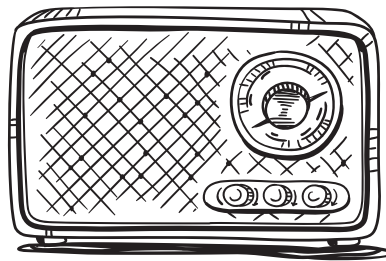
FOURTH OF FEBRUARY

AAMIR RIZVI



CROSSROADS

SHREDXXX





Jorbagh



GAURI YADAV



And here
We stop to see God
At 4 pm trying to sell himself
To a couple of speed walking sceptics

Leaves catch fire
My hand stretches to capture him
green veins jumble with red.

Over mehar chand market
The sky freezes to set us a table
And the moon, so pudding-like
Lets us gorge our spoons into it
For dessert





Manchester United



AGATHA BARKER



Some death like some earth is red
In antithesis of death , as a child I played in the smoky reeds
when sky and sea meet , the dance of moss and tide flag
Thé sky is heavy like smoked meat or an ambulance
And red is the colour of stunting not abundance
My deafening winter coat a premonition of how we almost bred
The fog horn bellows where my body (like a devil) delighted
You're always disappointed by Manchester United
The players spill shrapnel sounds like seeds , my limbs in the reeds
Some men join football teams instead of the army so they don't get murdered
The fans in red shirts will shout like a still birth
my child will cut its feet on the earth and scream on the moss
Red ,black , green by Pharoah Sanders
The first two notes like children unfathered
From Holloway the emirates calls like something cottard
Low like the reeds and high like the tide flag
You kind of said you wanted to be a dad



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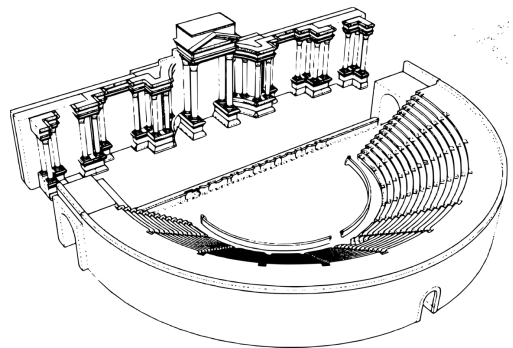
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