

From Separation to Symbiosis: Analyzing Sufia Humayun's Short Fiction from *Shattered Echoes* through Haraway's Cyborg Lens

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Humayun's (2024) *Under the Currents* through Haraway's (1985) cyborg lens. The short story is taken from her anthology of short stories, *Shattered Echoes*, published in 2024. The study examines the increasing interdependence between human and machine. While posthumanism questions the concept of human sovereignty and independence, the human-machine relationship in Pakistani science fiction is less explored. The study uses Haraway's (1985) cyborg lens as a theoretical framework and McKee's (2003) textual analysis method to make a qualitative close reading of selected text excerpts from the story. The analysis focuses on how the characters have merged boundaries with the machine. The characters interact with the device "Vision-O" and the device notices characters' subtle gestures such as grief and tears. The device controls human emotions, memories, and physical situations. The findings illustrate that the boundaries between human and machine have been dissolved completely in *Under the Currents*. It also depicts that machines have become disturbingly lively and humans have become frighteningly inert. The agency of the characters in the story is controlled by technology. Characters and machines are inseparable; the characters even use technology in the absence of a device, which shows that they have become cyborgs. This study shows what it means to live in a world where humans have lost control of their own agency and emotions. This study adds to critical posthumanism and Pakistani science fiction.

Keywords: Posthumanism; Haraway; Cyborg; Under the Currents; Pakistani science fiction

Introduction

In contemporary literary studies, posthumanism has become extremely relevant for examining literary texts (Wolfe, 2010). With the increasing dependency on machines and gadgets, the idea of anthropocentrism has been dismantled (Hayles, 1999). Anthropocentrism is the idea that humans are superior beings and it is the center of everything. Post humanist thought is an important critical lens that examines the entanglement of humans with its surroundings (Braidotti, 2013). Humans cannot live alone, it is dependent on environment, technology, and other nonhuman forces. The relationship between human and nonhuman is not a relationship in which one is superior and the other is passive, rather it is a mutual relationship of co-dependency (Haraway, 2003).

Haraway (1985) in her essay, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, dismantles this concept of human as a center of everything by giving the concept of cyborg. Cyborgs are a hybrid of humans and a machine. According to Haraway, the boundaries between human and machine are already blurred, and humans are now cyborgs, it cannot function without a machine (Haraway, 1985). Her concept of the cyborg provides a framework to understand hybrid identities in fiction, in which humans are highly dependent on technology, to the extent that a machine controls their emotions and surroundings.

In Pakistani literary studies, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and socio-political have been explored in fiction (Makhdoom & Ahmad, 2019; Rahman, 2019). These approaches are indeed concerned with environmental concerns and human experiences of ecological crises. However, they often continue to see the world as human-centric in analysis (Braidotti, 2013; Wolf, 2010). Likewise, post humanist and cyborg-related readings are still emerging, and the Pakistani literature is less explored with this lens. This gap creates space for reading literary texts with post humanist lens, specifically Haraway (1985) cyborg theory. That is

reading it beyond human centered interpretations towards post-anthropocentric perspectives.

The rationale of this study is in the need to expand the interpretive frameworks which are applied to Pakistani literature by studying a Pakistani short story *Under the Currents* which is a part of an anthology of short stories, *Shattered Echoes* written by Humayun (2024), with post humanist perspective taken from Haraway's (1985) cyborg concept. A human-centered worldview fails to address the increasingly complex entanglements of human and nonhuman things in the present time. As Braidotti (2013) discusses that today's human is made through its relations with technology, environment, and nonhuman beings. Today's humans according to Braidotti (2013) are sovereign beings but they are interdependent. That is, the increase in the dependency on technology and the consequences of harming environment are the crises which according to posthumanism are the crises caused due to anthropocentrism (Hayles, 1999; Wolfe, 2010). According to Wolfe (2010), physical distancing from nature and other species are the consequences of anthropocentrism as well.

Haraway (1985) gives a theoretical lens for analyzing the blurred boundaries between human and machine. It argues that humans are cyborgs, which is a hybrid of humans, and machine. Its perceptions, agency and selfhood are controlled by machines, like humans inhibit machines and machines inhibit humans, they are inseparable.

Through this Haraway's (1985) framework, this study seeks to analyse how the text in *Under the Currents* by Humayun (2024) represents the blurred boundaries between human and machine. This approach is significant because it contributes to Pakistan science fiction and posthuman literature. Even though the technological dependence, environmental degradation, and the collapse of nature-culture degradation are present in contemporary literature, still it has been less explored with Haraway's cyborg ideology. The story, *Under the Currents* has not

been analyzed through this post humanist lens. This study also adds to the broader post humanist literature. As the Haraway's concepts are quite relatable, this framework gets new dimensions of meaning when applied to South Asian literary context. It gives Pakistani literature a place in global post humanist studies.

Overall, this research goes beyond the traditional ecocritical and human centered interpretations of Pakistani literature, offers a theoretically integrated reading and reflects on the contemporary technological realities through the post humanist lens; Haraway (1985) cyborg concept.

For policy makers, this study is directly relevant to the ongoing debates around digital ethics and artificial intelligence, as it studies the blurred boundaries between human and machine. This study shows how science fiction portrays the current anxieties regarding technology, and nature. It portrays what it means to live in a world in which humans are entrapped with technology.

Statement of the Problem

In the present world, where the dependency on technology has become excessive and human's thoughts are shaped by the technology they use. There is a need to study this interrelation of human and technology in fiction. The Sci-Fi short story *Under the Currents* written by Humayun (2024) has the posthuman aspects of human machine interdependence. The boundaries between humans and machines are blurred. However, it remains unexplored. This study analysis *Under the Currents* through Haraway's (1985) cyborg concept. It examines the blurred boundaries between human and machine.

Literature Review

Posthumanism is a contemporary theory which questions the assumption of human superiority. It rejects the idea of Renaissance humanism, especially its anthropocentrism and its dualistic thinking (Ferrando, 2019). It challenges the assumption that humans are autonomous, and that human identity is separate from animals, machines, and animals. Pettman (2011) argues that humans have never been separate from machines. Post humanists argue that the humans are human "animals" rather than human "beings" (Pettman, 2011). Embracing this idea of animality, would make humans think about their interrelations with other animals differently (Arkan, 2019). While humans are like non-human animals, still they are not the same (Wolfe, 2010). Thus, posthumanism does not only modifies the concept of humanism, but it also interrogates it.

Wolfe (2010) argues that posthumanism is not anti-human, but it does not make the human the center of everything. Rather, it deals with the interrelatedness of humans to non-humans, to technology, to animals and their surroundings. The basic theme of posthumanism is the idea that humans are always constituted in its relations with the nonhuman others. Badmington (2000), examines the repeated occurrence of the nonhuman other in literature, science, and culture that is the alien, the machine, and the animal. Thus, the human has always been unstable and contest the. Badmington (2000), argues that the boundaries between humans and others are never secure. These boundaries must be produced through cultural labor and through literary text these separations between human and its others are discussed and reimagined.

Critical posthumanism questions who is been included or excluded in the category of human. It also examines the power division between human and nonhuman (Wolfe, 2010). While transhumanism sees the transcendence of the human as a positive thing, critical posthumanism questions the very categories through which the human has been constituted. It deals with what will happen if the boundary between human and nonhuman is disturbed (Ferrando, 2013). Braidotti (2013) writes on the transformative and productive dimensions of this posthuman condition. She does not see the decentering of the human as a loss. For her, it opens possibilities for thinking subjectivity, ethics, and political life. In which the thought process would be beyond the boundaries of humanism.

Clark (2003) writes about the relationship between humans and their technological extension. He argues that human beings are cyborg by nature. Thus, the incorporation of technologies and tools into a human's cognitive processes is not a recent development, rather it is a feature of human intelligence (Clark, 2003). He argues that the boundary between brain and its technological extensions is fundamentally porous. Thus, there is no fixed boundary between human and its technological extension. This argument resonates strongly with Haraway's cyborg theory.

Ihde (1990) examines three types of human-technology relations that is, "embodiment relations", "alterity relations" and "background relations". The embodiment relations mean the one in which technology is incorporated into bodily experience, like with eyeglasses. The "alterity relations" means the one in which we relate to technology to a certain extent. While the "background relations" means the one in which technology shapes our environment without being directly addressed. Grosz (1994) classifies body as a site of becoming. It is neither fixed nor transparent, rather it is in process. It is always being remade through its interactions with other bodies, technologies, and environment. Therefore, embodiments are dynamic and shaped through their relationships with others. It shows that the incorporation of technology into the body does not only add to the already existing stable self, but it transforms the subject to which it is incorporated.

In Pakistani literature, Ishaq and Saleem (2026) has studied Iftikhar's (2020) *Divided Species and Chambers* (2014) *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* considering Hayles (1999) *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. It analyzes symbiotic relationships between humans, other species, and artificial intelligence. It also studies the challenges which humans face in adapting identity in an environment which is digitally saturated. They argue that in post multispecies world the identity is not fixed, it is not determined biologically. It is rational and technologically entangled.

Liaqat and Raza (2021) has applied Haraway's (1985) cyborg concept to Hamid's (2000, 2007, 2013) *Moth Smoke, The Reluctant Fundamentalist and How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. They have analyzed how the characters form a close bond with their vehicles. The change in this bond depends on how the characters see themselves as well as how society sees them. This is called an unconscious cyborg state (Liaqat and Raza, 2021). The characters do not realize how deeply their identity has started

depending on their vehicles. Liaqat and Raza (2021) argue that in Hamid's fiction the vehicle has become a mirror of a person's social class, the psychological state and gender. Thus, it is a form of cyborg identity.

Memona and Latif (2025) analyzed Hamid's five novels by using Haraway's (2010) idea of cyborg and Baudrillard's (1994) ideas of simulation and hyperreality. They examined that as the characters start depending more on technology, they start losing contact with the real world. They argue that in the hyperreal world the difference between the real and the simulated becomes unclear. The study also shows that excessive dependence on technology leads to a situation in which people lose their true selves and it reshapes what it means to be human.

Shattered Echoes is an anthology of short stories written by Humayun (2024). She is a lecture of English literature in Govt. College for Women Gulberg. *Shattered Echoes* is her first book. Humayun is an academic, a short story writer, and a poet. The subject of this study is *Under the Currents*, the first short story of this book. It is set in future, and it has sci-fi, climate fiction, ecocriticism, magic realism, and post humanist elements. In this research the post humanist and eco post humanist aspects are studied.

Iqbal et al. (2024) studied a short story from the anthology through Butler's perspective of feminism. They explored the lives and treatment of trans in Pakistani society as depicted in the short story. In their critical reading of Humayun's short story, Sana et al. (2025) examines the short story "A Text Divorce" through the lens of postcolonialism highlighting how patriarchal and colonial legacies intersect to restrict women's agency within marriage and divorce. Ahmad et al. (2026) analyzed honor killing and violence against women in Humayun (2024) *Its Not Ok Not to Be Ok* from a feminist perspective. The story analyzed in this research is *Under the Currents*, the existing literature on it consists of a study conducted by Nazir et al. (2026) who explored environmental degradation in Humayun's fiction through an ecocritical perspective. Environmental destruction, floods, and deforestation have been discussed in it through ecocritical lens and Nixon's concept of slow violence to analyze environmental destruction and climate trauma in the story. However, the study remains limited to ecocritical exploration of climate trauma and environmental destruction.

Method and Theoretical Framework

This study uses McKee's (2003) textual analysis, which involves close reading of selected lines or passages. This method allows the researchers to select specific themes or textual excerpt for analyses which are relevant to the research objective, although the researcher should know the context. According to this method text excerpts are taken from *Under the Currents* based on their relevance to the research objective and are closely analyzed.

The theoretical framework of the study is taken from Haraway's (1985, 1991) cyborg concept. Cyborg is a hybrid of machines and organisms. She gives it the name "a cybernetic organism," and "it is a creature of social reality as well as creature of fiction." (Haraway, 1985, p.65). Cyborgs are not futuristic concepts, rather it is present social reality, in our daily life cyborgs

do exist. In fact, we ourselves have become cyborg as our daily life's normal functioning is exceedingly dependent on machines.

Haraway (1985) has given the idea of three crucial boundaries which characterize the late twentieth century existence. The first boundary is between humans and animals. She claims that the boundary between human and animal is completely breached. And many people no longer feel the need for such boundaries. The second boundary is between organism and machine. She argues that the twentieth century machine has blurred the boundaries between the organism and machine. The machine has now become more responsive, and the human's have become passive. From the blurring of boundaries, she means that humans and machines are no longer separate. The third boundary is between physical and nonphysical.

The second breakdown is directly relevant to the objective of this study. It is the collapse of the boundaries between machine and organism. Haraway argues that "late-twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally-designed" (Haraway, 1985, p.69). Thus, an organism is no longer separate from a machine. It shows an ontological shift in what it means to be human. Humans are no longer independent, and machines are no longer a passive tool outside the human body. Machines are now a part of human identity and survival. For Haraway, the boundary between human and a machine is not fixed its historically constructed and it is highly unstable.

Haraway elaborates on the human machine relationship as "our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves are frighteningly inert" (Haraway, 1985, p.69). This concept can be used for analyzing texts in which the character's identity, agency, or perception is controlled through technology, or it is dependent on a machine. In *Under the Currents* the feelings, actions, and identity are determined through the Vision-O. Human is no longer independent, and it is a hybrid of machine and human. According to Haraway's framework, the cyborg does not represent domination or control of human by machine or vice versa, rather it shows "informatics of domination" (Haraway, 1991, p.161). That is a new world order in which the boundaries that organize human life, including those between organism and machine, nature, and culture, and physical and non-physical, have become radically permeable (Haraway, 1991).

Haraway gives the argument that by late twentieth century, humans are living life as cyborgs, whether they realize it or not. "We are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (Haraway, 1985, p.66). This is a claim which dismantles the idea of pre-technological human. This framework can be applied to the present study to analyze the blurred boundaries between human and machine in Humayun's (2024) *Under the Currents*.

Analysis and Discussion

According to Haraway (1985), by twentieth century humans are already cyborgs, that is, hybrid beings whose identity and agency are inseparable from technological systems. In *Under the Currents* the characters are the same hybrid as described by Haraway. The characters and the Vision-O (a gadget) work together. Vision-O operates on the emotions of humans,

changing the situations, and making calls, at the same time the Vision-O is operated by mere gesture of hand in air, or a sad feeling. The human and Vision-O are inseparable and thus the boundaries between human and machine are blurred. Therefore, humans have become cyborgs.

It can be analyzed through text. As "To increase the volume, she rubbed her thumb and index finger in circular motion in the air between herself and Vision-O." (Humayun, 2024, p.18). In the given excerpt Kiran who is watching reels on Vision-O rubs her fingers in a circular motion and the volume on Vision-O increases. Vision-O, which is a device that is not separate from the human it is an extension of the character Kiran. This directly represents Haraway's (1985) argument that by the late twentieth century machines have made the difference between natural and artificial and the body and mind blurred. Kiran's rubbing of fingers in the air is physical and human, while the volume increasing through the detection of human gesture is virtual. This represents the dissolution of boundaries between humans and machines. Vision-O is not external to Kiran it has become a part of her. Thus, Kiran is a cyborg. It shows Haraway's argument that humans are chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism (Haraway, 1985). Therefore, this excerpt shows that *Under the Currents* deals with the dissolution of boundaries between human and machine and how humans have become a cyborg. It represents the dependence of humans on technology and thus rejects the idea that humans are the center of everything.

The story illustrates the blurred boundaries between humans and machines as Vision-O observes human feelings and change the situation and thus human feelings are controlled. It is shown in the text as; "As soon as its camera eye saw a pool of tears on charpoy before it could absorb into the fabric, the Vision-O flipped to face Zaitoon. She opened her eyes on the dialing sound. It was not flat long beep. But pitter pitter. The Vision-O knew that she loved the sound of rain. She felt transported to the olden days when the rains used to be celebrated with joy and pakoras over a cup of tea." (Humayun, 2024, p.18-19). In this excerpt, Zaitoon is grieving and missing her son Hayyaan, as she is afraid that he might never come back. It makes her sad and she cries but no longer have the tears reached the pillow that Vision-O recognizes it and it produces the sound of dripping rain as it knows that Zaitoon like it. She feels good after listening to it. It represents Haraway's cyborg concept. Here Vision-O is directly controlling Zaitoon's emotions; Zaitoon is a cyborg; she is a human hybrid and a machine. The Vision-O is not separate from Zaitoon as it senses her sadness, creates a virtual reality around her, and make her feel good. The passiveness of Zaitoon as she is just lying and thinking while doing nothing, and the activeness of Vision-O as it directly senses the tears and plays the sound of dripping rain represents Haraway's argument that "our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves are frighteningly inert" (Haraway, 1985, p.69).

Normally we regulate machines, but in *Under the Currents* the boundaries between human and machine are blurred to the extent that the Vision-O regulates the human and human emotions, and it operates on its own. As in the text; "Bhaiya! It's the Vision-O who dialed your number. It saw mother moaning." Kiran giggled while trying to grab the Vision-O

levitating in the air. But the Vision-O moved away. (Humayun, 2024, p.28)". Here the Vision-O read and interpreted Zaitoon's state and even before her direct command to call Hayyan, it called him by itself. It represents Haraway's claim that machines are "disturbingly lively" and we are "frighteningly inert" (Haraway, 1985, p.69). As Kiran was still busy watching reels even after seeing her mother moan, Vision-O observed the need and acted upon the solution. Vision-O is alive in a sense of response, and conscious while the human is passive. The boundaries between humans and machines are blurred as the needs of humans are fulfilled by Vision-O.

The humans in *Under the Currents* have lost control of their agency. It is now controlled machine. As it is shown in the text; "In her village, playing an online game made a woman with her four kids cross the boarder and form a family which she could not find within the boarder." (Humayun, 2024, p.20). The human, which was supposed to be autonomous and independent in their decisions, now takes based on the kind of technology which they use. It illustrates Haraway's (1985) claim that machines have blurred the difference between mind and body, self-developing and externally designed (Haraway, 1985).

The story represents Haraway's claim that we are already "chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (Haraway, 1985, p.66). As; "The Vision-O spread its screen as big as the wall itself to play virtual rainfall. With her parched lips and dry eyes, she'd eventually fall asleep staring at the virtual rainfall." (Humayun, 2024, p.32). Kiran has never seen rains, she had only heard about it from her Zaitoon and Dadi, still it fascinated her. Therefore, when she would insist upon seeing rain, Vision-O would create virtual rain, and Kiran would fall asleep while looking at the virtual rain. The relationship of Kiran with reality has become technological as the virtual rain is experienced like a real one. Her ability for experience has become inseparable from technological mediation. Thus, the boundaries between human and machine are dissolved. Vision-O operates on human needs, and the characters accept and depending on the Vision-O is proof that they are living as cyborgs. This excerpt of text also represents Haraway's claim of machine's disturbingly lively and human's frighteningly inert (Haraway, 1985), as the Vision-O is active to the extent of creating a virtual rain without being asked and Kiran watching it passively while knowing that it is not real.

The story shows Haraway's "we are theorized and fabricated hybrid of machine and organism" (Haraway, 1985, p.66). As in the text, "He rubbed his forefinger and thumb in a circular motion to see time and date: 23 AUG 2050" (Humayun, 2024, p.43). Hayyan is in mountains, he rubs his fingers and the time showed up. He did not have any gadgets or machines at that time, but he has become a cyborg, technology is now a part of him. Thus, the boundaries between humans and machines are blurred and humans are cyborgs.

The humans and machines are cooperating and there is no fixed boundary between them in the story. As in; "Hey Vision-O! My eyes!" The Vision-O dimmed its light and shifted the focus towards the corner." (Humayun, 2024, p.40). When it finally rains after years, Zaitoon tells Kiran to pick pots for storing water, when she opens Dadi's things its dark. Just as she says that she cannot see anything, Vision-O brings light to her eyes. Here the

boundaries between human and machine are dissolved as the Vision-O hears and observes what the human is saying and doing, then it works in collaboration with it. It also represents Haraway's concept of machine's "disturbingly lively." It also shows human as "disturbingly inert" as Kiran is extremely dependent on the Vision-O, her needs are fulfilled through Vision-O without even asking. The light that Vision-O spreads on her eyes is intense, therefore, Kiran says, 'my eyes' and the Vision-O dims the light." It represents that the boundaries between human and machine are blurred and humans are now a cyborg, as Kiran and Vision-O are inseparable in this text. Therefore, Kiran is "chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrid of machine and organism" (Haraway, 1985, p.65). It shows that the characters in *Under the Currents* are cyborgs and the boundaries between the characters and Vision-O are dissolved.

The selected excerpts of text and its analysis illustrate that humans are incomplete without machines. They have become cyborgs. Thus, the boundaries between human and machine are dissolved. The humans in *Under the Currents* cannot even regulate their emotions by themselves. They are dependent on machines for everything. They cannot even experience longing for the environment as Vision-O creates virtual rain for them. Zaitoon could not feel grief as Vision-O played the sounds of dripping rain, neither could she panic as Vision-O played animations for her. Kiran could not see in the dark, but Vision-O immediately brought light to her eyes. The humans in *Under the Currents* are not only dependent on machines, but rather the machine have become a part of human. Thus, the story does not show technological dependence as a future possibility or a dystopian warning but as an already existing condition of human life. Therefore, it is a present reality in which the boundary between the human subject and the technological system has not only blurred but dissolved entirely.

Conclusion

Sufia Humayun's *Under the Currents* illustrates the blurred boundaries between human and machine. The characters are representations of cyborgs. From Haraway's (1985) cyborg view, the characters have become frighteningly inert, and the machines have become disturbingly alive. The machine has become part of human normal functioning. It shows what Haraway said: that a cyborg is not something futuristic; rather, it is the present reality. In this futuristic short story, humans have lost control over their agency and true selves. They have become passive and extremely dependent on technology. It shows what it means to be living in a world where humans have lost control over their own agency and feelings while the machine has control over humans. If humans kept depending on technology to a larger extent, it would end up becoming the cyborgs of *Under the Currents*. It would rely on a machine which would control its decisions, feelings, and agency.

It was found out that humans are no longer superior beings, they are entrapped in technology and machines. The study contributed to posthumanism by decentering humans from idea that humans are the center of everything. It studied how humans have lost control over their agency and emotions in the sci-fi world of *Under the Currents*. The study adds to Pakistani science fiction as well. By analyzing the merged boundaries of

humans and machines, this study shows what it means to live in a world in which a human has lost control over its agency and emotions.

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Credit authorship contribution statement

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