

Interspecies Entanglements and Reverse Evolution: Rethinking the Human in Posthuman Vitalism

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Abstract Going beyond the tenets of postmodernism, posthumanism engages critically with the humanist tradition, re-examining the roles of human creativity, agency, and consciousness. In a post-anthropocentric world, it advocates for the decentering of human agency, situating the human within broader, interdependent systems of coexistence with non-human entities. This perspective extends the postmodern project of deconstructing the human subject. However, a perfunctory reading of the term *non-human* often restricts its scope to technology, while overlooking nature, animals, and surrounding ecosystems. This paper seeks to situate the human in entanglement with non-human systems, particularly nature and animals, through an analysis of the 2019 Malayalam film *Jallikattu*, directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery. It explores the ways in which human–animal coexistence may be understood within a posthuman framework, through the lens of reverse evolution. The study further examines how human subjectivity is being reshaped to accommodate an interspecies identity, reflecting a broader posthuman condition. The concept of reverse evolution is employed here within the framework of Monistic Vitalism, as articulated by Rosi Braidotti, who conceptualizes evolution not as a fixed state of *being*, but as an ongoing process of *becoming with*. The film’s depiction of a chaotic buffalo chase and the emergence of primal human instincts offers a rich site for interrogating human-animal relationships, the unpredictability of nature, and the limitations of human dominance. The blurring of boundaries between the human and the wild within the narrative serves as a symbolic challenge

to anthropocentric worldviews. This study positions such moments of disruption as crucial points of intersection between postmodern and posthuman thought.

Keywords Posthumanism; Reverse Evolution; Animal; Identity; Coexistence; Jallikattu

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Introduction

Since the time in history that accorded central importance to perceived human supremacy and its altering perception, it has paved the way for oppressive homogeneity and selective depravity. For a long time, humans have assumed a position of autonomy where non-humans have been marginalised. The human condition that questionably survived the last eight hundred years extols the hierarchical supremacy of this species, creating an anthropocentric world that declared that “Man is the measure of all things” quintessentially. This human centred value system aggrandised human significance while the rest of the species plummeted in stature and their relative survival.

However, advances in science and philosophy clarified the incredulity of a deterministic view of the universe, explicating that the natural universe is a fluid, dynamic, and interdependent system. It calls for an ontological break and a relooking of the exclusive world that mankind has built for themselves. At this juncture, Humanism, extending beyond the autonomous and conscious human world, assumes a posthumanist perspective wherein human beings are participants but not the authority in a dynamic world. The world assumes the form of a collective ensemble where events unfurl due to interactions. The post in Posthumanism hence radicalises the critical ethos of contemporary times that attempts to make sense of

the world in relation to the non-human. Posthumanism does not mean after-human or more than human. Neither does it call for the disembodiment of the human. According to Carry Wolfe :

Posthumanism isn't posthuman at all, in the sense of being 'after' our embodiment is transcended, but is only posthumanist, in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself (Wolfe 15).

Posthumanism contests the notion of humans on multiple grounds to expose the influence of colonialism, racism, and sexism that constituted the innocent notion of man. It questions the idea of a human being the "basic unit of reference" not only to define humans but also to determine the extent to which reality is influenced by the existence of the human-animal (Susen 64). The idea of the Vitruvian man proposed by Da Vinci was not only used as an ideal but also as a discourse to oppress everything that was non-human. Since the Enlightenment, the distinction between human/non-animal has been more prominent. This dividing line has caused an imaginary 'humanity' to flourish like the notion of the 'West', where all the other people and species that do not fit into the label of the humane became a privative alterity (Braidotti 33). Humanism became an excuse to exploit the planet by placing itself outside nature, which paved the way for the pervasive postmodern condition (Lyotard 7).

The nuances of posthumanism bridge the gap between humans and non-humans by questioning the place of man in the natural world where all species coexist (Braidotti 34). The decentralisation of human supremacy puts into scrutiny the idea of humanness in itself. Katherine Hayles, banking on the foundation of liberal humanism and its discontinuities, contextualises posthumanism as an understanding that human life is "embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival" (Hayles 5).

The literature on posthumanism has gone a long way to negotiate a space for itself in tandem with the machine-human-animal continuum. Donna Haraway has pioneered the exploration of the porous category of the Human that is now open to technological interventions and modifications. She uses the cyborg to serve as a metaphor for justifying the ambivalent position of the man in the contemporary world. She uses the cyborg not only as an ambivalent subject but also to legitimise the potential of technological mediation at the social and political levels (Haraway 31). However, the non-human world extends itself to animals as well. In her book "When Species Meet", she extensively talks about the notion of companion

species, where the binary of human-animal relationship is completely undone. She reconceptualises life as a mesh of naturecultures where all species are defined by “the patterns of their sometimes-joined, sometimes-separate heritages both before and lateral to the encounter” (Haraway 25). This argument is meticulously derived from the Derridian argument that ‘animality’ is often denied of those qualities ascribed to humans (Derrida 56). The rigid conceptual border between the human and the animal that stands erect since the classical times is a human construction. The self ascribed human uniqueness like language, culture etc, according to him, is often dependent on the devaluation or the objectification of non-human life which is a philosophical prejudice rather than a natural truth. He problematises simplistic moralisation and the obligatory ‘inclusion’ of animals into the ambit of human consideration and calls for a radical deconstruction where these boundaries are questioned.

While critiquing the tenets of humanism, posthumanism questions the social and political position of animals with the assumption that the species spectrum is continuous and humans cannot be authoritatively positioned for their self-assumed cognition and sociability. At this juncture, non-humans (in this context, animals) become a socio-political entity in themselves.

In an attempt to contextualise the human and the nitty-gritties of humanness, this research seeks to explore and interpret the boundaries of the human and non-human. An explication of the human world in relation to the non-human world that is not technology-oriented is sparsely engaged from a critical point of view. This paper is guided by the understanding that posthumanism, while discussing the nuances of the technological interventions and transhumanist future, also needs to discuss the nature of ‘the human’.

The blurred boundaries of humans not only indicate the transgression of the non-human into the hitherto human spaces but also the venturing of the human into the traditional category of non-human spaces. The Malayalam movie *Jallikattu* showcases the human and non-human conflict in its raw form to question man's social and political position in a posthuman world. In that regard, the critical approach to posthumanism is from the perspective of reverse evolution. Reverse evolution is a metaphorical nuance that decenters the human centric discourses of living that calls to fall back in line and co-exist with all the species that equally owns the planet. *Jallikattu* highlights this nuance through its complicated human and non-human relationships, mis-en-scene and compelling cinematic nuances.

Jallikattu, the 2019 Malayalam film directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery, is a masterpiece that transcends the boundaries of traditional storytelling. It immerses the viewers in the heart of a remote village, which is thrown into chaos by the

escape of a buffalo intended for slaughter. The film's visceral portrayal of violence, coupled with its stunning cinematography and masterful storytelling, has earned it critical acclaim and international recognition.

The film's impact has been recognised globally, winning numerous awards, including the Kerala State Film Award for Best Director for Lijo Jose Pellissery and the National Film Award for Best Cinematography for Girish Gangadharan. It was also nominated for the Satellite Award for Best Motion Picture, International, and the Asian Film Award for Best Cinematography and Best Original Music. The movie premiered at the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival and was subsequently showcased at the prestigious 24th Busan International Film Festival under the esteemed section "A Window on Asian Cinema."

At its core, *Jallikattu* is a story about conflict. It explores the clash between tradition and modernity, man and nature, and individual desires and societal norms. The film opens with Kalan Varkey, a butcher, tasked with slaughtering a mighty buffalo for a local festival. However, the buffalo escapes, triggering a frenzy that angers the entire village. The buffalo's escape serves as the catalyst for the film's exploration of violence and its impact on the human psyche. The film does not shy away from depicting the brutality of the situation, leaving a lasting impression on viewers. The cinematography plays a crucial role in creating a sense of immersion and immediacy. Director Lijo Jose Pellissery utilises handheld camerawork, long takes, and close-ups to draw viewers into the heart of the action. The shaky camerawork reflects the chaos of the situation, while the close-ups capture the characters' raw emotions.



Figure 1: Promotional poster of the Malayalam film *Jallikattu*, prominently featuring the buffalo as a central visual element.

Jallikattu is not just about the buffalo or the violence it incites. It is also a portrait of a community under pressure. The film delves into the lives of the villagers, showcasing their struggles, their fears, and their resilience. It shows how the villagers grapple with the consequences of the buffalo's escape and attempt to maintain order and safety amid chaos. With time, the film transcends the simple narrative of a buffalo's escape; instead, it encourages the viewers to re-examine the boundaries between humans and animals, questioning the anthropocentric dominance that defines society. As the villagers descend into a primal frenzy in pursuit of the animal, the lines between hunter and hunted blur, challenging traditional power dynamics and exposing the underlying animality. *Jallikattu* thus becomes a potent lens through which the posthumanist notion of a world beyond the human, a world where the boundaries between species are not absolute, and the relationship with the natural world is re-evaluated.

The movie rejects the exclusionary nature of the human world by punctuating power structures by altering the supremacy of the hunted and the hunter. With the dynamics portrayed between the humans and the animals, the movie impeccably narrates the realities of coexistence in a posthuman world. In order to extend the critical journey of posthumanism, *Jallikattu* serves as an excellent tapestry to look at the human and non-human interface in a hitherto anthropocentric world. The movie, set in an encroached forest space, legitimises the exploration of blurred boundaries. The inquiry further becomes interesting from a posthuman perspective due to the multiple layers of complexities it puts forth without relying on technology, on which the critical inquiries of posthumanism are fixated. It highlights how the human and non-human identity is not a unidirectional discourse that gravitates towards cyborgs and other technology-driven enterprises. The movie reminds us of the posthumanist approach that requires the blurring of the nature-culture binary. These categories are brought into the limelight by bringing out the innate animalistic traits of man and not by humanifying animal emotions or rights. In that regard, the deliberate usage of the term human animal becomes more pronounced and relevant.

This paper explores how the human-animal conflict can be viewed from the perspective of reverse evolution. By establishing this conflict, the movie is scrutinised to understand how it divulges the message of the need to coexist with other species in an interconnected ecosystem. Furthermore, the paper analyses the posthuman condition that is laid out by the director in the movie and gives a novel perspective to the discourse of posthumanism, which connotes interspecies identity in a post-anthropocentric world. In this regard, the idea of reverse evolution becomes a trail that needs to be carefully negotiated, as it does not indicate a walk

back to a pre-anthropocentric world but a form of falling back in line with other species by giving up the humanist notion of human exceptionalism. The paper also analyses how the movie unhinges the narrative from the basic tenets of humanism per se.

The movie *Jallikattu* is named after the Tamil bull-taming tradition that was traditionally linked to the expression of rural masculinity, agrarian pride, and Tamil culture. Jallikattu is traditionally observed in the Pongal festival and has long been justified by its participants as a representation of local culture. Nevertheless, over the last few decades, the sport has become a site of fierce legal and political rivalry. In 2014 and 2016, the Supreme Court placed bans on the sport, stating that it was concerned about animal cruelty (Khan 2023). Such prohibitions in their turn provoked the mass protests throughout Tamil Nadu, uniting animal-rights movements, political parties, and even the Tamil identity movements.

Theoretical Framework

Jallikattu garners a unique position in the discourse of post-humanism with its bold take on human supremacy and the clarion call to move ahead of the Anthropocentric discourse that constantly places nature and non-human species as secondary and subordinate to the human race. Dualistic oppositions have constantly tried to define human beings for what they are not, completely denying their inter-species identity and carefully forcing the propagation of the binaries of natural v/s cultural, instinctual v/s intentional, non-human v/s human, etc. According to Rosi Braidotti's theory of Monistic Vitalism in the discourse of posthumanism, human beings are beyond these binaries. She opines that the binary division of human and non-human is a Western idea that has rendered everything that is not the anthropological West as the Other or the private alterity (Braidotti 7). There is a need to reposition the human in the post-anthropocentric world, accommodating the realities of life in the universe and by dislodging ideologies of humanism.

Rosi Braidotti's theory of Monistic Vitalism and Species Egalitarianism that critiques Anthropocentrism explicates that the posthuman world is built by the coetaneous ontological intertwinement of non-human and human sources that enables an exploration across multiple axes (Braidotti 65). She remarks on two implications of the post-human's knowledge production that is facilitated by a novel understanding of humans' position. Firstly, to consider oneself as a member of a species and not of a culture. Secondly, to face the consequences of the violent rule of the sovereign anthropos (Braidotti 10) (qtd in Susen 67). She insists on promoting a monistic approach that engenders the unity of all living matter. Her

theory further posits that all living organisms have the relational ability to relate to the external world in a creative, adaptive, and responsive manner and that these are not exclusive attributes of the human kind. In that way, life can never be reduced into “the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others or of being sacralized as a pre-established given” (Braidotti 60).

Furthermore, Monistic Vitalism is also a deconstructive approach that subverts and rejects any forms of species supremacy or othering, paving the way for a nuanced understanding of life that remaps life in ways that give equal importance to all. Donna Haraway’s arguments on the ontology of ‘Becoming with’ rather than ‘Being’ supplement in comprehending the nuanced ways in which the movies unpack the human-animal relationship in the movie from a posthumanistic lens. By critiquing human exceptionalism and exalting coexistence founded upon relationality and shared vulnerability, she posits that subjectivity, identity, and embodiment are formed in shared spaces and not within ideologically and culturally restricted spaces that revolve around human values (Haraway 95).

Jallikkattu is a relevant premise on which insights of critical post-humanities can be applied to make sense of the human in a post-anthropocentric world. The movie, ornate with human-animal conflict, problematises the existing discourse of humanism and posthumanism that overlooks the necessity of species egalitarianism. The insights put forth by Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway are perused to discern the politics embedded within the film narrative through the notion of reverse evolution.

Qualitative Film Analysis within a Posthumanist Framework

Jallikkattu puts forth a plethora of layers and categories into question. It questions what a human is and how they are different from animals. The primal buffalo chase in *Jallikkattu* is a strong criticism of human essentialism. For a long time, human beings have been treated as supreme beings, thus holding the position of a political animal. This perspective, put forth by Aristotle, was further taken up by Humanists who distorted and trivialised the non-human life. Apart from decentering the human from a position of power, the movie scrutinises the interspecies identity that the hunted and hunter share. The idea of interspecific identity relates to the relationship shared between various organisms living in the same ecosystem. *Jallikkattu* delves into these relationships that the humanists conveniently ignored by bestowing upon the audience the role of identifying any possible boundaries. In several scenes, the emotions of the buffalo and the villagers are juxtaposed one after the other, creating a continuum that validates the congruent relationship between the human animal

and the buffalo. This is one of the most important axes of what Braidotti propagates about the posthuman condition - “becoming-animal” which exemplifies the principle of “trans species solidarity”. The movie, through the juxtaposition of the buffalo and villagers, exposes the similarities and dependence on each other.

On Reverse Evolution

The notion of reverse evolution is very profound in the context of this research. A well-defined term in the field of ecology and evolution lacks stable definitions in the domain of literature. The term does not echo its literal meaning of evolving backward biologically or socially. It is a progression away from human exceptionalism by undoing the hierarchical model that positions humans at the top of evolution. It necessitates a sense of embodiment with the continuum of species. According to Porter and Crandall, reverse evolution is the reacquisition of the characters of the ancestral populations by the derived population (Crandall and Porter 541).

In this paper, however, the notion of reverse evolution is used as a novel method to look at the posthumanist perspective, wherein the human reverts to its dependent position with other species by denouncing their self-assumed positions of power and autonomy. The concept of reverse evolution assumes a metaphorical position than literal by not spilling into the risk of romanticising the primal state of human existence and consumption. It problematises the relationship between humans and non-humans as being “unequal and structured around the anthropocentric assumption that these other animals exist primarily in relation to humans” (Shaw Post-anthropocentric - *Life Beyond the Species*). Anthropocentric worldviews have reduced non-animals into metaphorical attributes of human values and life systems. It has got more to with how an animal attribute is understood in relation to humanist values than the human in itself. At the face of this staggering arrogance, Rosi Braidotti calls for a “system of representation that matches the complexity of contemporary non-human animals and their proximity to humans” (Braidotti 70). In this system of ‘becoming animal’, non-humans are not defined in relation to humans but as entities that are independent of human constructs. The concept of reverse evolution, in analogous to Braidotti’s notions of ‘becoming animal’ destabilises the teleological imaginaries that enshrine the human as the culmination of evolution. The figurative notion of ‘reverse’ or backward serves as an unlayering of this canonical ideology. While running along the lines of reverse evolution and ‘becoming animal’, the movie does not romanticise the primal state, but exposes the necessity to blur the convenient boundaries between humans and

the non-human.

Jallikattu uses this reverse evolution method to bring in the posthumanist lens of anti-anthropocentrism. It does not talk extensively about animal rights or feelings. Instead, it attempts to show how humans are just like animals. The movie contests the arrogance of human exceptionalism as a transcendental category and anthropocentrism as a convenient discourse. By using the blurred dynamics between the people and the buffalo, the movie exposes how human and animal relationships are always evaluated based on the instrumental or entertainment value that they carry.

Despite being firmly rooted in the present, in the film *Jallikattu*, Lijo Jose Pellisery unleashes the buffalo, with a gaze firmly fixed on the past. The movie begins with a dynamic power hierarchy wherein the man is kept at the centre. Throughout the film, the echoes of footsteps, the measured cadence of the buffalo's stride, and the rhythmic ticking of a clock serve as auditory symbols, signifying a deliberate shift in focus toward the past. These elements also encapsulate a profound representation of human evolution, illustrating how humans have evolved in tandem with the passage of time. This change is significantly linked to the market economy as well.

As the movie progresses, the director brilliantly captures how each chase is a run closer to the de-powering of this self-assumed position of power. The villagers running around like the buffalo, making sounds like it, blur the distinctions between the human-animal dichotomy. The fact that the hunted and the hunter were running for their own life is another crucial aspect of questioning the power structure. In the chase of life and death, a sense of mortality and vulnerability is shared between the villagers and the buffalo (Nussbaum 136). It also implies the capability of both the villagers and the buffalo to navigate through and deploy "their own bars of information" to live their lives. This mono vitalist take on the chaos detests the exclusivity bequeathed to humans as the only being that is capable of emotions and intelligence, and that it is present in all matters (Braidotti 60).

The film illustrates the evolving mindset of humans and the impact of modernity. The director underscores the advent of modernity by depicting the hunter Kuttachan engaging in various animalistic behaviours as he approaches the buffalo and later positions him on the jeep's bonnet with a formidable gun in hand. The director then shifts focus to the gun, a symbol historically linked to hunting, particularly during the colonial period.

The entire identity of the hunter, Kuttachan, becomes objectified through the lens of the gun, highlighting his status as a self-proclaimed successful hunter, esteemed by society only when armed. However, Kuttachan ultimately fails to shoot

the buffalo. This failure extends beyond Kuttachan or the people; it symbolises the limitations of modernity and anthropocentric ideologies when confronted by the forces of nature and the animal kingdom. The gun's failure signifies a collapse of the empowering narrative associated with modernity, challenging the notion that humans are superior to the natural world. In this instance, the unsuccessful outcome transcends the individual hunter and speaks to a broader narrative of human beings reevaluating their position relative to animals and the environment.



Figure 2: Film Screenshot about Kuttachan trying to hunt down the animal

The film skillfully dismantles the perceived distance between humans and animals, portraying a reverse evolution of human beings. It initiates this exploration by depicting a buffalo trapped in a well and the subsequent human efforts to rescue it, revealing an initially egalitarian perspective. The intention behind the rescue, however, starkly contrasts with a genuine concern for the buffalo's well-being; instead, it is motivated by the eventual consumption of the animal. Towards the end of the movie, the intentions and behaviours of the villagers and the buffalo become synchronised, thus blurring the boundaries between the human and the non-human. It is a symbolic rejection of human exceptionality and supremacy and a call for falling back in line with other species.

This backward journey is a novel posthumanist approach that highlights the need for co-existence and questions the figure of man in a post-anthropocentric world. It is not a regressive tendency but an attempt to reject the exclusionary and constructed systems of segregation and hierarchy, offering a rhetoric on the kind of subjects that we all are becoming (Braidotti 2). Jallikkattu tries to re-orient subjectivities towards an ethical praxis that is predicated on mutual vulnerabilities, interdependencies and multispecies care.

Though *Jallikattu* is a Malayalam movie that takes place in a remote hill village in Kerala, it borrows and rephrases the larger South Indian cultural environment. Instead of merely replicating the Tamil tradition, the film reinvents the runaway buffalo as a catalyst that introduces repressed tensions around masculinity, territoriality, and communal identity. The growing violence, the multiple competitors who are trying to control the animal and each other, can be viewed as both critical and ambivalent: the movie questions the passion of patriarchal violence, and the visual spectacle at the same time threatens to continue the thrill of the hunt. As a result, the protests redefined Jallikattu as something more than a sport but as a powerful symbol of cultural independence, group pride, and protest against what was considered an encroaching federal government. However, the film does not directly engage with the political controversies surrounding Tamil Nadu's bull-taming sport. Instead, it shifts focus toward the broader dynamics of human–animal relations.

Caste, class, and regional hierarchies determine this, which highlight the role of establishing the socio-economic frameworks. The buffalo hunters are mostly working-class men whose physical labor is closely tied to the land, while the authority to control, profit from, or police the event lies with landowners and village elites. Marginalised characters, namely women, lower-caste workers, and migrant labourers, are scattered throughout the periphery of the spectacle, as they observe the breakdown of order but play a limited role in its orientation. These imbalances enhance the posthuman argument of the film, which implies that the loss of human dominance over the animal is a stratified experience, which is conditioned by social inequalities. The flight of the buffalo destabilises human exceptionalism and, at the same time throws light on which humans are already dispossessed in the political ecology of the village.

The Posthuman Condition in *Jallikattu*

The idea of what constitutes Human is derived from the Euro-American tradition that developed during the Enlightenment. It anchors on human beings' role in shaping the world's history. The humanist's concerns with epistemology, ontology, logic, and ethics validate this human agency (Susen 51). It has paved the way for the categories of nature-culture that created a humanist knowledge system that looked at itself not as one among the species but as a superior being. There is a need to dislodge notions of humanist exceptionalism that undermine the transversal nature and the relational capabilities of being. The Posthuman condition develops within the contours of Humanism to challenge and overcome the “deeply engrained habits of anthropocentric thinking” (Braidotti 22).

One of the most injurious legacies of hierarchical reasoning is our strong “belief in human uniqueness and our exaggeratedly hierarchical relationship with other species” (Goodbody 64). The movie affirms the human’s animality. The movie starts off with this assumption and moves towards a posthumanist understanding where the human is stripped off from his self-assumed sovereignty and is regarded as just another species in the interconnected ecosystem. This leads to Braidotti’s first critique of Anthropocentrism towards a mono vitalist approach, which says that humans need to consider themselves “as a member of a species and not just of a culture or polity” (Braidotti 10) (std in Susen 66). *Jallikattu* achieves this through the synchronisation of embodiment, mortality, and survival. At the same time, both the hunted and the hunter are aware of their finite time, the threat to their life, and the need to overcome the situation that they are put in. The director brilliantly articulates how human animals and non-humans behave the exact same way when put in a flight situation, thereby challenging the species supremacism that human beings have adorned on themselves. The usage of the term human-animal in itself is a way to reject this hierarchical reasoning.



Figure 3: Screenshot of people in search of the animal to hunt it down

It is at this juncture that the interspecies identity comes into question. It emphasises the interconnectedness of human life with all other species living in the ecosystem. The movie achieves this relevant depiction through the portrayal of the same trajectory through which the buffalo and the villagers move. The emotions and intentions conveyed are the same despite being two different species. The hierarchical distinctions are challenged, and subjective positions are constantly decentered. The director has also carefully placed the site of events very near to the forest, indicating that the blurring of the boundaries is not just a social and political issue but also a geographical concern.

The movie, in the opening scene of the climax, juxtaposes human and animal footprints, fusing them into a singular entity. This visual metaphor, amidst the villagers' frenzied chase of the buffalo, compels viewers to confront the inherent convergence of the impact humans and animals have on Earth. In stark opposition to the modern norm of individual identification through fingerprints, this scene suggests a shared, primal essence we possess with all living beings, a collective "post-human" identity. Further solidifying this theme, an elder, witnessing the chaotic capture of the buffalo from a deserted well, declares that these men are no different from beasts. His sharp and accusatory words raise a crucial question: are we, in our pursuit of technological advancement, unwittingly shedding our humanity, succumbing to the beastly instincts that lie dormant within? This reinterpretation of the scenes pushes the boundaries of traditional representation, emphasising the blurred lines between humans and animals.

The land and the discussion around the land also become an essential focus point in the movie to discuss human evolution. Though the land may appear to belong to humans, the film meticulously exposes the violent conquest that paved the way for their dominance. The posthuman subjectivity that the movie extends dislodges all forms of anthropomorphic elements from the characters. It embraces the politics of life in itself (Rose 27). A character recounts the forgotten past, reminding us that this land once belonged to animals, their presence echoing in the rustling leaves of the decimated forest. As humans migrated and settled, they systematically cleared and displaced the existing inhabitants, claiming the land as their own. This centuries-old pattern of human domination has pushed other beings to the periphery, their very existence rendered precarious. The character's final observation cuts to the heart of the matter, declaring that these humans before him, despite walking on two legs, are no different from the animals they have displaced. This stark statement serves as a powerful critique of anthropocentrism, challenging the notion of human superiority and exposing the hypocrisy of claiming ownership of land that was once shared with other living beings. *Jallikattu*, through this poignant reflection, forces us to confront the consequences of our relentless domination and question the very foundation of our claimed place in the world.

“Becoming with” rather than “Being”

Unfurling from within and extending out of the contours of humanism, posthumanism strongly advocates a sense of coexistence among all living beings. Deleuze and Guattari, extending on Foucault's notion of power, rightly argue how “it is not a matter of either/or, but of ‘and...and’” (Deleuze and Guattari 56). The

movie fuels self-reflexivity to embark on a journey that goes beyond disciplinary encounters to engage with an interconnected world. Lijo Jose Pellissery approached the creation of *Jallikattu* with a distinctive perspective, choosing to centre the narrative around the buffalo. While the Malayalam film industry has witnessed various productions emphasising animals, the typical focus has invariably been on human characters. *Jallikattu* stands out by placing the buffalo at the forefront, making it the primary focal point of the film. This unique approach diverges from conventional storytelling norms as the movie unfolds through the eyes and experiences of the buffalo. In doing so, Lijo Jose challenges the prevailing cinematic emphasis on human narratives and endeavours to articulate a compelling story through the lens of an animal. The film breaks new ground by making the buffalo a central character and intricately weaving the storyline around the perspectives and experiences it embodies.

The film challenges and deconstructs the traditional Nature/Culture binary entrenched in the Euro-American tradition. In a manner related to posthumanist ideals, the movie blurs the boundaries between nature and culture, exposing the fluidity of these distinctions. The movie highlights the collapse of the rigid distinctions between human and animal behaviours, and it reflects a vision that questions the hierarchical structures traditionally assigned to these categories. In that way, the movie highlights the predicaments and contradictions that an anthropocentric world will face. The mono vitalist approach underscores that human beings need to fall back with the other species refuting to fall into the self-assumed positions of supremacy.



Figure 4: Screenshot from the film depicting a chaotic scene where people turn against one another, leading to violence and bloodshed

The narrative takes a profound turn when nature intervenes, compelling humans to confront their limitations. The film poignantly captures this moment through a thunderstorm, rain, and heavy winds. These natural elements, typically viewed as forces beyond human control, serve as a powerful reminder of the anti-anthropocentric forces that have existed since time immemorial. In this climactic scene, the movie emphasises the supremacy of nature over human endeavours, rendering the anthropocentric viewpoint obsolete. The thunderstorm and rain, symbols of nature's authority, become a poignant metaphor for the resistance against anthropocentrism. The environmental accelerations that are associated with climate change puts forth that the posthuman condition is not just a humanitarian issue but a conundrum that affects all living beings (Braidotti 28). The film prompts viewers to reflect on the humility that comes with acknowledging the overwhelming power of the natural world. The elements of rain and wind serve as more than mere climatic occurrences; they symbolise a timeless force that challenges human arrogance and underscores the enduring presence of an anti-anthropocentric paradigm. The movie, rightly imbibing the essence of Monistic Vitalism, contends that to live in this world as a creature is beyond the dualistic oppositions like human v/s non-human, natural v/s cultural, emotional v/s natural, etc (Braidotti 6).

In another scene, the lifeless buffalo, a victim of human cruelty, is juxtaposed beside the deathbed of a helpless man. As the man gazes at the buffalo through the window, the film underscores a profound parallelism between the vulnerability of humans and the plight of animals. This visual metaphor powerfully communicates the idea that humans, despite their perceived superiority, are not inherently greater than animals or nature. The juxtaposition serves as a reflection of the shared helplessness of both humans and animals when confronted by the forces of nature. It suggests that the supposed distinctions between human and animal vulnerabilities dissolve in the face of the uncontrollable elements and the harsh realities of existence. The film challenges the notion of human dominance and highlights the intrinsic interdependence and shared vulnerability of all living beings in the intricate web of existence. This particular scene becomes a commentary on the fragility of life and the universal experience of facing one's mortality. By aligning the buffalo's fate with the man's frailty on his deathbed, *Jallikattu* invites viewers to reflect on the common threads that bind all living beings, emphasising the shared challenges and helplessness inherent in the complex tapestry of life. It underscores the post-humanist notion of becoming with' rather than 'being' through the shared existence of all forms of life in our ecosystem.

The climax of *Jallikattu* shatters the illusion of human progress, revealing a

stark reality where order has dissolved into primordial chaos. As humans clamber over the subdued buffalo, building a grotesque human pyramid, the scene becomes a macabre monument to the barbarity lurking beneath the veneer of civilization. This unsettling image is further amplified by the final shot, which depicts prehistoric humans engaged in a brutal fight within a cave. This visual parallel strips away any notion of linear progression, portraying civilization not as an ascent from savagery but as a cyclical journey destined to return to its primal roots. It dispossesses the idea of civilisation of all forms of agency to convey that it was just a facade made by the tenets of humanism to create a sense of human exceptionalism. In this scene, the distinction between human and animal very clearly ceases to exist. Both are trapped within the same loop of violence and chaos, forever bound by their shared instincts and vulnerabilities. The film thus dismantles the anthropocentric claim of human dominion, exposing the hollowness of our self-proclaimed superiority over other living beings.

The movie exemplifies the critical posthuman perspective that sees abilities, consciousness, and qualities as features that evolve with other life forms and ecosystems. At no point does the movie see human beings as the centre of all things. All the characters are seen as an instantiation of a network of connections, linkages, and crossings with all forms of life. Exclusionary systems of segregation and separation of bodily subjectivities and identities (Nayar 5). *Jallikattu* focuses on the interspecies identity of the humanimal, where the human is now conceptualised in entanglement with nature, animals, ecosystems, culture, and technology extolling evolution as 'becoming with' rather than 'being'.

A detailed analysis of the formal strategies of *Jallikattu* shows how the aesthetic decisions of the film reinforce the posthuman thesis of the film. The camera movements and handheld shots used in the chase scenes in the film create a destabilized visual field that does not favor the human eye or the perspective of the animal. As a result, the viewer is sucked into an interspecies tangle where the direction keeps changing, reflecting the failure of the community to tame the runaway buffalo. This effect is enhanced by the soundscape: the breathing of buffalo is amplified, the beat of hooves is heard, and the shouts of people overlap each other, forming an acoustic space that erases the boundaries between species. The editing pace picks up at various points to a near-chaotic montage, enhancing the sense that human agency is quickly falling apart as the pursuit engulfs the village.

The mise-en-scene of the film is also influenced by color and lighting to create the breakdown of hierarchical structures. The scenes at night and those lighted by storm are filled with deep blue colors and occasional glimpses that blur the bodies

of individuals, making the group of men almost indistinguishable to the animals they are hunting. This visual homogenisation supports the idea of the film of a reverse evolution: deprived of reason and social organization, humans become instinctively driven beings, competing to dominate. A particularly good example is the scene in the pit, which is climactic, where the quick cuts and disorienting camera angles remove the stable positions of the subjects, making human and animal bodies seem trapped in a common vortex of primal energy. As a result, these formal elements are not just narrative support, but actively visualise the collapse of human exceptionalism and the corresponding appearance of a common, chaotic ecological process.

Conclusion

The critical discussions on Posthumanism have gone a long way to incorporate the vast expanse that Industry 4.0 has opened for the whole of humanity. However, the academic and pragmatic engagements on it will be complete if there is an equal discussion on human/ non-human relationships. The idea of reverse evolution was put forth in this paper in the context of a careful synchronisation of sensibilities, attitudes, and mortality of all species, and not just humans. The posthumanist endeavour of decentering and challenging an anthropocentric world will only be successful if the nature/culture boundary is blurred and destabilised. Ross Braidotti's theory of Monistic Vitalism is a significant step towards generating posthuman knowledge that dislodges notions of human supremacy. For this, the human identity has to come on par with all other species to understand its coexistence with them and to reject notions of species supremacism. To this idea, the analysis of the movie *Jallikattu* has attempted to add value. *Jallikattu* is a film that stays with the viewers long after the credits roll. It is a potent exploration of violence, human nature, and the consequences of human actions on animals and nature. It is a film that challenges viewers to confront uncomfortable truths and to question the very foundation of the society in which human beings live. It decenters this anthropocentric foundation by positioning the human as an instantiation of a network of interconnected exchanges and connections.

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