



Humanity from the Heavens: Human Consciousness, Planetary Fragility, and Collective Identity in Samantha Harvey's *Orbital* (2024)

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Abstract:

Samantha Harvey's Orbital (2024) presents the thoughtful reimagining of humanity through the surprising spatial setting of the International station. The novel is structured around the sixteen orbits of Earth within a single day. The novel has not traditional plot-driven narration which always occurs in favour of lyrical observation, philosophical introspection and meditative attitude. It relocated the human consciousness out of terrestrial boundaries. Harvey, through his narration, invites the scholars and critics towards the novel to re-evaluate agency, human identity, and responsibility in the present world. This research paper evaluates how Orbital forms the concepts of humanity with the help of the interrelated themes of collective consciousness, spatial distancing, ecological awareness and existential vulnerability. Harvey in his book crosses the political borders and nationalist identities, foregrounding humanity as a shared planetary presence rather than a disjointed grouping of competing nations. She depicted cooperative life aboard the International space station. The novel presents the microcosm of earth where human societies' features of interdependence, restraint and responsibility are needed to live at space stations. On the basis of ecocritical theory, humanistic ethics and posthumanist philosophy, this study explains that Harvey reframes humanity not as a governing planetary force but as a breakable and morally responsible type rooted within delicate ecological systems. The novel focuses on the environmental fragility, memory and affective experiences. These issues locate humanity within the wider context of the Anthropocene. It also focuses on the concerns of human action on planetary life. Orbital promotes a re-established planetary consciousness grounded in care, cooperation, attentiveness, and humility, offering a quiet yet urgent ethical vision for thinking humanity's place in the cosmos.

Keywords: *Humanity, Ecocriticism, Posthumanism, Collective Consciousness, Space Narrative, Samantha Harvey.*

Introduction:

In *Orbital* (2024), Samantha Harvey frees humanity from the terrestrial center and leads to silence and suspension of outer space. The novel consist the story of the six astronauts aboard the International Space Station. They circle the Earth sixteen times in twenty-four hours. Harvey very deliberately weakens the traditional ideas of progress, destination, and linear movement. It is observed that the astronauts “are not travelling anywhere; they are falling endlessly around the Earth” (Harvey, 2024:3). It is image of continual motion. It includes the dominant narratives of

technological advancement and exploration. It is considered as a symbol of human triumph, traditionally. This condition of perpetual orbit has used as a powerful metaphor for humanity itself. It is scientifically progressive but it is existentially ambiguous. It is accomplished of enormous innovation but unable to escape from ultimate helplessness. Author never makes the space the site of conquest and heroism; he deliberately uses the ordinary routines and habits of the human being like, eating, exercising, maintenance work, and silent observation. She narrates the ordinary routine repetitively which

highlights the climax and replicates action. It leads reader towards interior lives of astronauts. There is absence of dramatic conflict which invites the philosophic inquiry. This inquiry occurs within humanity at space station, how human should be when he is out of national borders, social hierarchies and anthropocentric illusions. Geopolitical visions disappear from the orbit. From the orbit, no one is owner of land, everything relates with the freedom. Human life looks like shared planetary condition. It is not divided due to the politics of mankind. Every region is equal and it shares the part of earth. Harvey's art of narration lies within narration of the outer space into a reflective lens. These reflective lenses are used to show humanities ethical responsibilities. These ethical responsibilities are for each other. Earth becomes abruptly noticeable in a new perspective due to her narration. This paper explores how Harvey has used the new perspective, narrative skill, and poetic self-examination to re-imagine humanity as a collective, vulnerable, and morally accountable presence within the planetary ecosystem, particularly within the situation of contemporary ecological and existential crises. On earth, the world is divided into various fragments and it has several problems like environmental and existential disasters.

Research Methodology:

This study includes a qualitative textual analysis methodology, close reading of text and thematic interpretation. This research paper is interdisciplinary. It includes ecocritical theory to analyse representations of earth, human accountability and environmental delicateness. It also uses humanistic and existential perspective to understand reflection of memory, helplessness and meaning. It has used the posthumanist philosophy to study the novel *Orbital* in relation to the delineating human dominance and the importance given to the relational existence. Samantha Harvey's *Orbital* (2024) has been used as primary data. The secondary sources include

the works of Ursula K. Heise, Lawrence Buell and Rosi Braidotti. This methodology has given importance to narrative form, imagery, symbols, and perspective related ethical vision of humanity.

Spatial Perspective and the Reimagining of Humanity:

Orbital has given importance to seeing earth from space. It is the most important feature of the *Orbital*. It shows a new perspective which changes the human self-perception. It is true that there is no boundary from the orbit. There is a single term 'earth' which includes all things. Harvey observes that—"there are no borders, no lines, no visible marks of ownership on the planet's surface" (Harvey, 2024:27). This view reshapes the concept of the nationalist ideology. It binds humanity within the single term of humanity. It is the reframing of humanity as a single planetary community. Here we cannot see the fragmentation of humanity within geopolitical entities. Power and possession become meaningless in space. The novel criticises the human culture of competing for power and possession. The novel highlights the artificiality of the human world which divides the human being within terms like, nations and territories. It shows the shared planetary belonging. For the astronaut earth is splendid and fragile but it is part of the vast darkness of space. This atmosphere is described as—"a thin blue veil, barely there, yet holding everything that lives" (Harvey, 2024: 41). It means that humanity completely depended on the ecological system. Due to the distance, astronauts think about ethics and the ecological system. For example one astronaut quotes that- "it is only now, from so far away, that Earth seems unbearably precious" (Harvey, 2024:58). Harvey attempted to motivate readers to think about humanity's relationship with earth. By giving them directions related to humility, care and responsibilities.

Collective Consciousness and Transnational Humanity:

Harvey in her narration avoided giving importance to individual heroism regarding the collective human presence. Astronauts are described as functioning as a single organism. They are not separate individuals and a part of the system. Harvey described them as-“six bodies, six minds, sustained by a fragile system” (Harvey, 2024:72). Her narration of such an attitude shows interdependence of humans. Even it challenges traditional narration which focuses on nationalism. She described survival in space as a shared condition, dependent on assistance, trust, and joint liability. Her narration of life aboard the International Space Station as the symbolic microcosm of earth. In space, resources are finite, there is a need to recycle the things because the minor mistake of any person can be a matter of danger to collective survival. She very keenly connects this condition to humanity in a large space. She writes that- “What Keeps them alive up here is cooperation, and nothing else”. (Harvey, 2024: 75). Here the issue of national identities remains away. In this relation one of the astronaut marks that- “up here, nationality feels like a story told long ago, something learned rather than lived” (Harvey, 2024:81) Harvey makes the reader think as humanity is bounded by shared responsibilities, it is more than a political fragment.

Memory, Emotion, and Human Universality:

Orbital has a cosmic setting but it tells more about humanity. It includes the deeply rooted emotional texture which has philosophical reflections in touching experiences. In this novel memory is used as the vibrant tie between astronauts and the Earth. Memory helps to counterbalance the physical distance of space. In this relation Harvey writes that- “memory tethers them more firmly than gravity” (Harvey, 2024:96). It also suggests that emotional and psychological bonds exercise a stronger pull than physical forces. Memory helps the astronauts to

maintain their identity and belongingness, although they are far above from the earth. Through memory technique, the writer makes the character think about their lovers, children, parents and homes. She transformed an individual's memory into the shared human experiences. Memories of astronauts are related with universal emotions such as grief, love, regret and desires. These memories cross the boundaries of nation and culture. The memory of one astronaut is narrated as- “to be human to miss what you cannot reach”(Harvey,2024: 101). Harvey clarified through the narration of memory and emotional incident that the importance of humanity is not in defeat of others or conquering others, permanence or technological intelligence. The importance of humanity is in emotional deepness, interpersonal ties and ability to care for others.

Ecological Vision and Planetary Fragility:

It is exhibited by the author that environmental destruction always leads human beings towards destruction. The writer stresses on the environmental issues by using the narration of earth from orbit. Environmental destruction requires the moral and social responsibility of human beings. She narrated through the astronaut as- “spinning with terrifying beauty”, coastlines reshaped by rising seas, and forests reduced to scars on the land” (Harvey, 2024:119). This narration shows the ecological transformation created by humans. Here Harvey states that human beings can be punished by nature through the natural calamities in various matters. She highlighted the effect of human action on nature. She has used orbital perspective to see the earth as a single field of vision and strengthens the interconnected nature of ecological systems and human actions.

The atmosphere becomes a symbol of vulnerability in the novel. It is narrated at different incidents in different manners. Harvey writes as- “so thin it seems a careless land could wipe it away” (Harvey, 2024:123). Such imagery

is always used to convey the earth's fragility and humanity's unjustifiable dependence on the earth's system of life saving. Harvey intentionally does not exaggerate didactic approach. She recommends the ethical awareness of mankind. The narrator witnesses as, "to see clearly is already a form of responsibility" (Harvey, 2024: 131). She focuses on keen observation. She is not interested in moral prescription. The novel motivates the reader to face human ecological responsibility.

Existential Fragility and Posthuman Humility:

Space has vastness. Due to it, humanity looks unimportant. Author described in the novel as, "immense, indifferent, and utterly unconcerned with human survival" (Harvey, 2024: 144). It does not mean this recognition delineates the human value. Harvey in his writing spreads posthuman humility to show the approach of mankind. She notes that meaning comes from alertness; it never comes from supremacy. According to text Meaning comes from, "comes not from dominance, but from care" (Harvey, 2024:149). It is a true fact that human vulnerability depends on assistance, technology, and fragile ecosystems which later turns into the foundation of ethical seriousness.

Narrative stillness as Ethical Form:

The novel has a gradual speed of moving the story; it has no dramatic action which works as a conscious aesthetic and ethical choice. Harvey through his narration puts up several things in front of the reader. She narrates as, "Nothing happens, and yet everything matters" (Harvey, 2024:162). She experimented with his narration. She denied the traditional way of plot development. She has made readers contemplate over the action and incidents of the novel. The novel challenges the traditional habit of reading

for the reader. It makes the reader think about the facts, rather than to indulge in the story. It makes the reader wear the shoes of the astronaut to see the universe and planet. In short, it gives the reader fact to brood over; hence the reader of the novel contemplates over the ecological awareness and ecological responsibility of the human.

Conclusion:

The novel gives a clear picture of the thoughtful reconfiguration of humanity. Harvey described through orbital view that human beings are fragile, interrelated and ethically responsible dwellers of shared planets. The author destabilizes anthropocentric and nationalist concepts. She interchanges them with a vision of collective responsibility which relies on memory care and ecological awareness. Harvey fuses lyrical prose with philosophical inquiry in the novel to prove that humanity's value is in alertness, it cannot occur in domination. Harvey skilfully makes a call for transformed planetary consciousness through her novel. The novel is the mirror of human emotions and experiences. *Orbital* has a setting of space which becomes the microcosm of the earth. But she represents humanity which is heaven's humanity which is universal. The features of humanity are applicable to all ages.

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