

## Artificial Intelligence in Fiction from India

Indian today has carved out a name for itself in information technology and the cities of Bangalore and Hyderabad have become household names in many parts of the world. Besides, films that portray India's call center universe such as Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) or Atul Agnihotri's *Hello* (2008), based on Chetan Bhagat's novel *One Night at the Call Centre*, attest the widespread recourse to artificial intelligence in contemporary India. S. Shankar's 2010 movie *Enthiran* went a step further and portrayed an android robot falling in love with the girl friend of his maker.

The Tamil Writer Sujatha Rangarajan, who, as an engineer, supervised the design and production of the electronic voting machine which is still used in India today, penned *En Iniya Iyanthira* (My Dear Machine) in the late 1980s as a serial in the magazine *Ananda Vikatan*. This novel, which translated and popularized complicated computer science terms in Tamil, discusses the future of Indian democracy in an Orwellian style. Set in 2021, it features ruthless robots at the service of a surveillant state as well as an affectionate robot dog. Artificial intelligence was incorporated as early as 1989 in astrophysicist Jayant V. Narlikar's science fiction *The Return of Vaman*.

More recently, writer and programmer Vikram Chandra, who has extolled the beauty of the code in *The Geek Sublime* (2014), has created a software application called Granthika (2020),<sup>1</sup> "designed to help writers keep track of character attributes, timelines, the who-what-when-where of their tangled plots"<sup>2</sup> so that they could focus on the story. It is the materialization of the possibility of a narrative code from which writers can develop their stories conceptualized earlier by Salman Rushdie in his *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990).

Parallely to this acceptance and integration of AI in fiction, Indians are fascinated by the power of the human brain to defeat computer programmes as the examples of the "Human Computer" Shakuntala Devi and Grand Master Visvanathan Anand show. More than the posthuman, the power of AI to enhance human intelligence and render it superhuman is what seems to appeal to Indian imagination.

Some novelists like Sudha Murthy or Hari Kunzru choose to dwell on the social impact of the migration to the US of tech-saavy Indians.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze what in Indian culture and literature has made Indians typically receptive to algorithmic reasoning and artificial intelligence and offer a historical perspective on the ways in which the symbolic practice of fiction writing is being transformed and renewed thanks to a unique processing of modernity from tradition under the impulse of the knowledge economy. Thanks to AI, is India moving towards what Enrique Dussel calls "a pluriversal utopia"?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://granthika.co/>

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Leonard, "A Code-Obsessed Novelist Builds a Writing Bot. The Plot Thickens." 6 February 2020. <https://www.wired.com/story/code-obsessed-novelist-builds-writing-bot-the-plot-thickens/>, accessed on 25th May 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Enrique Dussel, "Transmodernity and Interculturality: An Interpretation from the Philosophy of Perspective of Liberation", *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* (1-3) 2012: 28-59, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6591j76r>, accessed on 25th May 2020.