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Terraforming the Self: Posthuman Identity, Ecological Adaptation, and the Ethics of Repair in S. B. Divya's *Meru*

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Abstract

This study examines S.B. Divya's Meru, a significant work of speculative fiction that explores environmental and posthumanist concerns. Recent studies on the book have examined it in relation to postcolonialism and disability awareness; this paper relates these ideas to the main theme of planetary survival of the novel. It claims that Jayanthi, the main character, has a complicated morality of repair and is 'self-terraforming' beyond a simple technical improvement. This study explores, through a careful reading of the book in interaction with major posthumanist thinkers including Francesca Ferrando, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles, the interconnection of biological adaptation, identity creation and ethical responsibility. The study seeks to demonstrate Jayanthi's environmental adaptation turns posthuman identity into a fluid, hybrid and relational concept. It also shows how the book changes our attitude of disability therefore transforming it into an evolutionary advantage depending on the surroundings instead of a handicap. Jayanthi's journey, which ends with a plan for generations and the planet to live together, is a good example of how to deal with the problems of the Anthropocene. It shows the ethics of repair that is based on caring for others and being willing, which is essential for a livable future.

Keywords: *Co-evolution; genetic modification; ethics of repair; speculative fiction; posthumanism.*

Introduction

Speculative fiction has long investigated how human survival in alien environments not just demands technological progress but radical reconfigurations of the self. S.B. Divya's *Meru* (2023) depicts a projected future in which mankind pays the price for having used Earth's ecosystems in past. In the world of the novel, humans remain confined to Earth under the watch of the alloys, their genetically engineered, long-lived and space-faring descendants, who consider humanity too destructive to be trusted with other worlds. Jayanthi, a young woman raised by alloys, dreams of becoming a genetic designer under the guidance of her mentor Hamsa, and she travels with the alloy pilot Vaha to test whether a new planet can be settled without harm. The finding of the planet *Meru*, whose oxygen ratio is dangerously elevated, presents an existential challenge that necessitates re-evaluation of humanity's own being. Jayanthi, the protagonist of this novel, finds herself at the vortex of this crisis. Born to genetically modified 'alloy' parents and carrying the gene for sickle cell anemia, she has to create her own body form to live in this strange environment. Her journey then reflects the guiding principle of the book, "The evolved life-form adapts the environment to itself; the

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highly evolved life-form adapts itself to the environment" (Divya 34). This is a really extreme act of rebuilding, called 'self-terraforming.' This changes not just her body but also her identity, morals, and sense of belonging.

This paper contends that Jayanthi's self-terraforming is not just an added technological feature but an intentional 'ethical act of ecological restoration.' Instead of transforming the new world to conform to human requirements- something that caused ecological doom on Earth-Jayanthi adaptively alters the self to assimilate with the new environment. This mindset follows one of the maxims in her world: "An evolved life-form will adapt itself rather than hurt other Beings in its environment" (Divya 13). This transformation will be examined through the theoretical perspectives of posthumanism and posthuman ecology, both of which break down anthropocentric models and promote relational knowledge between life-forms, tech and the environment.

Meru is a contemporary book so the academic debate around it is still in process, and two recent studies stand out in this developing discussion. Tanu Aastha's article approaches the novel through technological embodiment, reading it alongside Judith Butler's performativity and Andy Clark's extended mind. She argues that the alloys work as extensions of human cognition, and that *Meru*'s environment itself becomes part of how Jayanthi thinks and adapts (35-36). Aastha's focus stays on identity, cognition and human autonomy rather than on ecological restoration. The article by Manpreet Kaur Kang and Simran Mittal is the major work in this developing discussion. Kang and Mittal argue that the book uses a disability-conscious perspective, challenges gender identity, and engages postcolonial critiques of development - hence creating a crucial framework for appreciating the work (121-137). Usually regarded as a deficit, Divya's perspective of Jayanthi's sickle cell anemia condition is shown as a crucial trait that enables her to live on *Meru*. This rethinking questions ableist norms and the search for a uniform, 'ideal' human form.

Though these studies provide a needed perspective, this discourse is not extensively investigated in terms of direct relevance to the main narrative of ecological restoration in the novel. This research paper attempts to bridge this gap by expanding upon their approach in order to explore Jayanthi's journey as one in which posthuman identity, disability and planetary ethics intersect. This research will engage in terms of responding to these research questions:1) In what ways does Jayanthi's self-terraforming process operate not only as a survival strategy but also as an ethical act of world renewal that redefines the human relationship to new planets? 2) How does this biological adaptation rewire posthuman identity, disrupting boundaries between human, nonhuman and technology? 3) How does

the novel use the concept of disability to remark upon anthropocentric and ableist presumptions and envision a future of survival through co-evolution?

Ecological Adaptation: Rewriting the Human Body for Planetary Survival

In S.B. Divya's *Meru*, terraforming the world does not guarantee humanity's future on an oxygen-rich exoplanet; instead, it is the metamorphosis of the self that secures it. The protagonist, Jayanthi, shows this extreme way of surviving by changing her own genes, which is a very deep way of adapting to the environment and morals. In a world that is deadly to baseline humans, Jayanthi learns that her sickle cell anemia, which is seen as a disorder on Earth, can help her stay alive. Jayanthi has a different approach taught to her by her alloy mentor, Hamsa, that shapes her perspective on genetics. She repeats core axiom: "There's no such thing as a bad gene... Only one that's ill-suited to its environment" (Divya 6). This ecological and context-dependent view of biology allows her to reconsider her own claimed 'flaw' as a possible asset. Her enlightenment that just one gene can protect her from *Meru*'s hostile surroundings turns her body the location where people are changing along with a new world. She thought, "Her gaze stumbled over a familiar term, HMOX-1... the same enzyme would keep the alveoli in human lungs from corroding under continuous exposure to excess oxygen" (Divya 33). This understanding positions her subsequent self-modification not merely as a technological remedy, but as an essential biological assimilation with the planet.

This self-terraforming event is a powerful narrative that illustrates Rosi Braidotti's posthuman ecological theories. Braidotti, in her book - The Posthuman, advocates a transition from anthropocentrism to what she describes as 'becoming-Earth', a process based on a material and ethical relationship with the planet. In The Posthuman, she argues that the essence of the posthuman turn is 'Zoe-centred egalitarianism', with Zoe symbolizing the generative life force inherent in all matter, both human and nonhuman. Jayanthi's journey is a literal 'becoming-*Meru*'; she aims to rewrite her own biological code instead of to dominate the planet so that it works with the ecosystem. Her body serves as a connection, therefore erasing the clear border between the human subject and the strange or different environment. This is not the narrative of a person who learns to live in a new world; rather, it's the story of a person who allows the new world to transform her from the inside out.

Advanced technology is used to produce Jayanthi's adaptation as an embodied process. This supports with Cary Wolfe's argument centered on technological mediation and embodied experience. Wolfe argues that, in posthumanist thought, subjects are always intertwined with technical and ecological systems. The film Annihilation by Alex explores a somewhat related concept. Lena, a biologist, joins an expedition into the Shimmer, an alien zone that scrambles

the DNA of everything inside it, so that plants, animals and even the explorers begin to blur into one another. The movie shows this process as only a change, not something innately bad. Dr. Ventress says, "It's not destroying." It's changing. "It's making something new" (1:32:15). This view captures exactly what Jayanthi's work is all about. Her severe genetic transformation turns her into a new human/being form ready to flourish in strange environments, not erasing her uniqueness.

One truly understands the power of Divya's revolutionary vision by contrasting it with more traditional humanist survival stories like the Netflix show Lost in Space. The series begins when the colony ship Resolute is damaged and the Robinson family escapes in a small craft that crash-lands on an unfamiliar planet. They are soon joined by other survivors, including the scheming Dr. Smith and the mechanic Don West, and all of them are stranded because their ships have run out of fuel. The Robinson family's values are learning how to solve problems in their surroundings and being creative with technology. Maureen Robinson said it best: "Every problem has a solution" (Impact 00:35:45-00:35:47). The Robinsons adapt by drawing outside tools and resources and it has been shown throughtout the series. On the other hand, Jayanthi modifies her biological self to fit. Though Jayanthi fundamentally changes who she is, the Robinsons live on what they have. This contrast emphasizes *Meru*'s main posthumanist theory: genuine environmental adaptation in a crisis may call not only for new tools but also for a rethinking of human nature itself.

Posthuman Identity: Becoming-Earth, Hybrid Belonging and Ethical Reconfiguration

In Divya's novel *Meru*, Jayanthi's genetic adaptation project is deeply connected to her growing sense of who she is. In the last part, it is discussed how her self-terraforming can help the environment. In this section the discussion shifts to how this biological process is also a journey of existence and morality that changes what it means to be human. Her transformation is more than simply a positive development; it is a profound demolition of the obstacles between surroundings, technologies and species. Jayanthi is looking for a place to fit in a world where she doesn't fit into any of the groups that are already there. The story says she was in a liminal space "like the dusk that bathed the sky...Of Earth but not like other humans; of alloys but not suitable for life in space" (Divya 16). Within this liminal space, she forms a posthuman identity grounded not in fixed origins but in relational becoming, ethical companionship and embodied hybridity.

Jayanthi's experience exemplifies Rosi Braidotti's notion of the 'nomadic subject,' a paradigm of identity characterized by fluidity, complexity and continuous evolution. Braidotti dismisses the singular, self-sufficient subject of humanism, advocating for the conceptualization of "The

posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming" (20). Jayanthi is the perfect example of a nomadic person. She was raised by genetically modified alloys that live in space, but she was born biologically human. She has to deal with the problems that come with being both. She doesn't want to choose between these two worlds, so she genetically modifies her body to make a third one. She recognizes her hybridity as a source of resilience, establishing a novel form of belonging characterized by her direct, tangible connection to the planet *Meru*. Instead of asking, 'What am I?' she starts to ask, 'What am I becoming, in relation to others and my world?' and becomes a continuous process of becoming, as she realizes that while she "would never be human enough for the people on Earth, and... too human for the people in space, ...if she could discover something worthy of the Nivid, she could prove her value to all of them" (Divya 19).

The transition to a relational self is most distinctly illustrated through Jayanthi's connection with Vaha, her alloy pilot. Their relationship across species serves as a case study in Donna Haraway's ethics of companionship. Haraway criticizes the idea that humans are better than other animals and calls for relationships based on shared vulnerability, co-creation, and care. The theory of the cyborg, a combination of an organism and a machine, is based on the idea of "the boundaries between animal/ human, organism/machine, and physical/non-physical are no longer firm" (Garcia and Pohl 20). Jayanthi is a cyborg because she has been changed by technology, but her work is more closely related to Haraway's because she builds trust between different species. Her relationship with Vaha is not based on who is in charge but on working together, being emotionally in sync and caring for each other. Her decision to let Vaha have full access to her body's information network is the ultimate expression of this ethic. It shows how much she trusts and is vulnerable to him. She says to Vaha, "I think it's only fair that you have the code to my body... I trust you to take care of me, just like you have with me and your womb" (Divya 142). Identity is now obviously a mutual dependency agreement, an ethical entanglement rather different from the notion of the solitary person.

Jayanthi's journey challenges any techno-utopian vision of a future free of bodies since her transformation results from the messy reality of the body. Cary Wolfe claims that critical posthumanism has to understand that the human condition is fundamentally defined by its physical and technical connectivity with the world. He states that "posthumanism... comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world..." (xv). Jayanthi's body is the exact site of this embeddedness. Her self-modification's discomfort, tiredness from her treatments, and physical risks are all aspects of her growing self or who she is becoming; they are not things she has to overcome. By becoming political, her

incarnation questions the idea that a body has to maintain a regular degree of health in order to be seen as functional or valuable. The genetic changes/modifications show a strong rejection of exclusion and a bold assertion of the right to live differently. Jayanthi introduces us to a posthuman identity created in the crucible of global disaster and worry for other species instead of in the sterile perfection of a lab.

Self-Terraforming as an Ethics of Repair

In S.B. Divya's *Meru*, Jayanthi's genetic modification project evades the immediate project of survival and becomes instead a multi-faceted, radical act of ethical repair. The procedure consists of many different phases of self-terraforming spanning an always growing spectrum and finally defining an existential strategy for humans' multi-generational future outside of personal biological adaptation. Jayanthi's body serves as virtually the foundation for a new beginning following an environmental disaster on Earth that drove people into exile. This process of repair unfolds on several levels: philosophically, it rejects humanity's violent past; technically, it unites biology with information; and ethically, it commits to a shared future in which all evolve together. In embracing this posthuman ethics of repair, it addresses not only personal biological fragility but also the collective heritage of a species whose destiny it is to learn to live in harmony with, not dominate, its environment.

The whole project is based on a philosophical correction-a deliberate choice to reject humanity's past trend to actively transform environments to conform to needs. Jayanthi's choice to transform herself instead of the planet consists of a new, more sustainable co-existence ethic, a rule in keeping with Francesca Ferrando's understanding of posthumanism. Ferrando contends posthumanism consists not in an end to humanity, but in an indispensable redefinition of its significance in an ecologically vulnerable and technologically overloaded era. As she states it, "The posthuman destabilizes the limits and symbolic borders posed by the notion of the human. Dualisms such as human/animal, human/machine, and, more in general, human/nonhuman are re-investigated through a perception which does not work on oppositional schemata. In the same way, the posthuman deconstructs the clear division between life/death, organic/synthetic, and natural/artificial" (5). Jayanthi's self-terraforming represents an apotheosis of this 'changing notion of the human.' She adopts an axiom learned from Alloy teachers as the basis of her new life, one essentially mending humanity's bond to the nonhuman world: "Around the time of the compact, scientists had come to accept that consciousness was a fundamental property of nature, and all matter had it to some degree." (Divya 167).

This philosophical commitment can be observed through a direct act of biological terraforming, a process that illustrates the theories of N. Katherine Hayles. Hayles describes the posthuman condition in How We Became Posthuman as the breakdown of traditional divisions between the biological organism and the informational pattern. For Hayles, "In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals" (16). Jayanthi lives this reality by treating her own genetic makeup as a form of biological information-a code to be rewritten. She reframes her sickle cell anemia, a condition considered a weakness, as a unique advantage in *Meru*'s high-oxygen atmosphere. This move is a powerful example of what Manpreet Kaur Kang and Simran Mittal describe as a "disability-conscious" (121- 137) posthumanism, an ethic that disrupts normative ideas of perfection and bodily purity. Her specific modification, up-regulating the HMOX-1 gene, is the technological mechanism of her repair. Through this, she discovers that "the same enzyme would keep the alveoli in human lungs from corroding under continuous exposure to excess oxygen" (Divya 33). By rewriting her body at the informational level, she not only repairs her own viability but also performs a social repair, creating a new hybrid identity that resolves her feeling of being an outsider in both human and alloy societies.

However, Jayanthi's most daring action is a generation correction that considers humankind's future beyond herself. This action mirrors Donna Haraway's powerful ideas of 'staying with the trouble,' an ethical duty to stay responsible in an injured world by creating fresh, unexpected affinities. As Haraway stated Survival, "A cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (154). By selecting to have a child to Vaha, her alloy pilot, Jayanthi is acting quite strangely 'oddkin.' *Meru* is given a child with the proper genes; Jayanthi is therefore influencing the next generation of humans. She tells Vaha that this is more than just personal survival; it's a deliberate effort to guarantee a new generation of humankind living sustainably and responsibly. "Human beings are capable of so much, but we've been confined for too long, our natural curiosity and ambition repressed. You and I hold the key to unlock humanity's potential" (Divya 337).

One idea with a strong cultural resonance in the Netflix show Sweet Tooth is finding hope and building a new, hybrid society from the ruins of the old. The series is set roughly a decade after the Great Crumble, when a pandemic called the Sick wiped out much of humanity and babies began to be born part human, part animal. Gus, a deer-antlered boy, grows up hidden in a cabin in Yellowstone with his father, who keeps him away from a world that fears and hunts hybrids. When Gus finally leaves the woods, he travels with the wanderer Jepperd. As

the Storyteller (voiced by James Brolin) explains, "No one knew which came first, the hybrids or the virus. But that question would become the mystery that would define the new world" (Out of the Deep Woods 00:03:28-00:03:37). Because no one can say whether hybrids caused the virus or arose from it, they become scapegoats, yet they are also the series' symbol of repair. Just as the hybrids in Sweet Tooth embody a difficult yet optimistic future, Jayanthi's child is the solution to the mystery of human destiny on *Meru*. This causes Jayanthi's last and most profoundly moral revival: the giving of her own pleasure for the common benefit. Given the opportunity to escape to a life of freedom, she chooses to return to confront the consequences of her deeds; she hopes her tale could serve the benefit of all of mankind. She tells Vaha, "You are what I really want, but I'm willing to sacrifice my happiness for the good of my people. I know it's not fair to ask you to do the same, but I'm asking anyway. Will you help me?" (Divya 338). Her last deed transforms her personal mending into a present for her species, therefore building a base for a future based on compassion, accountability, and co-evolution rather than on conquest.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that Jayanthi's journey of self-terraforming in S.B. Divya's *Meru* is a complex and nuanced application of a posthuman ethics of repair rather than only a survival narrative. This study has also shown how a person may view her decision from the combined points of view of ethical responsibility, identity development, and ecological adaptation using the creative models. A very different way to deal with the terrible results of humanism and colonialism. Research on Jayanthi indicates that her hybridization and fluid, relational reshaping of identity are closely connected to her biological transformation. By turning an alleged handicap or disability into an evolutionary advantage, she strongly rejects ableist standards and envisions a future in which survival depends on co-evolutionary diversity rather than a single ideal of perfection. Fundamentally, her own physical recovery acts as the model for a worldwide and generational one, so tackling the central theme of the book - how humanity might have a future marked by compassion instead of domination.

Posthumanist thinkers including Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Cary Wolfe, N. Katherine Hayles, and Francesca Ferrando help this work to create the growing body of *Meru* research. The book's primary method is ecological restoration; hence, it directly ties their disability-conscious and postcolonial systems to the fundamental work of reviewers such as Manpreet Kaur Kang and Simran Mittal. This study so helps to show how speculative fiction is a crucial laboratory for envisioning fresh moral systems. *Meru* presents no easy solutions or tech-utopian visions. Rather, it implies a difficult, moral, physically and morally taxing path ahead that is necessary for any big response to world catastrophe and for fundamental self-change.

Jayanthi's story asks us beyond ideas of control and dominance toward vulnerability, interdependence and mutualism; it provides a strong theoretical fable for the Anthropocene.

Therefore, the provocative questions the novel asks the reader gives it ongoing relevance. Jayanthi's metamorphosis makes us question what it is to be human in a society marked by increasing environmental sensitivity, social breakdown and technological velocity. Her journey suggests that our future will depend less on our bravery than on our capacity to create the world to fit our demands and genetically and honestly redesign ourselves to coexist with it. Divya's work reminds us powerfully that most important repair is changing our own place on the earth, not fixing the planet. *Meru*'s last inquiry is not whether humanity will survive but rather what we are prepared to become so as to merit it.

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