Terraforming the Self: Ecological Adaptation and Posthuman Identity in *Meru*

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Summary

Introduction

This paper examines *Meru* (2023) by S. B. Divya as a significant work of contemporary speculative fiction that reimagines human survival in the context of ecological collapse. While speculative fiction has traditionally explored survival through technological mastery or planetary terraforming, *Meru* departs from this convention by foregrounding bodily transformation and ethical adaptation. Set in a future where Earth's ecosystems have been irreparably damaged, the novel presents humanity's search for survival beyond its home planet. The discovery of Meru, an oxygen-rich exoplanet hostile to baseline human physiology, forces a fundamental reconsideration of what survival means and how it should be ethically pursued.

At the center of this narrative is Jayanthi, a genetically human protagonist raised by technologically modified alloy beings and born with sickle cell anemia. Her biological condition, typically regarded as a disability within normative medical frameworks, becomes crucial to her survival on Meru. Rather than seeking to reshape the planet to meet human needs-a strategy that mirrors the ecological violence responsible for Earth's collapse-Jayanthi undertakes a process of self-terraforming. This involves altering her own biological structure to align with Meru's environmental conditions. The paper argues that this act transcends technological enhancement and functions as an ethical response to planetary crisis.

Engaging with posthumanist and posthuman ecological theory, this study situates *Meru* within emerging scholarly discussions on disability-conscious posthumanism and postcolonial critiques of expansion. While existing criticism, particularly by Manpreet Kaur Kang and Simran Mittal, has emphasized the novel's treatment of disability and gender, this paper extends the conversation by placing ecological restoration and planetary ethics at the center of analysis. The research addresses how Jayanthi's bodily transformation operates simultaneously as ecological adaptation, identity reconfiguration, and an ethics of repair, thereby offering an alternative model of survival for the Anthropocene.

Discussion

The discussion section of the paper brings together three interconnected analytical strands: ecological adaptation, posthuman identity, and self-terraforming as an ethics of repair. Rather than treating these as isolated themes, the study demonstrates how they function relationally within Jayanthi's journey.

The first movement of the discussion focuses on ecological adaptation and the rewriting of the human body. In *Meru*, planetary terraforming fails as a viable solution, exposing the limitations of human-centered survival strategies. Meru's environment cannot be controlled or domesticated without repeating the same logic that destroyed Earth. Jayanthi's response emerges from an ecological understanding of biology as context-dependent rather than fixed. Her sickle cell anemia, which is treated as a disorder on Earth, becomes an adaptive strength on Meru, where excess oxygen threatens baseline human lungs. By modifying a specific genetic pathway that allows her body to tolerate this environment, Jayanthi transforms her own biology to align with the planet. Her body becomes the site where human evolution meets an alien ecosystem.

This process reframes adaptation as an ethical act rather than a technical solution. Instead of dominating the environment, Jayanthi learns to live with it. Her transformation reflects a posthuman ecological perspective that rejects anthropocentrism and emphasizes interdependence between life forms and environments. Her body functions as a bridge, dissolving the strict separation between human and nonhuman, organism and planet. This vision of transformation finds a strong cultural parallel in Alex Garland's film *Annihilation*, where an alien force reshapes DNA across species and landscapes. In both narratives, genetic change is not portrayed as destruction but as transformation and emergence. Jayanthi's self-

terraforming similarly does not erase her humanity; it reshapes it into a form capable of coexisting with a new world.

The paper strengthens this argument by contrasting *Meru* with more traditional survival narratives such as the Netflix series *Lost in Space*. In that series, survival depends on ingenuity, resilience, and the use of external tools to preserve the human subject as it is. The Robinson family adapts environments and technologies to remain fundamentally unchanged. Jayanthi, by contrast, adapts herself. This contrast highlights the radical nature of Divya's vision, suggesting that true ecological adaptation may require a redefinition of humanity itself rather than better tools or stronger willpower.

The second movement of the discussion examines how ecological adaptation reshapes posthuman identity. Jayanthi's biological transformation is inseparable from her evolving sense of self. Raised by alloy beings yet biologically human, she exists in a constant state of in-betweenness. She does not fully belong to Earth-based human society, nor is she entirely accepted within alloy culture. Rather than resolving this tension by choosing one identity over another, Jayanthi's self-terraforming allows her to create a new mode of being. Drawing on Rosi Braidotti's concept of the nomadic subject, the paper reads Jayanthi's identity as fluid, relational, and always in process.

Instead of asking what she is, Jayanthi begins to ask what she is becoming. Her hybridity becomes a source of resilience rather than exclusion. Her belonging is no longer rooted in biological purity or social categories but in her embodied connection to the planet Meru. This shift represents a move away from fixed identities toward relational becoming, where identity emerges through interaction with others and with the environment.

This relational identity is most clearly visible in Jayanthi's relationship with Vaha, her alloy pilot. Drawing on Donna Haraway's ethics of companionship, the paper interprets their bond as one based on trust, shared vulnerability, and care rather than hierarchy or control. Identity here is not defined by autonomy but by mutual dependence. Jayanthi's willingness to share access to her bodily information network with Vaha signals a profound ethical commitment that challenges liberal humanist notions of the self as independent and self-contained. Her posthuman identity emerges through companionship, not isolation.

The paper also emphasizes the importance of embodiment, drawing on Cary Wolfe's critique of disembodied posthuman futures. Jayanthi's transformation remains deeply physical. Pain, fatigue, medical risk, and bodily vulnerability are central to her becoming. Rather than escaping

the body, *Meru* insists on its political and ethical significance. Jayanthi's body challenges ableist assumptions about health, normalcy, and worth. By reframing a stigmatized condition as adaptive strength, the novel asserts the legitimacy of divergent bodies and critiques the demand for standardized perfection.

The third movement of the discussion frames self-terraforming as an ethics of repair. Jayanthi's genetic modification extends beyond personal survival toward collective and generational futures. Her body becomes the ground for repairing humanity's broken relationship with the nonhuman world. This act represents a rejection of humanity's violent ecological past and a commitment to coexistence rather than domination. Drawing on Francesca Ferrando's philosophical posthumanism, the paper reads self-terraforming as a redefinition of the human in an ecologically fragile era. Humanity is not erased but transformed beyond rigid binaries such as human and machine or natural and artificial.

This vision aligns with N. Katherine Hayles's understanding of the posthuman condition, where biology and information are deeply entangled. Jayanthi treats her genetic makeup as informational code, rewriting it to survive Meru's conditions. In doing so, she performs both biological repair and social repair, resolving her marginal position within both human and alloy societies. Her body becomes a site of ethical possibility rather than limitation.

Jayanthi's most radical ethical act lies in her decision to think beyond herself toward future generations. Her choice to bear a child with Vaha represents a form of generational repair grounded in co-evolution. This vision resonates strongly with the series *Sweet Tooth*, where hybrid children symbolize hope emerging from ecological and social collapse. In both narratives, hybridity is not a threat but a promise of sustainable futures. Jayanthi's willingness to sacrifice personal freedom for collective survival transforms self-terraforming into an ethical gift, laying the foundation for a future based on care, responsibility, and mutualism.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that Jayanthi's journey in *Meru* represents a deeply layered enactment of a posthuman ethics of repair rather than a conventional survival narrative. By integrating ecological adaptation, posthuman identity, and ethical responsibility, the study demonstrates how self-terraforming offers an alternative response to the crises of the Anthropocene. Jayanthi's biological transformation is inseparable from her identity reconfiguration into a hybrid, fluid, and relational subject, challenging anthropocentric, ableist, and colonial assumptions about survival.

By placing *Meru* in dialogue with posthumanist thinkers such as Braidotti, Haraway, Wolfe, Hayles, and Ferrando, and extending existing disability-conscious and postcolonial scholarship, this paper contributes to the growing critical discourse on the novel. It highlights speculative fiction as a vital laboratory for imagining new moral systems in times of global crisis. Rather than offering technological utopias or simple solutions, *Meru* insists on the difficulty of self-change-biological, ethical, and emotional-as a prerequisite for sustainable futures.

Ultimately, the novel's enduring relevance lies in the question it poses to readers and to humanity at large. Survival, *Meru* suggests, is not guaranteed by strength, intelligence, or technological power alone. It depends on humanity's willingness to rethink its place within the planetary ecosystem and to redesign itself in honest coexistence with the world it inhabits. The central question that remains, and that this paper opens for further research, is not whether humanity can survive ecological catastrophe, but what it must become in order to deserve survival.