

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 3

Month: April

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Citation:

Ponni, N., and P. Nagaraj.
“Reboot or Breakdown:
Posthumanism, Trauma,
and The Limits of
Adaptation in Mukherjee’s
Migrant Narratives.”
*Shanlax International
Journal of Arts, Science
and Humanities*, vol. 12,
no. S3, 2025, pp. 146–48.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS3-Apr.9075>

Reboot or Breakdown: Posthumanism, Trauma, and The Limits of Adaptation in Mukherjee’s Migrant Narratives

N. Ponni

*Ph.D., Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages
Bharathiar University, Coimbatore*

Prof. P. Nagaraj

*Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages
Bharathiar University, Coimbatore*

Abstract

*This paper examines Bharati Mukherjee’s *Wife and Jasmine* through the perspective of posthuman philosophy, proposing that migration triggers a posthuman transition that challenges traditional identity paradigms. Using the concept of fluidity and self-evolution in reaction to external influences proposed by posthumanism, this study examines trauma as a crucial driver of identity reconfiguration in both novels. *Jasmine* presents the central character’s frequent experiences with violence and displacement as a source of posthuman resilience, as shown by her ongoing ability to adapt and self-reinvent. In contrast, *the Wife* portrays Dimple’s painful experiences as a fatal “glitch” in her posthuman development, resulting in psychological disintegration and, finally, self-destruction, as evidenced by Amit’s murder. Through a comparative study, the research investigates whether trauma in the migrant setting promotes adaptation and survival or causes irreversible disintegration. By situating these narratives within a posthuman framework, this study investigates the psychological consequences of migration, the breakdown of identity, and the precarious balance between adaptation and annihilation in the posthuman era, providing new insight into the migrant experience.*

Keywords: Posthumanism, Migration, Psychological Struggles, Escapism, Trauma, Breakdown.

Introduction

Migration is one of the leading factors in the major changes many individuals undergo and they must adapt to new places with unfamiliar traditions and social structures. In her novels *Wife and Jasmine*, the renowned diaspora author Bharat Mukherjee masterfully portrays the complexity of the migratory phenomenon. This paper suggests exploring these narratives within the posthumanism theory, which states that some elements like technology, globalization, and trauma are attempting to change the stable, autonomous understanding of the human being. It defend the idea that migration in itself serves as an initiator of posthuman shifts and compels people to transcend boundaries of identity in profound ways, hence evolving through adapting. The research also defend that this change poses threats.

This paper will address how trauma – ever present in the migration experience – pushes Jasmine towards posthuman resilience, while in the case of *Wife*, it depicts the vulnerability to collapse, disintegration and destruction.

Posthumanism: Fluidity, Adaptation, and the Shifting Self

In the words of RosiBraidotti, N. Katherine Hayles, and Donna Haraway, Posthumanism dabbles with the idea of technology's inseparability to humans and the world, critiquing the self-centred humanistic worldview. This perspective makes room for other species by inviting a more dispersed understanding of the self. Hayles et. al. emphasize how identity is a dynamic construct, shaped by interactions with the outside world as opposed to being an essence that is fixed and intrinsic. In *The Posthuman*, RosiBraidotti proposes a “nomadic subject” that is open to new environments and difference. This notion is particularly striking for individuals like migrants who must grapple with a novel culture and contend with the need to reconstruct their identity due to displacement and isolation. The displacement from one's native region and the settlement in a new one requires a dynamic self-transformation, the relinquishing of an old self to create a new self. This self-creation, however, can be dangerous, especially when trauma intertwines with the experience.

Trauma as Catalyst: Rebooting and Resilience in *Jasmine*

Jasmine depicts the protagonist's journey through a series of the traumatic events like losing her husband to murder, being raped, and dislocation of identity as motivating factors to her posthuman evolution. Jasmine metaphorically sheds her skin with every encounter to violence and loss and impersonates a new version of herself. She embodies the posthuman ideal of American life social mobility, rename, change personalities, change lover, change everything. Through Jasmine's lens, unrecognizable shifts can be captured such as sheer re-creation of a being, proactively adopting to changing dynamics and elements in the world. She is witnessing a nurturing violence. Although dearly, Jasmine's trauma is marked with adaptability demonstrating the acute sustainment of the body without limits ideology. Instantly piercing is done by the words of Haraway on posthumanism. Jasmine exemplifies the freedom and dominance hidden within the blurring lines of human versus machine, nature versus nurture while endlessly demolishing and reconstructing herself. She is permanently evolving and thus becomes a figure beyond her past, resembling a cyborg.

Trauma as “Glitch”: Breakdown and Annihilation in *Wife*

Unlike Jasmine, Dimple as the main character of *Wife* suffers trauma as a “glitch” in her posthuman development. While migrating to America and facing the same problems with cultural assimilation, her reaction is different. Rather than successional change through fluidity and merging, Dimple attempts to escape reality by idealizing her Indian womanhood, which contributes to her alienation and disconnection from everything surrounding her. Dimple's trauma originates from a mix of the solitude of suburban life, the unrelenting need to fit in, and self-induced stress and insecurities. Unlike Jasmine, who uses trauma as a catalyst for reinvention, Dimple internalizes her trauma, allowing it to rot away her identity. Dimple's growing paranoia and mental breakdowns stem from the identity of her posthuman self. The inability to adapt, to “reboot,” and to withstand the burden ultimately leads her, in a moment of tragic revelation, to kill her husband Amit. Dimple's character illustrates the complexity of the posthuman experience through the lens of migration. Migration can act as a double-edged sword, offering new paths for achievement, but simultaneously revealing new mental obstacles to conquer such as psychological stress. This disintegration and fragmentation can serve as a form of destruction. The individual's capacity to withstand traumatic experience undergoes profound change-and in the case of Jasmine's story, vocal accounts overshoot the limits of efforts to adapt.

Comparative Analysis: Adaptation vs. Annihilation

The fate of posthumanism is accurately portrayed through the fates of Jasmine and Dimple—with the latter, progressive, claiming the crucial role the trauma has embedded in both subjects. Differentiation or integration, the question still remains: what allows for trauma to be labeled resilient in one case and shattering disintegration in another? Various factors can stem the primary reason as to how.

Social Isolation: While Jasmine might be suffering from social fragmentation, he also has a few benefits such as resources as others provide her with the needed help to accomplish her goals. When placed in complete isolation, Dimple faces social alienation—forcing him to live without suitable resources and paving an online social life to help deal with the new stresses of migration.

Social Extension: Even before Dimple started migrating, an overflowing sense of anxiety and depression alongside instability sits rooted firmly in his head—creating an underlying sense of risk. Migration simply worsens the situation, slowly chipping away at her mental state. **Nature of Trauma:** While both characters have trauma, their experiences differ in scope and severity. Jasmine undergoes primal trauma while simultaneously being able to draw strength from her own tenacity. Dimple’s trauma is more gradual, an overwhelming and painful wearing away of her identity.

Conclusion: Keeping the Delicate Tension in Balance

This paper has explored Wife and Jasmine in a posthumanistic context and alongside the psychological depth of the migrant psyche. As an agent of posthuman alteration, migration can either result in self-reinvention and resilience or utter fragmentation and destruction. Trauma, an inseparable companion of migration, becomes a defining force in which way one’s life path will take. While explaining the self’s fluidity and multiplicity, posthumanism fails to capture the entire reality. The idea of a “nomadic subject” tends to idealize the migrant situation and, in doing so, ignores the harsh struggles and traumas people encounter. The change brought about by the posthuman cannot always be perceived as smooth or empowering. It is often fraught with danger, leading to psychological disintegration – or worse, obliteration. In the end, Mukherjee’s novels provide a nuanced and complex portrait of the migrant experience, reminding us that the path towards a posthuman future is not without its risks and rewards. The stories of Jasmine and Dimple serve powerful reminders of the delicate balance between adaptation and annihilation in the posthuman era, focusing on the important role of choice, social support, and personal strength in navigating the challenges of migration and forging a new identity in a world that is changing quickly.

References

1. Keezhangatte, James Joseph. Transnational Migration, Resilience and Family Relationships : Indian Household Workers in Hong Kong. 1 Jan. 2006, doi:10.5353/th_b3576038.
2. Mukherjee, Bharati. Jasmine. Grove Press, 1999.
3. Sasikanth, K. John Wesley, and D. Sumalatha. “Trials and Tribulations of Immigrants in Bharathi Mukherjee’s <<I>>Wife<</I>>” International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences, vol. 55, July 2015, pp. 44–47, doi:10.18052/www.scipress.com/ilshs.55.44.
4. “PosthumanCriticalTheory.” BloomsburyAcademicBooks, 2018, doi:10.5040/9781350030275.article-122.
5. Wolfe, Cary. “What Is Posthumanism?” Choice Reviews Online, vol. 48, no. 04, Dec. 2010, pp. 48–1856, doi:10.5860/choice.48-1856.