



Indian Posthuman Thought: Reading Karma, Reincarnation along with Posthumanism in Indrapramit Das's *The Devourers* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*

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Abstract: When Donna Haraway proposed the idea of the 'cyborg' in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, she highlighted the idea of the dissolution of the boundaries between human and animal, human-animal (organism) and machine and physical and non-physical. Contributing to this, further, theorists like N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, Cary Wolfe and others developed the concept of 'posthumanism', which interrogates what it is to be a human in this posthuman era, entangled with technology, where identity is dynamic and relational rather than fixed. Posthumanism has become a central part of global discussions and debates for a very long time now, yet most of the discussions are rooted in Western viewpoints, having a very limited engagement with the Indian perspective. This paper analyses two novels from Indian speculative fiction, "*The Devourers*" by Indrapramit Das and "*The Calcutta Chromosome*" by Amitav Ghosh, through the Posthuman lens alongside the Bhagavad Gita's teachings on Karma and Reincarnation to reimagine posthumanism from an Indian philosophical perspective, taking literature deliberately as a space where Indian philosophy and Posthuman thought converge. Drawing from Ferrando's idea of Philosophical Posthumanism and Debashish Banerjee's "*Posthumanism and Indian Spirituality*" and through close readings of both the selected novels through a posthuman and Gita's karmic-reincarnation framework, this paper uses speculative fiction as a microcosm of a wider scope of discussion involving an Indian philosophical view on posthumanism and literature being a mirror to it. The paper puts Indian philosophical teachings into dialogue with posthumanism through speculative fiction and, at the same time, revives the philosophical teachings of karma and reincarnation from the Bhagavad Gita in accordance with today's evolving world and technological advancements. This paper argues that pre-existing Indian philosophical teachings, particularly karma and reincarnation as per the Bhagavad Gita, can reconfigure identity and ethical responsibility in today's era of Artificial Intelligence.

Index Terms - Artificial Intelligence, Indian Philosophical Teachings, Karma, Posthumanism, Reincarnation, Reconfigure and Speculative Fiction

I. INTRODUCTION

Long before the beginning of the discussions, debates, and developments around posthumanism, which quite often is viewed as a critique of liberal humanism and a thought that destabilises the human subject, Indian philosophical traditions already imagined a cosmos that is not restricted to boundaries, bodies, or lifetimes. The Bhagavad Gita describes the soul as eternal and imperishable and the body as transient. It advocates for the idea that the soul never dies but transmigrates into different forms, carrying the consequences of past actions as per the law of Karma. This view is very opposite to the idea that ethical responsibility ends with the end of the physical body; instead, it proposes that the soul transcends along with the moral responsibility across lives or lifetimes, as the soul is neither born nor does it ever die; nor, having once existed, does it ever

cease to be. The soul is without birth, eternal, immortal, and ageless. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed (Gita 2.20), and whatever one remembers upon giving up the body at the time of death, one attains that state, being always absorbed in such contemplation (Gita 8.6). These dialogues, documented in the Gita, explicitly suggest that it offers a non-anthropocentric and non-terminal ethical view of life. These teachings of the Gita are not only restricted to a mere metaphysical idea but also carry a deeper ethical concern. If the soul is eternal and the body represents a vessel containing the soul, the moral responsibility also gets carried forward with the soul, irrespective of the vessel's shape, size or form. Hence, moral responsibility is not limited to a single vessel (body), i.e. one lifetime or life form. The actions performed by a person in one life transcend to different lifetimes, creating a moral order that is not strictly linear but cyclic. If observed closely, the teachings of the Gita do not restrict themselves to an idea of salvation but extend to relational or trans-generational ethics connecting beings across different lives and forms through an invisible moral responsibility. The teachings of the Gita form a philosophical base for the fact that identity is not fixed but ever-changing, that transforms and migrates across embodiments based on actions.

Posthumanism, based on the ideology of non-anthropocentrism, not philosophical, but having Western roots, is a recently emerging idea. Developed over the course of time by theorists such as Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, Cary Wolfe and others, posthumanism talks of the dissolution of the boundaries between human and non-human. Also, it acknowledges the fact that agency is distributed across bodies, species and technologies. N. Katherine Hayles, in her book *How We Became Posthuman*, discusses the co-evolution of posthuman parallelly with the machines and how subjectivity extends beyond the boundaries of existence, entangling with networks, systems and data with time. Posthumanism critiques and questions anthropocentrism and re-evaluates the boundaries between humans and non-humans (animals, environment, technology, ecological systems, etc.). While critiquing and re-evaluating the boundaries, it also calls to re-imagine human subjectivity, ethical responsibility and agency in the 21st century, where artificial intelligence and technology are continuously being integrated into the lives of humans. In contemporary times, critical posthuman thought emerges as a lens, helping to navigate human subjectivity that extends beyond the stereotypical idea of considering humans as supreme and identity as a self-contained subject.

'Philosophical Posthumanism', as Ferrando in her book chapter terms it and talks about, highlighting one of its prime characteristics that lies in its post-dualistic understanding of existence, which she finds parallel to the South Asian philosophical traditions, especially Advaita Vedanta. Recent scholarship has found this idea important and valuable and has begun to map the relationship between Indian philosophical traditions and posthuman thoughts. Debashish Banerjee's recent book chapter, *Posthumanism and Indian Spirituality*, examines the relationship between posthuman thought and Indian spirituality, emphasising the philosophy of Aurobindo's yoga. The chapter analyses posthuman alongside the Indian philosophical traditions, and discusses the idea that Indian philosophical teachings not only illustrate Western Posthuman thoughts but also offer an in-depth ethical horizon to reimagine posthuman thought.

Belonging to distinct genealogies, developed within different time frames, geographical areas, and originating from a different set of ideas and traditions, both the teachings of the Gita and the idea of posthumanism somehow share a common ground; both accept the fact that the self (soul) is not bound but free and exists beyond the human body. This convergence or intersection between Gita's karmic-reincarnation ethics and posthuman rationality builds a space where a discussion around how Indian philosophical traditions can play a significant role in the ongoing developments of posthuman thought, an idea that has already come into play but remains underdeveloped. Building upon this intersecting conceptual idea of Gita's karmic-reincarnation ethics and posthuman thought, this paper offers a selected analysis of the two Indian novels, *"The Devourers"* by Indrapramit Das and *"The Calcutta Chromosome"* by Amitav Ghosh, to navigate how literature serves as a site where both Indian philosophical ideas and Western posthumanist thoughts can converge, contributing to the emerging thought of reimagining posthumanism from an Indian perspective. The study suggests that Indian philosophical traditions serve not only as a passive background or just a comparative analytical framework but also as an active source that can help shape ongoing posthuman discussions globally.

"The Devourers" involves the body-shifting, multispecies werewolves whose lives entangle human and non-human dimensions, blurring the boundaries between human and non-human and *"The Calcutta Chromosome"* deals with the techno-historical cycle between body, information, and memory. By putting these texts into a dialogue with the Gita's philosophy of reincarnation, karma and posthuman thought of distributed agency and fluid identity, this paper argues that literature can serve as a site of navigation at the intersection of Indian philosophical traditions and posthumanism, contributing to the already existing but

underdeveloped discussions around India and posthumanism. The selection of these two novels is deliberate as both belong to two different genres. *“The Devourers”* involves dark fantasy, myth and supernatural elements, whereas *“The Calcutta Chromosome”* is rooted in medical history, colonial science and is a speculative thriller. Despite differences, both novels, in their own way, present a trans-body continuity that aligns with the philosophical teachings of the Gita and at the same time challenges the human-centred prevailing views. This study opens a wider space for Indian posthuman dialogue, irrespective of genres. An analysis of these novels demonstrates that the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita have persisted for centuries and remain relevant in contemporary society, where individuals grapple with identity in a technologically driven world and confront ethical and moral dilemmas. A close examination of *“The Devourers”* and *“The Calcutta Chromosome”* reveals a parallel between these teachings and the concept of Posthumanism, thereby contributing to the philosophical discourse on Posthuman thought. Furthermore, this critical reading illustrates how these novels construct a hybrid framework that integrates posthuman perspectives with Indian philosophical concepts, presenting identity as dynamic, relational, and inherently connected to ethical and moral responsibility.

This critical analysis employs a framework that synthesises the Gita’s karmic-reincarnation ethics with the principles of posthumanism. The Gita articulates the cyclical nature of the soul and asserts that actions inevitably produce consequences according to the law of karma, thereby extending moral and ethical responsibilities beyond a single life, body, or form. According to the Gita, existence is a cyclical continuum rather than a linear progression from birth to death, which broadens the scope of ethical responsibility across different life forms and lifetimes. In contrast, posthuman thought, though originating from a distinct intellectual tradition, similarly challenges the notion that humans are the exclusive locus of agency, value, and meaning. It emphasises the interconnectedness among humans, the environment, animals, technology, and systems. Posthuman theorists, such as Rosi Braidotti and N. Katherine Hayles, argue that human agency is distributed rather than sovereign, and that ethical relations are collective rather than solely individual.

The convergence between these two frameworks rests on their shared belief that individuality is not bounded but autonomous. Both these frameworks dismantle the fixed human-centred ethical models, the Gita, by proposing the trans-body moral order in a cyclical loop and posthumanism by proposing agency as interdependence between humans and non-humans. These frameworks do not overlap but instead create a space for the emergence of the Indian philosophical view of posthumanism. This blended framework fits perfectly for the analysis of *“The Devourers”* and *“The Calcutta Chromosome,”* two significant South Asian works of speculative fiction, exemplifying that literature can give a concrete shape to the ongoing discussions around Indian Posthumanism, serving as a perfect site for the intermingling of the two distinct genres.

While Posthuman thought is based heavily on technology, artificial intelligence and cybernetics advancements, Gita’s framework relies on philosophical, metaphysical, spiritual and ethical concerns. But both of them reject anthropocentrism and advocate for relational, dynamic and fluid identity. Their convergence guides the reading of the two novels.

II. THE DEVOURERS BY INDRAPRAMIT DAS

Published in the year 2015, one of the significant works in South Asian speculative fiction and dark fantasy is Das’s debut novel, *The Devourers*. The story of shapeshifters and werewolves is the main plot of the novel. Das uses a multi-layered narrative structure to tell the story. This structure is revealed through the experiences of Alok Mukherjee, a middle-aged history professor in modern-day Kolkata. The novel begins when Alok encounters a stranger named Izrail at a music festival. Izrail claims to be half human and half werewolf. He asks Alok to translate and transcribe deteriorating manuscripts written on human skin. These translations form a significant part of the story and drive the plot forward. The manuscripts contain centuries of history, including the migration of European shapeshifters and werewolves to the Indian subcontinent. They focus on the stories of Fenrir, Gevaudan, and the Greek Lycaon Cyrah during the seventeenth century, at the time of Emperor Shah Jahan’s reign. The narrative blends the past and present in a non-linear way. Through its characters, plot, and narrative structure, the novel questions the divisions between human, animal, and demon, challenging common views about human uniqueness. It presents the idea that identity is fluid, pushing back against the ideas of Western liberal humanism and moving toward posthumanism, while rejecting traditional binaries. Das’s choice of a non-linear narrative is not just a stylistic one; it holds significant meaning. By mixing past and present, the novel reminds readers that the past lives on and influences the future, embodying the concepts of karma and reincarnation. In this way, Das does not rely heavily on cybernetics or technology, a common approach in Western posthumanism. Instead, the novel integrates metaphysical principles from

Indian philosophy, particularly karma and reincarnation. Its non-linear form reflects the cyclical nature of time and life, where past actions shape present and future identities and consequences. This contrasts with Western posthuman models, which suggest blurring boundaries while promoting a linear advancement toward AI or technology. The story emphasises that the past influences the present, as ethical concerns and identities carry over through lifetimes. When read critically within the framework of karma, reincarnation, and posthumanism, the novel presents a karmic-posthuman view, where identity and agency are non-linear and exist beyond individual bodies.

The Gita conceptualises 'reincarnation' as a continuous moment of the soul through different physical forms, shedding the body like a garment: "*As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones*" (Gita 2.22). In *"The Devourers"*, reincarnation is translated into literal, biological, and metabolic reality, where it becomes a cannibalistic embodied process. Shapeshifters/Werewolves not only kill humans but also devour their bodies and consciousness. This is exemplified in the novel through the character of Gevauden and is proved in the part where he explains his command of the local language, which he learned from a dead man after devouring him. Izrail, as he claims in the very beginning of the novel, is a half-human character, the offspring of European werewolf Fenrir and Cyrah, produced after Fenrir, a werewolf, raped Cyrah, a human being, representing the culmination of physical and postcolonial reincarnation. After devouring her mother, Cyrah, at her request, he internalises her physical form, trauma, experiences, and memories. Thus, Izrail is a character in the novel who possesses a transgenerational and trans-species identity, dissolving the boundaries of individual subjectivity. Also, Karmic dynamics in the novel are expressed through the historical and biological consequences of assault, trauma, violence, and colonial predatory exploitation faced by Cyrah and Fenrir. The karmic reckoning in the novel is biologically written and literally transcribed by Alok, serving as a practice of bearing historical witness. In a way, this whole process of coming across a stranger and the history of werewolves while transcribing makes Alok confront the ancestral karmic inheritance of his own lineage and his suppressed queer identity. This is echoed in his words, "*I am Cyrah of Lahore. I am Fenrir of the far Norse Lands. I am Izrail of the Sundarbans... a bastard khrissal-werewolf-rakshasa. I am Alok of Kolkata*" (Das 302). These words of Alok collapse the idea of stable and static identity and support the view that identity is dynamic as the multiple identities of Cyrah, Fenrir, Izrail, and Alok find their pieces into a single, hybrid self. Analysing the novel from an Indian posthuman lens helps recognise that the teachings of karma and reincarnation, as per the Gita, can serve as a pre-existing posthuman framework that is helpful in reconfiguring identity, embodiment, and agency in the techno-dominated era. The hybrid identity of Izrail is due to the colonial violence faced by his parents and is enacted through his cannibalistic reincarnation, portraying how these philosophies act as a posthuman mechanism in the novel. Identity, in the novel, remains in flux and an amalgamation of experiences, relational and entangled with the non-human forces (trauma, colonial history), which supports the central argument of posthumanism and at the same time remains tied to the philosophy of karma and reincarnation.

At the core of the analysis of this novel lies the way it challenges Western liberal humanism, critiquing human exceptionalism, emphasising the connection between the human and non-human, and justifying that identity is not static but fluid and relational. Alok's admitting of the fact of his hybrid identity, who claims to be all at once Cyrah, Fenrir or Alok himself, advocates for the posthuman idea that identity is not fixed but fluid, changing, relational and in a process of becoming. The character of Izrail is one of the finest specimens from the novel, exhibiting through his character the posthuman thought, blurring boundaries between human and non-human, all along carrying the karmic cycle.

The close analysis of *The Devourers* reveals that the novel contains elements of posthuman thought that do not actually make use of cybernetic technology or artificial intelligence; instead, it relies on the Indian metaphysical concepts, specifically reincarnation and karma as recorded in the Bhagavad Gita. Das's novel thus demonstrates how the novel integrates Indian philosophies and posthuman thought in parallel.

III. THE CALCUTTA CHROMOSOME

Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery* stands at the point where the medical history of Victorian times, near-future surveillance and the Indian philosophy of the Gita intersect. Popularised as a medical thriller, the novel traces Sir Ronald Ross's Nobel Prize-winning discovery of the malaria vector in Calcutta during 1897. The novel is a solid critique of Western colonial and postcolonial science. Underneath its plot, structure and style is the integration of the philosophies of reincarnation and karma, which advocate for the ethical implications of scientific advancements, often

ignored. Ghosh, in the novel, bridges Eastern philosophical teachings and the critical posthumanist thought in his own way. Following a non-linear narrative structure, he deconstructs the already fixed binaries and human-bound identity, challenging the thoughts of liberal humanism. The novel explicitly portrays the transfer of agency, identity and consciousness across bodies, times and systems. The narrative involves movement across three interlinked planes, near future New York where Antar indulges in finding of the cause of disappearance of Murugan using digital traces, Calcutta 1995, where Murugan engages in investigation of the hidden history of Ronald Ross's discovery of Malaria vector along with Urmila Roy's quest to discover the hidden messages behind the "Laakhan stories" written by a writer named, Phulboni, and in the late nineteenth century where Ross Ronald's research on Malaria intersects with Mangla, Lakhan and the network. At the heart of the novel lies Murugan's theory of "Calcutta Chromosome", stating that transmission defies conventional biology and Western scientific rationality, which lies at the centre of this reading.

The novel refigures reincarnation as the transmission of personality, memory, and consciousness across bodies through a hidden channel, i.e. linked to malaria, by a group of people rather than a biological transmission. This group of people includes Mangala and Lakhan as its prime members, who plan and achieve physical immortality by exploiting the malaria parasite for its ability to slice DNA. The parasite, in the novel, is shown to be used for slicing the target's DNA and transferring it into the host's body, which Murugan particularly terms as 'Calcutta Chromosome'. The characters in the novel are crafted in a way that they belong to different centuries, but as the temporary embodiments of a shared, underlying biological-conscious identity rather than as fully separate individuals. In the late nineteenth century of the novel, the cult leader, Mangala, a lab sweeper, leaves her traces of consciousness into Mrs Aratounian, a hostel owner, who does the same with the journalist, Urmila Roy and finally into Tara in the near-future New York, a nanny and neighbour to Antar. Similarly, her assistant, Lakhan, simultaneously transfers his consciousness to Lutchman, then Roman Haldar, Murugan and finally to Antar. This continuous circulation of consciousness among the characters belonging to different generations and timelines aligns with the view that the Gita's teachings of karma and reincarnation serve as a pre-existing framework, going along with today's development around what we term as 'posthumanism'. The transmission of consciousness or Calcutta chromosome throughout the novel across times, bodies and systems adhering to the ethical implications portrays how Gita's philosophical teachings operate posthuman mechanisms. Moreover, the novel focuses on one of the prime characteristics of posthuman thought, i.e. identity is fluid, relational and entangled with non-human forces, malaria parasite, digital traces and technology, integrating the karmic cyclical loop.

The dominance and epistemic violence of postcolonial science, in the novel, has been critiqued by Ghosh through the reflection of the karmic principle. Every character in the novel, from the very beginning of the story till the very end, remains caught up in the same loop of suffering and repetition because of a past action connected to his/her consciousness. Every action in the plot generates a reaction instantly or later on, creating a cause-and-effect structure for the novel in which the events unfold. Every part of the action determines the future happenings in the storyline, from Antar's quest to search for the reason for Murugan's disappearance to Murugan's discovery of the 'Calcutta Chromosome' theory, unfolding into a tightly linked chain. Malaria, in the novel, acts as a karmic vector, a medium through which consciousness and identity are transferred, mirroring the Gita's philosophy of reincarnation, where the soul migrates carrying the consequences of past actions. However, Ghosh has overlapped this metaphysical idea with technological and biological scientific discoveries. In the novel, the malaria parasite slices the DNA and transfers the consciousness, making this transfer look literal and not symbolic. In this way, it presents a karmic-posthuman ontology where spirituality, technology and biology all three intersect.

In the novel, Malaria doesn't just serve as a disease but as a medium of transmission of identities, personalities and consciousness. Murugan's claim that parasites and bodies form a system of passage, making the body porous rather than a self-contained entity, directly aligns with posthuman thought. The idea that the body is porous is central to posthuman thought, as in the novel's world, the body is not a self-contained vessel but a site of transformation, exchange and transmission. Posthumanism sees the body as an entanglement with the non-human world, be it the environment or technology. Ava, the supercomputer built on Artificial Intelligence that Antar uses in the near future, serves as the perfect example, which blurs out the boundaries between a human and a non-human. Ghosh deploys Ava as an active participant who helps drive the plot instead of serving just as a prop; it is Ava who reconnects Antar and Murugan in the end through digital traces. This reflects the posthuman idea of distributed agency across both human and non-human forms. Ghosh grounds his critique of colonial and postcolonial scientific advancements in Indian cosmology rather than just cybernetics, offering a very hybrid framework.

With the ending of the novel, we also come across the end or dissolution of the boundaries between the characters, implying that they (every character) are all manifestations of the same underlying network of consciousness and biological-karmic continuity. Ghosh, in the novel, has creatively criticised Western Scientific dominance, a move that aligns with posthuman thought, while also, at a deeper level, drawing on Indian Philosophical traditions, particularly reincarnation and Karma as per the Bhagavad Gita, to reimagine identity beyond human boundaries. Read within the karma-reincarnational and posthumanism framework, the novel advocates that identity is fluid and that life, knowledge and consequences move beyond singular identity, life and time. *“The Calcutta Chromosome”* exemplifies how Indian philosophical traditions and posthuman thought can be read alongside each other and how Indian philosophies can shape posthuman discourse.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper argues that the novels *“The Calcutta Chromosome”* by Amitav Ghosh and *“The Devourers”* by Indrapramit Das open a space for the reading of speculative fiction through the blended karma- reincarnation and posthuman framework. The view of the Gita on the transmigration of the soul, according to the law of Karma and the posthuman thought of decentring the human subjectivity, advocating for fluid and relational identity, deconstructing traditional boundaries between humans and non-humans, finds a common ground, challenging the fixed human consciousness and identity, contributing to the ongoing discussions around posthumanism and India, using literature as a mirror. The two novels, discussed in the paper, however, enact the convergence of Indian philosophical traditions and posthuman thought in their own ways. *“The Devourers”* presents a karmic-reincarnational loop through flesh, memory, violence and desire, carrying the traces of the past into the present. Also, it expresses the posthuman thought of fluid identity through the story of shapeshifters and the fine portrayal of the half-human, half-werewolf character of Izrail as a figure of fluid identity. On the other hand, *“The Calcutta Chromosome”* identifies Indian philosophical traditions to challenge the dominance of Western colonial and postcolonial science, demonstrating a transfer of consciousness, agency, and identity across bodies using parasites as the medium. This creates a karmic-like chain of consequences of past actions and culminates in the dissolution of distinct identities into a single, shared network, aligning with posthuman notions of relational identity. These novels demonstrate that the teachings of the Gita on karma and reincarnation serve as pre-existing directions shaping today’s posthuman thoughts.

The close reading of these novels from this blended framework contributes to the ongoing global discussions representing these two novels as examples where Indian philosophical traditions not only illustrate the characteristics of Western posthumanism but also expand and revisit it from an ethical point of view, instead of reading it only through the lens of technological advancements, artificial intelligence or cybernetic entanglements as Eurocentric models of posthumanism do.

This analysis opens up a space for further enquiry into posthuman thought from other Indian philosophical perspectives, such as *Dharma*, *Prakriti*, *Rasa*, etc. Beyond Karma and Reincarnation, Indian philosophy has an abundance of thoughts and teachings, such as ‘Dharma’, using which, for instance, posthuman can be read with an emphasis on duty, responsibility and cosmic order, ‘Prakriti’, using which an ecological posthuman view can be put forth in the dialogue and much more. At the same time, it proposes a new blended framework involving karma- reincarnation and posthuman thought, which can be developed further for the analysis of other speculative fiction, not limited to a region or genre. This paper is not a closed statement; instead, an opening field towards a broader field of Indian posthuman thought where literature acts as a site for exploring the human, the non-human and the ethical future of shared existence. By bringing Gita’s teachings of Karma and Reincarnation into the dialogue with posthumanism, this paper aims to open a horizon of discussion around what it is to be a human in the 21st century, with rapid technological advancements that are inclusive of philosophical and ethical aspects rooted in Indian philosophy and how centuries-long proposed Indian philosophical thoughts and teachings can be reinterpreted today.

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