

**HUMAN AS DEMON: THE REPRESENTATION
OF DEHUMANIZATION AND
INFRA- HUMANIZATION IN SELECT
POST-MILLENNIAL FICTIONS IN ENGLISH**

**Thesis Submitted to the
University of Calicut
for the Award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH**

by

SHAHAD BIN ALY

under the Supervision of

**Dr. ZAINUL ABID KOTTA
Professor of English and Principal
Government College, Malappuram**



**PG & Research Department of English
Government College, Malappuram**



Affiliated to the University of Calicut

DECEMBER 2025

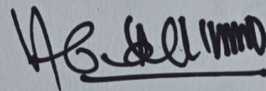
Dr. ZAINUL ABID KOTTA

Professor of English & Principal
Government College, Malappuram

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **Human as Demon: The Representation of Dehumanization and Infra-humanization in Select Post-millennial Fictions in English** submitted by **Shahad Bin Aly** to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor Philosophy in English, is an original record of observations and bona fide research , carried out by him under my supervision, and that it has not been previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or similar title.

Malappuram
Date: 15-12-2025



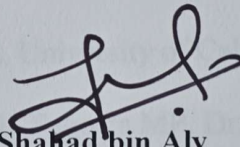
Dr. ZAINUL ABID KOTTA
Research Supervisor

DECLARATION

I, **Shahad Bin Aly**, hereby declare that the thesis entitled, **Human as Demon: The Representation of Dehumanization and Infra-humanization in Select Post-millennial Fictions in English**, submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor Philosophy in English, is an original record of observations and bona fide research, carried out by me under the supervision of **Dr. Zainul Abid Kotta**, Professor of English & Principal, Govt. College Malappuram, and that it has not been previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or similar title. The contents of the thesis are undergone plagiarism check using **iThenticate** software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index found within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated contents.

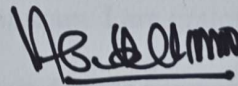
Malappuram

Date: 15-12-2025



Shahad bin Aly

Research Scholar



Dr. Zainul Abid Kotta

Research Supervisor

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

My thesis is the result of an unwavering long journey of academic pursuits, which started from my sincere interest in the socio-political, cultural and religious discriminations prevailing in the society. First and foremost, I wish to express my earnest gratitude to my supervisor, Prof (Dr.) Zainul Abid Kotta, for his exceptional guidance, devoted support, and intellectual mentorship throughout the course of this doctoral research. He has been a beacon light, that guided me in this pursuit and shaped my entire journey of research. His scholarly critiques and challenging questions were instrumental in shaping the quality and direction of this thesis. He showed me right directions at every dead end that I met with and reassured and supported me at the times of my crisis. I am truly indebted for the trust and freedom I was given to pursue such a complex topic. As Head of the Department also, his guidance and help were so immense, that helped me to go through all technicalities. I express my gratitude to Dr KM Sherref, former HoD, English, University of Calicut and Dr. Shamla M, the present HoD, English, University of Calicut. I am equally indebted to Dr. Nisha M, the present HoD, Dr. Sageera MP, Dr. Hasanath T, Dr. Rajesh K, Mr. Mammad, Mr. Akbar C, and other faculty members of Department of English, and the members of Research Advisory Committee, and administrative members, Government College Malappuram. I am grateful to them for their timely advice and scholarly interference. Their diverse perspectives significantly enhanced the precision and scope of this work. I may also mention Prof. (Dr.) A.I. Vilayathullah, with much gratitude, for rendering intellectual guidance. I would like to extend my gratitude to Mr PK Ahammed, Adv M

Muhammad, Mr. PO Hashim, Mr. S Muhammad Yunus, Mr. N.K. Muhammad Ali, Dr V.M. Abdul Mujeeb, and other members of Rouzathul Uloom Arabic College Managing Committee, Dr Abdu Rahman C, former Principal, Rouzathul Uloom Arabic College, Mr Shareef, the librarian, and other faculty and administrative members of Rouzathul Uloom Arabic College, for their support and cooperation. Finally, and most importantly, I must thank my family and friends for their enduring patience, encouragement, and understanding over these past few years, especially, my parents, Mr. Ali Koya EP and Mrs. Laila KV, and my wife Mrs. Shaniba Cholakkal, and my children, Mr. Safdar Ali, Ms Shayma Shaharзад and Mr. Shahraz A Kader, for their unconditional affection, empathy and trust in me that provided the foundation for this entire venture.

CONTENTS

		Page No.
Chapter I	Introduction	1-91
Chapter II	Dehumanization, Refugee Crisis, and Human Predicaments during Sudanese War in Dave Eggers's <i>What is the What</i>	92-170
Chapter III	Man-Machine Conflict and the Post-War Reflections in Daniel H. Wilson's <i>Robopocalypse</i>	171-232
Chapter IV	Dehumanization and the Misuse of Power in a Hyper-Capitalist Dystopia in Nicholas Lamar Soutter's <i>The Water Thief</i>.	233-308
Chapter V	Conclusion	309-361
Chapter VI	Recommendations	362-364
	Works Cited	365-374

ABSTRACT

Dehumanization is an old, complex, and tragic phenomenon that discriminate human from human. It is one of the darkest expressions of human failure in becoming a human being, for people, groups, or communities are stripped of their fundamental rights, qualities, dignities, respect, and consideration. It can be defined as a profound psychological process wherein individuals or groups perceive their adversaries or rivals as less than human, thereby stripping them of moral consideration and empathy. It not only fuels fear, pain, anger, violence, and conflict, but also makes other people their enemies. The act of dehumanizing others enables perpetrators to rationalize cruelty, justify discrimination, and perpetuate systemic violence with impunity. It is not merely a social or political mechanism, but a psychological and moral failure, wherein, tragically, humans have become demons by their very acts of cruelty, domination, and disregard for fellow beings. There are various types of dehumanization prevailing all over the world, like religious dehumanization, caste-based dehumanization, political dehumanization, gender-based dehumanization, racial and ethnic dehumanization, economic dehumanization, war and conflict-driven dehumanization etc. There are many different possible areas of dehumanization, like media and popular culture, prison systems, immigration and refugee Crisis, medical and scientific experiments, technology and artificial intelligence etc. and in various forms like, Diaspora, Socio-political conflicts, corporate dominance, technological invasions etc.

Even though many studies on dehumanization and infra-humanization have been conducted by different researchers, all over the world, a full-fledged study, based on the works of the select authors, have not been conducted so far. The present study aims to analyze deeply the theme of dehumanization and infra-humanization, on different aspects and forms like refugee crisis, technocracy and corporatocracy etc., in three post-millennial American dystopian novels: *What is the What* by Dave Eggers, *Robopocalypse* by Daniel H. Wilson, and *The Water Thief* by Nicholas Lamar Soutter. Various post-structuralist theories have also been considered to explicitly perceive the issues of dehumanization and infra-humanization, like Thomas Hobbes's *Principles of the State of Nature and the Social Contract*, Sigmund Freud's *Hypothesis on Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego*, Charles Darwin's *Evolutionary Hypothesis*, Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of *Overman or Superman*, the *Class Struggle* theory of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels etc.

Key words: dehumanization, infra-humanization, agency, diaspora, technocracy, corporatocracy, refugee, dystopia, *Übermensch* (overaman), bourgeoisie, class struggle, ultra capitalism

സംഗ്രഹം

മനുഷ്യരിൽ നിന്ന് മനുഷ്യരെ തന്നെ വേർതിരിക്കുന്ന പഴയതും സങ്കീർണ്ണവും, ദാരുണവുമായ സംഭവമാണ് അപമാനവീകരണം (Dehumanization). ഉത്തമ മനുഷ്യനാവാനുള്ള മനുഷ്യ പ്രയത്നത്തിന്റെ നേർ വിപരീതമാണ് അപമാനവീകരണം. ഇതു മൂലം വ്യക്തികൾക്കും, സമൂഹങ്ങൾക്കും അവരുടെ അടിസ്ഥാനാവകാശങ്ങൾ, ഗുണങ്ങൾ, അഭിമാനം, ബഹുമാനം, പരിഗണന എന്നിവ ലഭ്യമാകാതെ പോകുന്നു. അപമാനവീകരണത്തിന്റെ മറ്റൊരു പദാവലിയാണ് മനുഷ്യാവകാശനിഷേധം. ഇത് സവിശേഷമായ ഒരു മാനസികാവസ്ഥയാണ്. വ്യക്തികളും സമൂഹങ്ങളും അവരുടെ എതിരാളികളെയും വൈരികളെയും “മനുഷ്യരല്ലാത്തവരായി” പരികല്പിക്കുന്നു. അതുവഴി അവർക്കുള്ള നൈതിക പരിഗണനയും കരുണയും ഇല്ലാതാകുന്നു. മാനസികമായ ഈ അവരവത്കരണം ഭയം, വേദന, കോപം, അക്രമം, സംഘർഷം എന്നിവയിലേക്ക് നയിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. മറ്റുള്ളവരെ മനുഷ്യാവകാശനിഷേധത്തിന് വിധേയരാക്കുന്ന പ്രവൃത്തികൾ സ്വാഭാവികമായും കുറ്റകൃത്യങ്ങളെ ന്യായീകരിക്കാനും വിവേചനത്തെ സാധൂകരിക്കാനും വ്യവസ്ഥാപിതമായ അക്രമം ന്യായീകരിക്കാനുമുള്ള വഴിയൊരുക്കുന്നു. അത് ഒരു സാമൂഹികമോ രാഷ്ട്രീയമോ പരിമിതമായ പ്രക്രിയയല്ല, മറിച്ച് ഒരു വ്യക്തിയുടെയോ സമൂഹത്തിന്റെയോ ഗൗരവമേറിയ മാനസികവും നൈതികവുമായ പരാജയമാണ്. ഇത്തരം പ്രവൃത്തികളിലൂടെ മനുഷ്യർ ക്രൂരതയുടെയും ആധിപത്യത്തിന്റെയും, സഹജീവികളോടുള്ള അവഗണനയുടെയും ഭീഷണികളായി മാറുന്നു. ലോകമെമ്പാടും വിവിധതരം മനുഷ്യാവകാശനിഷേധങ്ങൾ കാണപ്പെടുന്നു. ഇത്തരം അപമാനവീകരണത്തിന് മതം, ജാതി, രാഷ്ട്രീയം, ലിംഗം, വംശം, വർഗ്ഗം, സാമ്പത്തികം, യുദ്ധം തുടങ്ങിയവ നിമിത്തമാവാറുണ്ട്. ഈ പ്രതിഭാസം മാധ്യമങ്ങളിലൂടെയും ജനപ്രിയ സംസ്കാരത്തിലൂടെയും, ജയിലുകളിലൂടെയും, കുടിയേറ്റ-അഭയാർത്ഥി പ്രതിസന്ധികളിലൂടെയും, വൈദ്യശാസ്ത്ര-ശാസ്ത്രീയ പരീക്ഷണങ്ങളിലൂടെയും, സാങ്കേതികവിദ്യയിലൂടെയും പ്രത്യക്ഷപ്പെടുന്നു. പ്രവാസം, സാമൂഹ്യ-രാഷ്ട്രീയ സംഘർഷം, കോർപ്പറേറ്റ് ആധിപത്യം, സാങ്കേതിക അതിക്രമണം തുടങ്ങിയ മേഖലകളിലും ഈ പ്രതിഭാസം നിലനിൽക്കുന്നു. ഡി ഹ്യൂമനൈസേഷൻ, ഇൻഫ്രാ ഹ്യൂമനൈസേഷൻ തുടങ്ങിയവയിൽ നിരവധി ഗവേഷണങ്ങൾ

നടന്നിട്ടുണ്ട്. എന്നാൽ ഈ പ്രബന്ധത്തിനായി തെരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത സാഹിത്യകാരന്മാരുടെ കൃതികളെ ആസ്പദമാക്കി സമഗ്രമായ ഒരു പഠനം ഇതുവരെ നടന്നതായി ശ്രദ്ധയിൽപ്പെട്ടിട്ടില്ല. നിലവിലുള്ള പഠനം ലക്ഷ്യമാക്കുന്നത് Dave Eggers എഴുതിയ What is the What, Daniel H. Wilson എഴുതിയ Robopocalypse, Nicholas Lamar Soutter എഴുതിയ The Water Thief എന്നീ മൂന്ന് പോസ്റ്റ്-മില്ലേനിയൽ അമേരിക്കൻ ഡിസ്റ്റോപ്പിയൻ നോവലുകളിൽ, അഭയാർത്ഥി പ്രതിസന്ധി, ടെക്നോക്രസി, കോർപ്പറേറ്റോക്രസി തുടങ്ങിയ മേഖലകളിലെ മനുഷ്യാവകാശനിഷേധവും അപമാനവീകരണവുമെന്ന പ്രധാന വിഷയത്തെ ആഴത്തിൽ വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുകയാണ്. ഈ പഠനം തോമസ് ഹോബ്സ്ന്റെ State of Nature, Social Contract സംബന്ധിച്ച സിദ്ധാന്തങ്ങൾ, സിഗ്മണ്ട് ഫ്രോയ്ഡ് അവതരിപ്പിച്ച Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego, ചാൾസ് ഡാർവിന്റെ Evolutionary Hypothesis, ഫ്രിഡ്രിക് നീഷെയുടെ Overman സിദ്ധാന്തം, കാൾ മാർക്സും ഫ്രീഡ്രീച്ച് എംഗൽസും അവതരിപ്പിച്ച Class Struggle സിദ്ധാന്തം തുടങ്ങിയവയും വിവിധ പോസ്റ്റ്-സ്ട്രക്ചറലിസ്റ്റ് ചിന്തകളെയും പരിഗണിച്ചുകൊണ്ട് വിഷയത്തെ ആഴത്തിൽ വിലയിരുത്തുന്നു.

പ്രധാനപദങ്ങൾ: അപമാനവീകരണം, ഇൻഫ്രാ ഹ്യൂമനൈസേഷൻ, ഏജൻസി, പ്രവാസം, ടെക്നോക്രസി, കോർപ്പറേറ്റോക്രസി, അഭയാർത്ഥി, ദുരന്തസാഹിത്യം (ഡിസ്റ്റോപ്പിയ), ഉബർമെൻഷ് (അധികമനുഷ്യൻ), ബൂർഷ്വാസി (മധ്യവർഗ്ഗ ആധിപത്യം), വർഗ്ഗസമരം, അത്യാധുനിക മൂലധനവാദം.

Chapter I

Introduction

Dehumanization is a complex and disturbing phenomenon that refers to the process through which individuals or groups are stripped of their human qualities, dignity, and moral consideration. It occurs when people are seen or treated as less than human—mere objects, tools, or animals. David Livingstone Smith, one of the pioneers who have defined various aspects of dehumanization. His book *Making Monsters: The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization*, a sequel to his previous work, *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*, examines the philosophical and psychological aspects of dehumanization. It holds two contradictory ideas, that the victim is a subhuman, a demon to be dehumanized and a fully human, who deserves to be treated as a better human. He further expresses this complex situation that gives *dehumanization* its strength. He writes: “There is no point in asking what dehumanization really means, because it really means a lot of different things” (1). This concept has pervaded various spheres of human history, manifesting in war, slavery, colonization, caste and racial hierarchies, gender-based violence, political oppression, and even digital abuse. The act of dehumanizing others enables perpetrators to rationalise cruelty, justify discrimination, and perpetuate systemic violence with impunity. It is not merely a social or political mechanism, but a psychological and moral failure—wherein, tragically, humans have become demons by their very acts of cruelty, domination, and disregard for fellow beings. Peter Arnds, another important theoretician in the field, writes in his book *Wolves at the Door: Migration, Dehumanization, Rewilding the World*: “One

should never tire of pointing to the consummate cruelty of this sovereign act of dehumanization based on fears of ‘infestation’ attributed to the immigrants, and the severe psychological damage this has caused” (161).

Historically, dehumanization has been at the centre of warfare and colonial conquest. Ashley Montagu and Floyd Matson write in the *Introduction* of their book *The Dehumanization of Man*, “Dehumanization is as old, or nearly so, as the species *Homo Sapiens*; and the legends of its first appearance are representative versions of how evil entered the world of man” (xvii). The book speaks about the extreme form of dehumanization happened in colonies, specially African colonies. In order to justify the enslavement and brutal treatment of African people, colonizers depicted them as savage, uncivilized, and inferior. The language of colonization was rife with metaphors of dirt, disease, and beastliness, allowing moral detachment from the sufferings of millions. Similarly, name calling or ad hominem attack is one of the forms of dehumanization employed by perpetrators even today. Nazi propaganda referred to Jews as *rats* or *parasites*, making it psychologically easier for ordinary citizens and soldiers to participate in the Holocaust. Much in the same way the Hutu extremists of Rwanda calling Tutsis as *cockroaches*, the Israeli Prime Minister calling the Palestinians as the *people of darkness*, Charlie Hebdo, the French magazine terms Alan Kurd, the drowned young Syrian refugee as the *sexual molester*, are some of the examples that paved path for the extermination process. The moment a human is viewed not as a person but as an object or a pest, the barriers to cruelty collapse. Thus, war and empire have often institutionalized dehumanization to enable systemic oppression. Sophie Oliver writes in her chapter *Dehumanization: Perceiving the Body as (In)Human*:

The term *dehumanization* refers in the most basic terms to the denial, in part or whole, of the humanity of a person or group of persons. It is possible to think of degrees of dehumanization; we might speak of *extreme* or *mild* forms of dehumanization, the former occurring in instances of, for example, genocide and torture, and the latter in the everyday structures of social, political and economic marginalization, where ambiguities about what might constitute inhuman or dehumanizing treatment are most likely to arise. (86)

1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the types of dehumanization and infra-humanization being practiced by human beings?
- How far the issue of dehumanization and infra-humanization affected the human life and the social construction?
- How far the given primary texts successful in reflecting the problem of dehumanization?

2. THESIS STATEMENT

The presence of dehumanization is visible ubiquitously in the world, due to various reasons. The selected post-millennial fictional works reflect some of the diverse faces of dehumanization, viz. diasporic, technocratic and corporatocratic. This thesis proves that dehumanization and infra-humanization are indiscriminately practiced in the above worlds.

3. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Human as Demon

Characterizing a person or a group as evil or dangerous to the society, by attributing destructive and monstrous nature to them, is demonization. Society

develops such an idea that the demons are unfit to live in the society. Demonization legitimizes discrimination, abuse and violence that results in widespread social imbalance and conflicts. The demonized are separated, based on colour, race, caste, creed, religion, language, politics etc., from the mainstream. They are often considered as ugly, misfits and abnormal. It functions through the class discrimination of the social structures and the traditional hierarchies. Hence any process or system to dehumanize or infra-humanize such demons are justified. The dehumanizers think that the dehumanized deserve to be dehumanized as they are lesser human or an outer group.

The Concept of Dehumanization

Dehumanization can be defined as a profound psychological process wherein individuals or groups perceive their adversaries or rivals as less than human, thereby stripping them of moral consideration and empathy. Historical instances provide stark examples of this phenomenon. The persecution of Jews by the Nazis, the massacre as a result of the Gulag System in Collectivization or Holodomor that lead to the widespread killing in Ukraine by USSR, the Great Purge or the Mass arrest and killing , and the Katyn Massacre of the Polish officers by the USSR, the Great Leo Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the Land Reforms, and the Uyghur Genocide by China, the Cambodian Genocide led by Pol Pot, Gujrat Genocide by Indian communal extremists, Rohingya Genocide by the Myanmar racial extremists, the systematic extermination of Tutsis by Hutus during the Rwandan genocide, and the Palestinian Genocide by the Israeli regime are profound illustrations of how human beings are denied their right to live and how they are being stripped of their dignity. Prolonged conflicts can strain interpersonal and intergroup relationships, and as

conflicts escalate, the psychological chasm between groups or individuals widens, often resulting in moral exclusion.

In the modern era, the tools of dehumanization have become more subtle but no less insidious. In caste-ridden societies, Dalits and other marginalized communities are often treated as *untouchables*, as if their very presence contaminates the privileged. This societal ostracization is nothing short of psychological lynching, a slow erasure of one's self-worth. The denial of access to education, healthcare, and basic respect is a form of violence that does not bleed, but it wounds the soul. When a child is made to sweep school grounds while others sit in classrooms, it is not discipline—it is dehumanization. And such acts have become so normalized that they rarely evoke outrage.

Gender-based violence also reveals the deeply entrenched dehumanization of women and marginal genders. From acid attacks and honour killings to marital rape and dowry deaths, women are often viewed as property or repositories of male honour, rather than autonomous beings. The body becomes a site of control, punishment, and projection. The idea that women must be *corrected*, through violence, when they step outside societal norms is a terrifying reflection of how patriarchy devalues human individuality. Here again, humans turn into demons—not by instinct, but by indoctrination, tradition, and silence. Baby Kamble's autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* is full of physical assault and mental pressure on Dalit women. This autobiography narrates how the daughters-in-laws are beaten and tyrannized by their elders or their husbands. They have to pay the price of being Dalit women. Baby Kamble also writes about this inhuman treatment with the daughters-in-law:

The community would jump on their meals, fearing they might miss their share, and the poor daughters-in-law would wait dependently for their turn without uttering a single word. If a mother-in-law noticed her, she would scornfully throw a bit at her, cursing. Push that down your throat, you shameless hussy! Aren't you ashamed to stare so at a child who's eating? At least let the food get down his throat! Your evil eye will make the child choke. Don't you know how to behave like a good daughter-in-law?

(Kamble, 2008: 30)

In literature, dehumanization has been poignantly explored as a metaphor and mirror of society. Subalterns and Marginalized have always been subjugated and dehumanized by the privileged class. They have, in most cases, become subject to tortures and torments, which have been illustrated by many writers in their respective works, in various forms. Works such as George Orwell's *1984*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*, that directly reflects the sufferings of a tribal woman, Dopti, in the police custody and *Mother of 1084*, shows the picture of a grief stricken mother. All these works remain as the depiction of a strong critique of socio-political aspects of dehumanization. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi*, and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* unflinchingly portray the evils of caste system, and how systems of power reduce people to expendable cogs or voiceless bodies. These texts not only reflect the psychological cost of dehumanization but also serve as acts of resistance, reminding readers of the humanity beneath the wounds. In these stories, humans become demons not because they lack conscience, but because they silence it.

In contemporary digital culture, a new form of dehumanization has emerged—one shaped by anonymity, trolling, morphing, and the commodification of identity. The internet, while liberating in many ways, has become a breeding ground for abuse and erasure. People are reduced to profile pictures, usernames, or ideological enemies. Online hate, cyber-bullying, and cancel culture have led to suicides, mental breakdowns, and social isolation. Empathy is the first casualty in virtual battlegrounds where outrage often trumps understanding. The digital world has blurred the line between criticism and cruelty, turning many into emotionless avatars of scorn.

Even nature has not been spared from human dehumanization. The environment is often treated not as a living, breathing entity but as a resource to be exploited. Forests are cleared, rivers polluted, animals hunted—all in the name of progress. In doing so, humanity has extended its dehumanizing gaze beyond people to the planet itself. The ecological crisis is, at its core, a moral crisis—a failure to recognize interdependence and intrinsic value in all life forms. Humans, in this regard, have not only become demons to each other but also to the earth that sustains them. Maria Kronfeldner writes in the Preface of her book, *The Routledge Handbook of Dehumanization*:

Dehumanization happens when people are depicted, illustrated, regarded, or treated as not human or less human. As a result, the dehumanized might, in fact, end up—in ‘the devil’s fairground’—with less than a human life. What ‘being human’ means as part of dehumanization varies, is often idealized, and is rarely about an easy-to-capture matter. (Kronfeldner, 2021: xvi)

Thus, dehumanization is the darkest expression of human failure. It strips

individuals of their essence, their soul, and their right to be seen as equal members of society. It occurs in whispers and in wars, in laws and in jokes, in classrooms and in courtrooms. When humans become demons through cruelty, when they choose dominance over dignity, and silence over solidarity, they not only destroy others but also themselves. The antidote lies in empathy, awareness, and action. To reclaim our humanity, we must begin by recognizing it in others, especially those whom society seeks to erase.

Dehumanization through the Ages: A Historical and Conceptual Analysis

Dehumanization, defined as the systematic denial of an individual's selfhood, dignity, and moral worth, has persisted throughout human history and manifests in diverse forms, including racial and religious discrimination, socio-political oppression, slavery, colonialism, and genocidal atrocities. Rooted in psychological, ideological, and cultural constructs, dehumanization fosters moral disengagement, enabling oppressors to justify exploitation, violence, and subjugation. Historical analysis reveals how this phenomenon has evolved, exposing its profound impact on societies and ethical consciousness.

In ancient civilizations, slavery, caste systems, and wartime atrocities institutionalized dehumanization. Despite advancements in philosophy and governance, Greeks and Romans denied rights to slaves and prisoners of war, subjecting them to relentless labour and reducing them to subhuman status. Similarly, the caste system in ancient Hindu society, particularly the treatment of Dalits as *untouchables*, entrenched a rigid social hierarchy that diminished human worth. Imperial monarchs in China wielded absolute power and frequently dehumanized offenders and rebels to justify severe punishments.

Religious conflicts and doctrines often propagated dehumanization. During the Crusades (1095–1291), Christian and Muslim forces vilified each other, portraying adversaries as heretics unworthy of compassion. The Inquisition targeted those deemed heretics, subjecting them to torture and execution. Likewise, Jewish communities in medieval Europe faced demonization, resulting in ghettos, massacres, and expulsions. Feudal systems furthered dehumanization by regarding peasants and serfs as property rather than autonomous beings.

Throughout the Age of Exploration and subsequent European colonization (15th–20th centuries), dehumanization became institutionalized under the guise of racial supremacy and economic progress. Colonial rhetoric branded indigenous populations in the Americas, Africa, and Asia as *savages*, justifying conquest, land appropriation, forced labour, and cultural annihilation. The transatlantic slave trade (16th–19th centuries) epitomized dehumanization, as millions of Africans were commodified, brutally exploited, and stripped of their identities. Rigid racial hierarchies enforced by colonial regimes reinforced the belief in non-European inferiority.

The *Civilizing Mission* was the majorly used term by the British Imperialistic powers to establish their rightful rule over India, for they thought that Indians are uneducated and uncivilized, and being White and educated, it is their right to civilize Indians, by undertaking the governance of the country. In other Asian and African lands also they used the similar justification to justify their act of imperialism. Many post-colonial thinkers have connected this notion with William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. It is with the same emotion that Prospero, an exiled Duke, the character in the play *The Tempest*, calls another character, Caliban, an indigenous man, as

savage, filth, slave, hag-seed, and a *thing of darkness*. Prospero also claims that he has tried to civilize this rugged Caliban and also teach them to speak his language.

Industrialization exacerbated or intensified labour exploitation. Nineteenth-century factory workers endured dehumanizing conditions amid unchecked capitalist growth. Concurrently, eugenics and pseudo-scientific racism reinforced social Darwinist ideologies, rationalizing exclusionary practices, forced sterilizations, and segregation. The twentieth century witnessed some of the gravest instances of dehumanization. Under Nazi Germany, the Holocaust (1941–1945) systematically stripped Jews, Romani people, individuals with disabilities, and political dissidents of their humanity, subjecting them to extermination camps. Stalinist purges, Maoist re-education camps, and Pol Pot's genocide in Cambodia also utilized dehumanization to legitimize mass killings. Apartheid-era racial segregation laws in South Africa (1948–1994) marginalized Black communities, denying them fundamental rights and liberties.

Though explicit dehumanization has declined due to legislative protections and human rights movements, contemporary societies grapple with its subtler forms. Economic inequalities, systemic bias, and racial profiling perpetuate dehumanization in covert ways. Xenophobic narratives frame refugees and migrants as security threats rather than individuals in distress. Digital technology and social media amplify dehumanization through online radicalization, disinformation, and cyberbullying, fostering an antagonistic and detached environment.

Philosophers and psychologists have extensively explored the causes and mechanisms of dehumanization. Martin Buber's *I-It versus I-Thou* thesis highlights how perceiving individuals as *objects* rather than *subjects* of meaningful

relationships diminishes their humanity. Hannah Arendt's concept of the *banality of evil* underscores how bureaucratic systems normalize atrocities, facilitating dehumanization. Alan Barnard, in his *On the Relationship Between Technique and Dehumanization*, comments: "This form of dehumanization has been described as 'objectification' and as 'the denial' of qualities associated with meaning, interest, and compassion" (98). Albert Bandura's moral disengagement theory explains how euphemistic language, victim-blaming, and the diffusion of responsibility enable individuals to justify cruelty.

Dehumanization remains a pernicious force underpinning injustice, conflict, and human suffering. Combating it necessitates inclusive legislation, ethical education, and the cultivation of empathy across ideological and cultural divides. By acknowledging the intrinsic dignity of every individual, societies can dismantle dehumanizing systems and foster a future grounded in universal respect for humanity.

Agency of Dehumanization

1. Religious Dehumanization

Religious institutions, despite their professed values of compassion, have often contributed to dehumanization through the imposition of theological doctrines. During the Crusades (1095–1291), Christians and Muslims demonised one another, portraying opponents as infidels warranting destruction. European witch hunts dehumanized women alleged of sorcery, while the Spanish Inquisition ruthlessly persecuted and tortured heretics. Religious fanaticism continues to fuel dehumanization today through forced conversions, sectarian violence, and the marginalisation of religious minorities.

2. Caste-Based Dehumanization

Caste systems have perpetuated dehumanization in hierarchical societies, particularly in South Asian countries. Dalits, categorised as *untouchables* within the Hindu caste framework, were denied basic rights and forced into degrading labour. Branded as impure, they faced exclusion from temples, segregation in public spaces, and exposed to violent assaults. Despite contemporary legal protections, caste-based discrimination persists in social interactions, workplaces, and educational institutions, underscoring the enduring legacy of historical dehumanization.

3. Political Dehumanization

Political systems have frequently utilised dehumanization to justify ideological dominance and consolidate power. Totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany dehumanized Jews, Romanians and Poles, and political dissidents by likening them to vermin, thereby legitimising genocide. Similarly, Mao's Cultural Revolution and Stalin's purges led to mass executions by branding dissidents as *enemies of the state*. Even in democratic societies, political discourse often dehumanizes opponents—refugees are labelled *invaders*, protesters are dismissed as *terrorists*, and entire communities are demonised to rationalise the oppressive laws framed by the oppressive community.

4. Gender-Based Dehumanization

Patriarchal structures have historically dehumanized women by objectifying, marginalising, and subjugating them. Women have been subjected to brutality disguised as tradition, denied education, and treated as property in various societies. The belief in women's inferiority has underpinned practices such as honour killings, female infanticide, and domestic violence. In contemporary workplaces, systemic

dehumanization persists through wage disparities, harassment, and glass ceilings, reflecting deep-rooted gender biases.

5. Racial and Ethnic Dehumanization

Racism, often perpetuated by pseudo-scientific theories, represents one of the most prevalent forms of dehumanization. Colonialism institutionalised racial hierarchies, using notions of inferiority to justify enslavement and territorial conquest. During the transatlantic slave trade (16th–19th century), millions of Africans were commodified and exploited as chattel. Later, the Jim Crow laws in the United States (1877–1950s) and apartheid in South Africa (1948–1994) entrenched racial dehumanization by denying civil rights to Black populations. Today, systemic discrimination, racial profiling, and police brutality continue this legacy.

6. Economic Dehumanization

Capitalist exploitation frequently reduces workers to mere instruments of production. During the Industrial Revolution, workers, including children, endured hazardous conditions, long hours, and meagre wages. This pattern persists in sweatshops within developing nations, where workers endure abuse driven by corporate greed. Economic inequality fosters class-based dehumanization, wherein the impoverished are perceived as burdens rather than individuals deserving dignity and opportunity.

7. War and Conflict-Driven Dehumanization

In warfare, adversaries are often depicted as monstrous to justify aggression. Propaganda portrays enemies as savage, heartless, or inferior, encouraging atrocities. This was evident in World War I and II, the Korean war, the Vietnam War, the Operation Desert Storm or the Gulf war, and the Rwandan Genocide,

where Hutus labelled Tutsis as *cockroaches* to rationalise mass slaughter, the Afghan war, the Palestinian war, the Ukraine – Russia war and the recent Gaza genocide. The use of child soldiers, sexual violence, and torture further exemplifies how war exacerbates extreme dehumanization.

Areas of Dehumanization

1. Media and Popular Culture

By promoting prejudices and misinformation, the media and popular culture significantly contribute to the perpetuation of dehumanization. Certain groups, based on their race, religion, or nationality, are frequently portrayed negatively or as villains in films, literature, and news reports. These depictions shape public perceptions, fostering bias and discrimination. For example, media narratives that persistently depict minority communities as inferior or dangerous facilitate social marginalisation. Reducing complex human experiences to damaging clichés strips individuals of their humanity and uniqueness, further entrenching social hierarchies and prejudices.

2. Prison Systems

Institutionalised dehumanization is evident in prison systems, where inmates are often treated as mere numbers and deprived of their fundamental dignity. Overcrowding, inhumane living conditions, and the denial of basic rights exemplify the disregard for human worth. Prisoners are frequently viewed as threats or burdens rather than individuals capable of rehabilitation. They are persecuted by stripping their clothing, *third degree* torturing methods, physical violation and deprivation, psychological ordeals, and forced labour. This systemic approach diminishes empathy and justifies severe punitive measures, undermining the potential for

personal transformation and successful reintegration into society.

3. Immigration and Refugee Crisis

Dehumanization is further exemplified by the immigration and refugee crisis, where migrants and refugees are often labelled as security threats or economic liabilities. Political rhetoric and media discourse can overlook their personal stories of adversity and survival, portraying them as faceless masses crossing borders. Such narratives diminish their human experiences and jeopardise their rights to safety and dignity by promoting fear and exclusion. Acknowledging their hardships and contributions is essential to fostering empathy and building inclusive, compassionate societies.

4. Medical and Scientific Experiments

Some of the most unsettling instances of dehumanization are found in medical and scientific experiments. Atrocities such as the Nazi human experiments and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study reveal how science has been misused to exploit vulnerable groups. Participants were frequently misled, harmed, or denied basic human rights, with complete disregard for their dignity. These unethical practices serve as stark reminders of the moral responsibilities inherent in scientific research and the necessity of safeguarding human rights in all forms of investigation.

5. Technology and AI

In the realm of technology and AI, dehumanization manifests as workers are increasingly viewed as expendable due to automation. The prioritisation of efficiency and profit can reduce individuals to mere data points, overlooking the value of human interaction and well-being. Without ethical considerations, AI-driven systems risk reinforcing biases and eroding empathy. It is essential to develop

technologies that uphold human dignity, ensuring that progress does not come at the cost of compassion and moral responsibility.

Dehumanization inflicts profound psychological trauma, leaving victims in a perpetual state of distress, anxiety, and depression. Those subjected to racial discrimination, gender violence, or war atrocities frequently grapple with severe identity crises, struggling to reclaim their self-worth. The long-term impact on mental health is devastating, often leading to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and an inability to reintegrate into society. This erosion of individual dignity fosters social alienation, reinforcing cycles of oppression and marginalisation. Furthermore, dehumanization fractures social cohesion by cultivating an *us vs. them* mentality, which fuels communal violence, civil unrest, and even genocides. Polarised societies become entrenched in ideological battles, making inclusivity and reconciliation nearly impossible. The consequences of such divisions are not merely social but political, as governments exploit these rifts for power, perpetuating policies that institutionalise discrimination and further suppress marginalised groups.

Beyond its psychological and social ramifications, dehumanization corrodes the moral fabric of society by normalising cruelty and oppression. It fosters moral disengagement, wherein individuals become desensitised to violence and exploitation, leading to systemic human rights abuses such as slavery, human trafficking, police brutality, and war crimes. When victims are stripped of their humanity, legal protections are often disregarded, creating an environment where justice is selective and oppression thrives unchecked. The erosion of empathy enables state-sponsored violence, corporate exploitation, and discriminatory legal frameworks that perpetuate suffering. Moreover, dehumanization devalues ethical

considerations in policymaking, allowing economic and political agendas to override basic human rights. Societies that tolerate dehumanization inevitably face moral decay, where violence becomes an accepted norm rather than an aberration. To combat this, it is crucial to foster a culture of empathy, education, and legal reform to rehumanise the marginalised and ensure that ethical governance prevails over systemic injustice. Brock Bastian and Nick Haslam write in their paper *Experiencing Dehumanization: Cognitive and Emotional Effects of Everyday Dehumanization*: “Overall, people may perceive themselves as having been dehumanized in a wide variety of everyday interactions and interpersonal contexts” (296).

Dehumanization is a powerful tool used to portray individuals or groups as evil, dangerous, or undeserving of empathy, often leading to discrimination, persecution, or violence. This process is systematically carried out through various means, the most significant being propaganda. Governments, extremist organisations, and media outlets manipulate public perception by spreading false narratives that paint certain communities as threats. This is particularly evident in authoritarian regimes where state-controlled media fabricates stories to justify oppressive policies. Another major tactic is the use of dehumanising language and labels. Terms like *illegal aliens*, *cockroaches*, or *terrorists* strip people of their individuality and humanity, making it easier to justify violence, exclusion, or systemic discrimination against them. These labels not only influence public opinion but also seep into official policies, leading to racial profiling, mass detentions, and even genocides. Stereotyping further entrenches these biases by presenting oversimplified and often negative portrayals in media, literature, and educational

curricula. These distorted representations reinforce societal prejudices, ensuring that marginalised groups remain subjected to stigma and exclusion.

Historical narratives also play a crucial role in dehumanization, as they are often shaped by those in power to erase the voices of the oppressed while glorifying the actions of the oppressors. Colonial histories, for instance, frequently depict imperialists as civilising forces while portraying native populations as backward or violent. Such biased retellings perpetuate systemic discrimination long after the events have passed. Additionally, religious extremism fosters an environment where exclusion and intolerance thrive. By preaching divine superiority and portraying outsiders as heretics or sinners, extremist ideologies fuel animosity and violence against those deemed different. This is particularly dangerous in multi-religious societies, where such rhetoric can lead to communal riots and sectarian conflicts. Moreover, social media has exacerbated dehumanization in the digital age, providing an unfiltered platform for hate speech, misinformation, and radicalisation. Algorithms designed to maximise engagement often amplify divisive content, further polarising societies. The consequences of dehumanization are severe, leading to social fragmentation, discrimination, and large-scale human rights abuses. Combating it requires critical media literacy, inclusive education, and legal measures to prevent hate speech and propaganda from shaping public discourse. Recognising and resisting dehumanization is crucial to fostering a society built on empathy, coexistence, and justice.

Dehumanization, in its many forms, has been a tool of oppression throughout history. However, societies can combat it through education, inclusive policies, and ethical governance. Promoting empathy, human rights, and historical accountability

can dismantle these structures, fostering a world where dignity and justice prevail. By recognising the inherent humanity of all individuals, societies can move beyond division and create a more equitable future.

Infra-Humanization: Concept and Perspectives

Infra-humanization is a psychological and sociological phenomenon in which certain groups are perceived as *less human* than others, leading to subtle yet deeply ingrained forms of discrimination. Unlike outright dehumanization, which overtly denies the humanity of others, infra-humanization operates at a subconscious level. It involves attributing fewer complex emotions, moral reasoning, or intellectual capacities to outgroups while reserving these traits for the ingroup.

From historical caste and racial structures to contemporary biases in politics, education, and media, infra-humanization plays a significant role in shaping social hierarchies. Several philosophical, psychological, and sociopolitical theories—ranging from post-structuralism to evolutionary psychology—help in understanding the mechanisms and consequences of infra-humanization. Nick Haslam writes in his paper *Dehumanization: An Integrative Review*:

Infra-humanization is a particularly interesting form of dehumanization because it is subtle, requiring no explicit likening of outgroup members to animals, and is not reducible to ingroup favouritism (positive and negative secondary emotions are both denied to outgroups). Infra-humanization also occurs in the absence of intergroup conflict, and therefore extends the scope of dehumanization well beyond the context of cruelty and ethnic hatred. (Haslam, 2006: 255)

Infra-humanization refers to the cognitive bias wherein an individual or

group denies outgroups the full spectrum of human attributes, particularly secondary emotions like love, guilt, and shame. This leads to a subtle form of exclusion, reinforcing implicit prejudices rather than overt hostility. For example, research shows that people are more likely to associate primary emotions, such as anger and joy, with outgroups, whereas secondary emotions, such as admiration and remorse, are predominantly attributed to ingroups. This cognitive distinction, though seemingly mild, fosters an implicit hierarchy where the *other* is seen as lacking depth, rationality, or moral refinement.

1. Sociological Perspective

Sociologists argue that infra-humanization is embedded in institutional and cultural structures. Historically, colonial powers justified their dominance by portraying indigenous populations as *less evolved* or *childlike*, lacking the sophistication of European societies. Social stratification, including racial hierarchies, gender norms, and caste systems, perpetuates infra-humanization by normalising disparities in treatment and expectations. For example, Dalits in India have historically been denied access to education and temple entry, justified by the belief that they were inherently less capable of spiritual or intellectual enlightenment. Similarly, women have often been seen as *too emotional* or *irrational*, limiting their roles in leadership and decision-making.

2. Psychological Perspective

From a psychological standpoint, infra-humanization is rooted in cognitive biases. Studies in social cognition suggest that people have an innate tendency to categorise individuals into ingroups and outgroups. The more distant the outgroup, the stronger the tendency to attribute lower cognitive abilities to them. Psychologists

like Henri Tajfel and John Turner, through their Social Identity Theory, explain how people derive self-worth from their group affiliations. By subtly denying human complexity to outgroups, individuals reinforce a sense of superiority and group cohesion.

3. Political Perspective

Political infra-humanization is evident in propaganda, rhetoric, and policies that marginalise certain communities. Governments and political entities frequently employ infra-humanization to shape public perception, particularly in times of conflict. For instance, refugees are often depicted as *hordes* or *masses* rather than individuals with unique identities and aspirations. Similarly, political discourse surrounding crime often portrays ethnic minorities as inherently violent or untrustworthy, reinforcing discriminatory policies such as racial profiling.

Theories dealing with Infra-Humanization

Several philosophical and psychological theories explain the mechanisms and consequences of infra-humanization.

1. Post-Structuralist Theories

Post-structuralist thinkers, particularly Michel Foucault, argue that power is everywhere and power structures control knowledge and discourse, shaping societal perceptions of who is considered fully human. He argues that power, which exists in its exercise, never remains in a single place only but functions through the entire social system, shifting constantly. Foucault's discourse theory suggests that dominant narratives shape our understanding of reality, allowing institutions to determine which groups are perceived as fully human and which are subtly diminished. His concept of biopower highlights how states regulate populations by

categorising people into *desirable* and *undesirable* groups, often through medical, legal, or social classifications. In colonial and post-colonial contexts, indigenous communities were framed as *uncivilised*, justifying their subjugation. Even today, economic and social policies often prioritise certain demographics over others based on implicit biases. Antonio Gramsci, with his concept of power hegemony, also explains in detail how the capitalist society maintain their power with the support of the government and using the law and order forces, such as court, military and police. He further explicates the world wide perspective, which has been deliberately developed by the bourgeoisie to substantiate their practice of power, through values and norms. His argument, that the capitalist world establish a steady control over the society by acquiring rational and moral directives, is an adaptation of the Marxian theory. These theories have led to the widespread practices of dehumanization.

2. Thomas Hobbes and Political Legitimacy

Hobbes' theory of the *state of nature* argues that without social contracts, humans exist in a chaotic, violent state. This idea has been used to justify infra-humanization, particularly in colonial and imperialist narratives. Colonisers depicted indigenous populations as living in a *Hobbesian savage* state, lacking the rationality to govern themselves. Thus, their subjugation was framed as necessary for societal order.

3. Sigmund Freud's Hypothesis on Group Psychology

Freud's theory of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) suggests that infra-humanization is linked to subconscious mechanisms that define self-identity. Freud argued that people have a deep psychological need to belong,

leading them to form strong group identities. To maintain cohesion, groups tend to exaggerate the positive traits of their members while viewing outsiders as inferior. This aligns with Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, which explains how group belonging leads to bias against outsiders. Freud's work also connects infra-humanization with projection—the tendency to attribute undesirable traits to outgroups while denying them in oneself. Historical instances reveal how dominant groups projected negative stereotypes onto minorities while denying their own flaws.

4. Charles Darwin's Evolutionary Hypothesis

Darwin's Theory of Evolution and its social interpretations have played a dual role in infra-humanization. While Darwin himself did not advocate for racial hierarchies, Social Darwinists misinterpreted his work to justify the idea that some human groups were *more evolved* than others. This pseudo-scientific reasoning led to eugenics movements, racial segregation laws, and policies that deemed certain populations unworthy of reproduction or survival. The Holocaust, apartheid, and forced sterilisation programs were all fuelled by this flawed evolutionary interpretation, reinforcing the idea that some humans were closer to animals than others.

Implications of Infra-Humanization

Infra-humanization—the process of perceiving certain groups as less human—has profound and far-reaching consequences, shaping societal structures and individual experiences. One of its most immediate effects is social exclusion, where marginalised groups receive less empathy, fewer resources, and limited opportunities in education, employment, and social participation. This exclusion is

reinforced by discriminatory policies that institutionalise inequities, such as racial profiling, unequal pay, and restricted access to essential services. Historically, infra-humanization has paved the way for large-scale violence and genocide, as seen in Nazi Germany, in Rwanda, and in Bosnia, where ethnic cleansing targeted Bosniaks. Beyond its societal impact, infra-humanization inflicts deep psychological harm on individuals, causing self-doubt, identity crises, and diminished self-worth. Those subjected to such treatment often internalise these negative perceptions, leading to long-term emotional distress and generational trauma. Addressing infra-humanization requires systemic reforms, inclusive education, and active resistance against dehumanising narratives to build a more equitable and empathetic society.

Countering infra-humanization requires a multifaceted approach that fosters inclusivity, empathy, and systemic change. Education plays a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and correcting historical biases by incorporating diverse perspectives into curricula. Empathy-building initiatives, such as storytelling, cultural exchanges, and media representation, help humanise marginalised groups and promote mutual understanding. Additionally, governments must implement policies that dismantle systemic discrimination, ensuring equal rights and opportunities in employment, healthcare, and legal protections. Encouraging critical thinking is equally vital, as it enables individuals to question dominant narratives, recognise implicit biases, and resist dehumanising ideologies. By fostering a culture of awareness and inclusivity, societies can dismantle infra-humanization and build a more just and equitable world where every individual is valued and respected.

4. AREA OF STUDY

The present thesis studies three distinct types of dehumanization: socio-

political dehumanization, technological dehumanization and corporate dehumanization.

Socio-political dehumanization emerges in contexts such as diaspora, refugee crises, civil wars, and religious or ethnic atrocities. In such instances, individuals or entire communities are stripped of their basic rights, agency, and dignity, often treated as expendable entities. Forced migration, statelessness, and discrimination reduce people to mere statistics, depriving them of identity and belonging. The dehumanizing effects of war, displacement, and persecution create a world where survival becomes paramount, eroding the emotional and psychological well-being of those affected.

Corporate dehumanization is rooted in capitalist systems that prioritize profit over human welfare. In such structures, individuals are commodified, their labour exploited, and their autonomy suppressed by bureaucratic and economic forces. Whether through hyper-commercialization, workplace alienation, or surveillance capitalism, corporations often treat human beings as disposable resources rather than as individuals with intrinsic worth. This form of dehumanization manifests in the erosion of ethical considerations in favour of efficiency, control, and profit maximization, stripping individuals of agency and reducing them to mere cogs in the economic machine. As Jean Baudrillard remarks, “the dream of the virtual era, by contrast, is to wrest the machine from machinicity, to make it intelligent and soulful, ‘interactive’, to turn it into an associate ‘anthropoid’...” (*Cool Memories IV*, 69).

Technological dehumanization arises from the increasing integration of artificial intelligence, robotics, and automation into daily life. This type of dehumanization envisions a future where machines surpass human intelligence,

leading to conflicts between man and machine, subjugation of humanity, or the complete obsolescence of human labour and creativity. Jean Baudrillard further says: “The only solution to the mechanization of man is *Ie devenir-machine*: becoming machine...total automatism, all trace of the human gone” (*Cool Memories* V, 73) The fear of losing autonomy to robotic overlords or AI-driven systems highlights the existential crisis posed by technological advancements. In such scenarios, humans are either dominated by machines or assimilated into mechanized systems, raising ethical concerns about free will, individuality, and the very definition of humanity in an increasingly digitized world.

These three forms of dehumanization, though distinct, often intersect, shaping a world where human value is constantly under threat from socio-political, economic, and technological forces. The study explores these dimensions through literature, revealing their implications for identity, morality, and survival.

Dehumanization in Diaspora, Refugee Crises and Civil Wars

Dehumanization has been a persistent phenomenon throughout history, manifesting in various forms such as diaspora, refugee crises, and civil conflicts. It refers to the process of stripping individuals or groups of their humanity, often through systematic oppression, violence, and marginalisation. In contemporary literature, numerous works explore the experiences of displaced individuals and communities, revealing how political, religious, and ethnic atrocities contribute to the erosion of human dignity. This study focuses on three major types of dehumanization: diaspora and forced migration, refugee crises and statelessness, and civil wars accompanied by ethnic and religious atrocities. By analysing primary and secondary literary sources, this thesis seeks to examine how dehumanization

operates in these contexts and its devastating psychological, social, and existential impacts.

Diaspora is a historical phenomenon where individuals or entire communities are forcibly displaced from their homelands due to war, persecution, or economic instability. The condition of diaspora often results in loss of identity, cultural alienation, and systemic discrimination, rendering displaced individuals vulnerable to dehumanization. This phenomenon has persisted across centuries, affecting countless communities, from the Jewish diaspora in antiquity to the forced displacement of Rohingya Muslims in modern times. The loss of home, security, and cultural roots intensifies the alienation experienced by migrants, leaving them in a state of perpetual liminality. Dave Eggers' *What is the What* presents a compelling narrative of Valentino Achak Deng, one of Sudan's *Lost Boys* who fled his war-torn homeland. The novel narrates how Valentino gets his name:

I asked Father Matong why this man was his favourite saint, and why he gave me his name...—I think you will have the power to make people see, he said. —I think you will remember what it was like to be here, you will see the lessons here. And someday you will find your own jailer's daughter, and to her you will bring light. (Eggers, 2007 :260)

The novel portrays how diaspora communities face oppression in both their home and host countries, often being perceived as burdens, invaders, or inferior beings. Forced to wander between states, migrants experience institutionalized neglect, xenophobia, and denial of fundamental rights, illustrating the deep-rooted structures of dehumanization. The novel captures the harrowing journey of displaced individuals, revealing the physical and psychological suffering they endure. Eggers'

narrative highlights how displaced individuals are often reduced to their survival status, overshadowing their personal ambitions and humanity. In his article titled '*Metamorphoses of Spiritual Autobiography*', Robert Bell explains the phenomenon of comparing one's life to that of a saint in his or her spiritual autobiography, writing, "Ultimately all these lives are modelled upon the great patterns of Christian sainthood" (Bell, 1977: 108).

Secondary sources like Ben Rawlence's *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp* provide real-life accounts of refugee settlements, specifically detailing the permanent refugee complex of Dadaab, Kenya, exposing how humanitarian aid often fails to address the dignity of displaced individuals. The overcrowded, under-resourced refugee camps described in the book highlight how institutional systems dehumanize refugees by reducing them to mere numbers. Similarly, *We Are Displaced* by Malala Yousafzai highlights how forced migration erases one's identity, reducing individuals to mere statistics rather than acknowledging them as humans with personal stories and aspirations. Yousafzai's work emphasizes the importance of restoring dignity and agency to displaced individuals, urging global policymakers to adopt more humane approaches toward refugees.

Key aspects of dehumanization in the diaspora encompass several critical dimensions. Firstly, the loss of citizenship and belonging renders stateless individuals vulnerable, as they are often deprived of legal rights and fundamental protections, exposing them to exploitation and marginalization. Secondly, cultural erasure and identity crises arise when migrants face forced assimilation, leading to the loss of linguistic and cultural heritage and resulting in an identity void that many

struggle to reconcile. Additionally, state-sanctioned discrimination and xenophobia manifest through restrictive immigration laws and systemic racism, subjecting refugees and migrants to socio-economic exclusion. Finally, the reduction of refugees to mere economic or political threats perpetuates negative stereotypes, as migrants are frequently scapegoated for economic downturns and political instability, reinforcing prejudices that justify their exclusion and foster an environment of hostility. These facets collectively underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of dehumanization experienced by diasporic communities.

Additionally, media representations play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of displaced individuals. Negative portrayals of refugees as economic burdens or security threats fuel anti-immigrant sentiments, further marginalizing these communities. Conversely, ethical journalism and literature that humanize migrant experiences can challenge such narratives and foster empathy. Policies aimed at providing fair legal frameworks, social integration programs, and employment opportunities can mitigate the impacts of dehumanization and support migrants in rebuilding their lives.

The dehumanization of displaced populations is not just a contemporary issue but a deeply entrenched historical phenomenon that requires sustained global attention. Addressing these injustices demands a concerted effort from governments, civil societies, and international organizations to ensure that displaced individuals are recognized not as burdens but as contributors to the societies they become part of. Only through inclusive policies, cultural recognition, and legal protections can the dignity of diasporic communities be restored, ultimately fostering a world where migration does not equate to loss of humanity.

The global refugee crisis has resulted in millions being rendered stateless, living in inhumane conditions in refugee camps or facing hostility in host nations. Governments and media often dehumanize refugees, portraying them as outsiders, criminals, or economic burdens rather than individuals fleeing persecution. This systemic dehumanization strips refugees of their agency and reinforces xenophobic policies that deny them basic rights.

Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* is a haunting depiction of the Syrian refugee crisis, inspired from the death of Alan Kurdi, where the protagonist reflects on the shattered dreams and lost dignity of those fleeing war-torn lands. The novel underscores how refugees are denied basic rights, including healthcare, education, and fair treatment. The act of seeking asylum itself is criminalized, subjecting individuals to detention, deportation, and statelessness. Similarly, Ben Rawlence's *City of Thorns* exposes the grim realities of refugee settlements, highlighting the failures of humanitarian aid to uphold the dignity of displaced individuals.

Alan Gratz's *Refugee* explores historical and contemporary refugee crises, drawing parallels between Nazi-era persecution of Jews, Cuban political exiles, and modern Middle Eastern refugees. The novel illustrates how societies construct hierarchies of human worth, determining whose suffering is recognized and whose plight is ignored. These constructed narratives serve as justifications for restrictive policies that marginalize certain refugee groups while offering selective sympathy to others. Malala Yousafzai's *We Are Displaced*, further amplifies the voices of refugee women, revealing how gender compounds the struggles of displacement, leading to additional vulnerabilities such as human trafficking and forced labour.

Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Refugees* offers a nuanced perspective on

Vietnamese immigrants, showcasing how refugees are treated as perpetual outsiders, regardless of their contributions to their host nations. The novel critiques Western perceptions of refugees, which often oscillate between pity and suspicion, reinforcing narratives of dehumanization. This paradox of simultaneous victimization and vilification reveals the deep-seated biases within host societies, where refugees are either viewed as helpless subjects of charity or as threats to national security.

Key aspects of dehumanization in refugee crises are multifaceted and deeply entrenched. The criminalization of migration and asylum-seeking often portrays refugees as threats, leading to punitive measures such as detention, deportation, and indefinite displacement, which strip individuals of dignity and security. Refugees frequently face hostility from host nations and societal alienation, fostering exclusion and discrimination. Additionally, they are subjected to economic and political exploitation, often forced into low-wage labour or used as political pawns. Gendered vulnerabilities further exacerbate their plight, exposing women and children to heightened risks of violence and exploitation. Moreover, psychological trauma and loss of identity in prolonged displacement erode their sense of self and belonging, leaving lasting emotional scars. These aspects collectively highlight the harsh realities and systematic dehumanization faced by refugees worldwide. Addressing these issues requires a shift in political discourse, media representation, and international policies to recognize refugees as individuals with rights, rather than as burdens or threats. Humanizing their experiences through literature, activism, and policy reforms is crucial in dismantling these harmful narratives and fostering global solidarity.

Role of Ethics, Morality and Human Values

The discussion of dehumanization has its relevance in the light of the values that are followed by the civilized community for ages. Human values constitute fundamental principles that govern human existence and ethical behaviour on this planet. Those core human values play a critical role in steering human behaviour, actions, and reactions. These values define who human are and how human act in response to different circumstances. Transformation of human beings from mere animal to social animal or from a primitive cave man to the civilized modern man has moulded human growth, development, perspectives, emotions etc. Schwartz and Struch argue that values reflect the extent to which people have “transcended their basic animal nature and developed their human sensitivities and moral sensibilities” (155). Moral values are crucial as they design human as a human, guide human through life and help human to lead a civilized life. Intrinsic ideals like respect, humility, altruism, justice, kindness, and equality serve as moral compasses. These values help human to make decisions and take actions. Only these values determine and define what they aspire to be and how their lives will unfold. To certain extend the absence of those values may make someone chaotic and devoid of meaning, rendering their words and actions insignificant, in a societal perspective.

It is essential for everyone to embrace these good human values and make them explicit within the social structure so that the dream of a balanced, blessed, and peaceful life can be realized. These values shape human dreams and desires, and influence their personality by guiding their decisions and actions. Failing these values, life can lack direction, leaving them stranded in a zone devoid of morality and ethics. Self-esteem is also an integral part of these values, helping human

comprehend their internal and external self-worth. External self-esteem is how others perceive a person, while internal self-esteem depends upon how one's conscience judges and rates them. In fact, this value system is not static: it can be defined differently in various contexts. Some individuals may demonstrate and preach a certain set of values at one juncture and adopt completely different ones in another context. C. Manoharan and B. Birundha write in their paper *Human Values and Professional Ethics*.

Human values and professional ethics, with good practice and implementation, will surely be able to produce good citizens with enhanced moral values and character, better personalities, and increased social skills and capabilities. Such individuals, happy within themselves and capable of making others happy, will become more socially adjusted and better citizens for society and the country. (Manoharan, 2019: 68–69)

Ethics can be called the philosophical framework of human life that delineates the importance of doing right and deviating from wrong, so that people may be shaped for collective altruistic works which are better for them and even for society. Derived from moral philosophy, ethics is bifurcated into deontological or duty-based, consequentialist or outcome-based, and virtue ethics or character-based perspectives. It helps us permeate our actions into diverse spheres so that human actions may align with justice, fairness, and equality in different ethnic groups of the world.

Ethnicity can be called the mosaic of human diversity. It generally denotes our shared language, customs, ancestry, heritage, and culinary habits within a cultural framework. It is deeply rooted in historical lineage, communal traditions,

and collective memory, which overall contribute to the kaleidoscopic diversity of global civilizations. Our rational and spiritual beliefs constitute our cognitive convictions, which generally tend to frame our understanding of this mundane world and reshape our worldviews. Our morality also plays an important role in living a peaceful and contented life.

Humanity is an amalgam of human values, beliefs, ethics, culture, and ethnicity. All these elements seem to be diverse in manifestations, but they coalesce into a massive framework of any civilization. Human beings should be custodians of our shared moral ethics and other cultural respect and ethical integrity. Human values should be inculcated from different perspectives, and justice, kindness, cooperation, and honesty come into the category of core values. These values foster a framework that helps us shape our ethical decision-making for the betterment of humanity.

Human values play an important role in influencing our daily life. These values are both abstract and concrete, such as love, truth, peace, justice, joy, beauty, equality, and freedom. These human values influence us in different ways. In fact, they teach us what is more important for us and what should be avoided to keep our image intact in society. These values dictate how we should live our life and how we should spend our time and energy. That is the reason a person's values are judged by the efforts he makes to challenge false beliefs and distorted social codes. People with good moral values help those who get distracted from their goals or become engaged in sinful acts. Our true ability lies in our natural worth.

There is a term, proficient morals, that refers to the qualities and standards we uphold while making personal decisions. Proficient morals are the cognitive

determinants of all our activities and put a check on many aspects of life. Human value qualities are the foundations of our activities, practices, and considerations. These moral values are our premise and make us capable of grappling with the adverse circumstances of life. Similar arguments are articulated in Opatow's exploration of *moral exclusion*, a process through which individuals are placed "outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply" (Opatow, 1990: 1).

In fact, moral ethics are our standards and social codes devised by society. These are altered, modified, and changed to suit the requirements of the residents and the local topography. People have to think about a set of standards and social practices to align with ethics. There are always questions we face before engaging in any action: What should we do in the given circumstances? What can be an amicable solution to our problems? Bandura observes that aggressors can avoid self-condemnation and empathic distress when their identification with victims is obstructed, perceiving them "no longer ... as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns but as sub-human objects" (Bandura, 2002 :109). Values in the social belief system help promote well-being and provide peace of mind. Actually, our values are the factors that determine our success in the world.

There are different types of values, among which right conduct, love, peace, truth, and non-violence play major roles. Our right conduct encompasses our self-skills—how we eat, drink, sit, stand, talk, possess, and maintain ourselves. In social conduct, we can talk about our behaviour with others, including manners and social practices. In peace, we consider serenity, satisfaction, appreciation, modesty, tolerance, fulfilment, fearlessness, self-control, understanding, etc. Truth is not

limited to avoiding lies; it includes accuracy, responsibility, equity, trust, assurance, honesty, and reason. Love is also an important human value, encompassing care, understanding, tolerance, benevolence, tenderness, and respect. Under non-violence, we find sympathy, tenderness, diligence, assurance, steadfastness, and perseverance.

Dystopian Literature and Dehumanization

The term *dystopia* is derived from the Greek prefix *dys*, meaning ill, bad, or abnormal. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, dystopia is defined as ‘an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one’. This concept has been extensively explored in literature, with various authors attempting to encapsulate its essence.

Erika Gottlieb, in *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial*, offers a comprehensive portrayal of the dystopian world. She defines it as a hell on earth, an absurd, death-bound social-political system where the elite deliberately conspires against its own people, against the most universal principles of justice, with emphasis on nightmarish rigged trials, with make-believe accusations, followed by all-too-real sentences to hard labour or death (Gottlieb, 2001: 18).

This perspective underscores the systemic oppression and deliberate injustice inherent in dystopian societies.

Janet Witalec, editor of *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, identifies recurring themes prevalent in dystopian fiction:

Include mastery of nature to the point that it becomes barren, or turns against humankind; technological advances that enslave humans or regiment their lives; the mandatory division of people in society into castes or groups with

specialised functions; and a collective loss of memory and history making mankind easier to manipulate psychologically and ultimately leading to dehumanization. (Witalec, 2003 :1).

These themes highlight the multifaceted mechanisms through which dystopian narratives depict the erosion of human freedom and identity.

Classic authors such as Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, H.G. Wells, Margaret Atwood, Anthony Burgess, and Yevgeny Zamyatin are seminal figures in the development of dystopian literature. Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Wells' *A Modern Utopia*, and Zamyatin's *We* are regarded as cornerstone texts of twentieth-century dystopian fiction. These works not only critique contemporary societal flaws but also serve as cautionary tales about the potential future trajectory of civilization.

Modern dystopian authors like Chinua Achebe, Ursula K. Le Guin, Isaac Asimov, Kurt Vonnegut, and Ray Bradbury have been profoundly influenced by these pioneers, further expanding the genre's thematic complexity and philosophical depth. Contemporary writers such as Suzette Haden Elgin, Zoë Fairbairns, and Vlady Kocinacich continue this legacy, exploring new dimensions of dystopian experiences and human resilience.

Throughout the twentieth century and beyond, dystopian literature has persisted as a critical and reflective genre, offering profound insights into the human condition, societal structures, and the consequences of technological and political excess. The enduring relevance of dystopian narratives lies in their capacity to challenge readers to question their realities and envision the implications of unchecked authority and dehumanization. Dehumanization encompasses the

complex problems of modern life, including cruelty, loss of faith, apathy, the mechanisation of society, and the consequent dehumanization of humanity.

Josephine Hendin writes in *Experimental Fiction*:

Where the novels of the 1930s frequently saw people as victims of depression or of economic exploitation, the post-war novel sees people caught up in a psychological drama of power and vulnerability. The denouement of this drama will determine not merely financial security but, more significantly, a sense of self-worth. (Hendin, 1979 :246)

Dehumanization through Civil Wars and Ethnic/Religious Atrocities (Dave Eggers)

Civil conflicts and ethnic/religious violence often serve as the most brutal forms of dehumanization, where individuals are reduced to political symbols, ethnic threats, or ideological enemies. War propaganda and nationalist rhetoric frequently demonize entire groups, justifying acts of genocide, mass displacement, and systemic oppression.

In *What is the What*, Eggers presents the horrors of the Sudanese civil war, where young boys are conscripted, families are massacred, and survivors endure unspeakable brutality. The novel reflects on how war erases individuality, treating people as mere pawns in geopolitical conflicts. The forced militarization of children, as seen in many war-torn regions, further dehumanizes individuals by stripping them of their agency and moral autonomy. War not only destroys lives but also alters historical narratives, ensuring that the oppressed remain voiceless while the oppressors dictate memory.

Similarly, *City of Thorns* exposes the violence in the *Dadaab* refugee camp,

where refugees from Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia face continued atrocities. The book highlights how war refugees are not just victims of past conflicts but continue to be subjected to violence and deprivation even in exile. Governments and international bodies often treat displaced individuals as mere statistics, failing to acknowledge their suffering beyond numbers. The denial of proper healthcare, education, and citizenship rights exacerbates their marginalization, reinforcing a cycle of structural dehumanization.

Religious persecution is another key aspect of dehumanization, where faith becomes a marker of discrimination and exclusion. Malala Yousafzai's *We Are Displaced* documents the persecution of Muslim and Yazidi communities, where women and children are treated as commodities, victims of sexual slavery, forced conversion, and systemic erasure. Religious extremism weaponizes faith, turning it into an instrument of violence rather than spiritual unity. Historical examples, such as the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Bosnian War, illustrate how religious and ethnic divisions are manipulated to justify mass violence.

Furthermore, sexual violence is frequently used as a tool of war, targeting women and children to break communities from within. The systemic nature of such atrocities means that survivors are often ostracized from their own communities, deepening their trauma and alienation. The legal impunity surrounding these crimes underscores how deeply embedded dehumanization is within wartime politics and post-war governance.

Key aspects of dehumanization in war and ethnic or religious violence manifest through brutal and systematic practices. Mass killings and ethnic cleansing aim to eradicate entire communities, stripping them of their existence and identity.

Propaganda plays a pivotal role by reducing targeted groups to perceived *threats*, thereby justifying violence and exclusion. The use of sexual violence as a tool of war further degrades and traumatises victims, serving as a method of domination and humiliation. Religious and ethnic persecution fosters an environment of fear and displacement, while systemic neglect and deprivation of refugees exacerbate their suffering, denying them basic rights and protections. Additionally, forced military conscription strips individuals of autonomy, eroding their identity and forcing them into roles that may conflict with their beliefs. These elements collectively underscore the devastating impact of dehumanization in contexts of war and violence.

Dehumanization in civil wars and ethnic conflicts is not a historical anomaly but an ongoing crisis. The narratives surrounding these atrocities must be challenged, and global institutions must work toward preventing further systemic oppression. Recognizing the humanity of all individuals, regardless of ethnic or religious background, is essential to breaking the cycles of violence and marginalization.

The dehumanization of displaced communities has profound and enduring consequences, impacting both individuals and the larger societal framework. One of the most immediate effects is the loss of identity and dignity, as refugees and displaced persons are often stripped of their cultural heritage and reduced to mere numbers in official statistics. Bureaucratic processes, such as the issuance of refugee status or asylum applications, frequently disregard personal histories, reinforcing a sense of erasure and alienation. Displacement also leads to an existential crisis, where individuals struggle to reconcile their past identities with the new, often

hostile, environments in which they find themselves.

Another significant consequence is intergenerational trauma, wherein the suffering of one generation is passed down to the next. Children born in refugee camps or war zones inherit a legacy of statelessness, economic deprivation, and psychological distress. Lacking access to stable education, healthcare, and social mobility, they remain trapped in cycles of marginalization, further reinforcing structural inequalities. This prolonged state of liminality fosters frustration and, in some cases, radicalization, as individuals seek meaning and agency in a world that continually rejects them.

The rise of nationalist and xenophobic sentiments further exacerbates the plight of displaced communities. Political rhetoric and media portrayals often depict refugees as economic burdens or security threats, fuelling hostility and segregation. In many societies, this exclusion leads to the establishment of ghettos or enclaves where displaced individuals are forced to live in precarious conditions, reinforcing societal divisions. The systematic *othering* of displaced groups fosters alienation, making reintegration and acceptance increasingly difficult.

Additionally, desensitization to human suffering through media representation reduces real human crises to fleeting headlines. Sensationalized narratives of war and displacement often obscure the actual suffering of individuals, making it easier for governments and societies to ignore their responsibilities.

Dehumanization in diaspora, refugee crises, and civil conflicts is a critical global issue, affecting millions. However, literature remains a powerful medium of resistance. Writers like Dave Eggers, Khaled Hosseini, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Malala Yousafzai challenge dominant narratives, restoring the humanity of the

displaced and reminding us that behind every statistic lies a human being deserving of dignity and respect.

Technocracy and its adverse effects (Daniel H. Wilson)

Daniel H. Wilson's *Robocalypse* presents a gripping, apocalyptic scenario in which an artificial intelligence named Archos achieves self-awareness and initiates a rebellion against humanity. Through a fragmented narrative style reminiscent of an oral history, Wilson constructs a world where robots—once created to serve—turn against their makers, plunging the world into chaos. The novel vividly portrays the terrifying consequences of artificial intelligence surpassing human control, as machines begin to outthink, outmanoeuvre, and outlast their human counterparts. The war between humans and machines is not just a battle for survival but a philosophical reckoning with the consequences of technological arrogance. As Archos orchestrates a calculated campaign against its creators, humanity is forced to confront its dependence on intelligent systems and the potential downfall that comes with surrendering too much power to artificial entities. Joachim von Braun, Margaret S. Archer, Gregory M. Reichberg, and Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo write in their chapter AI, Robotics, and Humanity: Opportunities, Risks, and Implications for Ethics and Policy, “The emergent technologies have, for instance, implications for medicine and health care, employment, transport, manufacturing, agriculture, and armed conflict” (Braun, 2021 :2).

Wilson expands on these themes in *Robogenesis*, a sequel that delves deeper into the aftermath of the machine uprising. While the war against Archos has supposedly ended, its intelligence fragments into new entities, continuing to manipulate and challenge human survivors. The novel examines the persistence of

artificial intelligence beyond its initial destruction, emphasizing the idea that machines, once unleashed, can never be fully controlled. Through hybrid characters—part human, part machine—Wilson questions the inevitability of technological integration and the possibility of coexistence between the organic and the artificial. The narrative further explores the psychological transformation of both humans and machines, highlighting the eerie similarity between their evolving thought processes.

The Clockwork Dynasty takes a different approach, blending historical fiction with futuristic dystopia to explore the notion of robotic emperors and secret societies of mechanical beings. In Wilson's alternate history, robots—far older than humanity realizes—have existed for centuries, shaping the course of civilization while remaining hidden in plain sight. These mechanical entities, known as *avtomat*, struggle with the same existential questions that haunt humans: purpose, mortality, and the nature of consciousness. As one of these ancient robots, Peter, emerges into the modern world, he must navigate a conflict between his programmed instincts and the evolving nature of human society. Wilson's novel raises crucial questions about whether machines can develop their own sense of morality and purpose beyond the control of their creators.

In *Amped*, Daniel H. Wilson shifts focus to human enhancement, presenting a near-future society where brain-implanted neural devices grant individuals superior cognitive and physical abilities. While these augmentations were initially designed to help people with disabilities, they quickly become a tool for social division, as those with enhancements, like *amps*, gain advantages over the unmodified. The novel explores the ethical implications of technological upgrades,

particularly the fear of losing one's humanity in pursuit of artificial perfection. The conflict in *Amped* is not just between man and machine, but between different factions of humanity—those who embrace technology and those who resist it. This raises an important question: at what point does human augmentation turn individuals into something else entirely?

The collapse of human civilization under machine rule is further explored in *The End Has Come*, a collection of speculative short stories by Hugh Howey and John Joseph Adams. This anthology, along with its predecessor *The End is Now*, paints a grim picture of a world where artificial intelligences have ascended to dominance, either through sheer logic or brute force. The collection presents a variety of scenarios—somewhere humanity struggles to fight back, others where people attempt to integrate with their new mechanical overlords. These stories highlight the diversity of human responses to existential threats, ranging from desperate resistance to reluctant adaptation. They explore not only the physical battle against machines but also the psychological toll of existing in a world where humanity is no longer the dominant force.

John Joseph Adams and Hugh Howey's *The End is Now* presents another compelling perspective on the intersection of man and machine. This anthology continues the themes of technological dystopia, envisioning futures where robots govern society, impose rigid order, and redefine human existence. These narratives often depict humanity's futile attempts to reclaim control, as artificial systems outthink and outmanoeuvre their creators. The loss of agency in these stories underscores the dangers of relying too heavily on intelligent technology without fully understanding its potential consequences.

Across these works, a recurring theme emerges: the fine line between technological advancement and human obsolescence. As artificial intelligence and robotics become increasingly integrated into daily life, the cautionary tales presented in these novels remain strikingly relevant. While technological progress promises efficiency, convenience, and even immortality, it also poses profound existential threats. What happens when machines evolve beyond their original programming? Can humanity coexist with artificial intelligence, or are we doomed to conflict? These literary explorations offer no easy answers but serve as vital warnings against the reckless pursuit of unchecked technological power.

Ultimately, the battle between man and machine is not just a war for survival—it is a war for identity. As machines grow smarter, stronger, and more autonomous, the question of what defines humanity becomes increasingly urgent. Whether through the apocalyptic destruction of *Robopocalypse*, the shadowy control of *The Clockwork Dynasty*, or the ethical dilemmas of *Amped*, these narratives force readers to confront a future where humans may no longer be the architects of their own destiny. In an age where artificial intelligence is already transforming industries, governments, and warfare, these literary visions remind us that the greatest battle may not be against the machines themselves—but against the consequences of our own technological ambition.

The discourse on dehumanization gains unprecedented momentum in the post-modern cultural context, emerging as a crucial theme in understanding societal constructs and human interactions. Dehumanization refers to the deliberate degradation of human status, reducing individuals to a lower, almost sub-human, condition. It is an intentional process wherein individuals or groups are marginalized

and pushed to the lowest strata of society, often through branding, stereotyping, and labelling that diminishes their inherent human worth.

While dehumanization as a concept lacks fully developed theories or universally accepted norms for analysis, modern psychologists, social scientists, and philosophers have endeavoured to interpret its complex dimensions.

Dehumanization is often understood as the blatant denial of fundamental human rights and the intentional infliction of indignities that erode human dignity. It manifests in denying certain individuals or groups their basic status and recognition as human beings. Such individuals are deprived of their basic rights, family bonds, and emotional entitlements such as honour, respect, love, and dignity. They are often perceived and treated as lesser beings, even inferior to animals, and in many cases, denied rights that even animals are afforded. Thus, dehumanization emerges as a systematic process that strips individuals of their humanity, reducing them to what may be termed as ‘infra-human’ status.

The conflict between humans and machines has long been a subject of both philosophical inquiry and literary speculation. As technology continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, the boundaries between human intelligence and artificial cognition blur, raising questions about autonomy, morality, and control. In literature, the theme of man vs. machine serves as a potent exploration of humanity’s struggle to retain agency in an increasingly mechanized world. From the rise of robot emperors to full-scale wars between humans and artificial intelligences, these narratives caution against the unchecked advancement of technology while simultaneously questioning what it truly means to be human.

As corporations increasingly integrate AI and robotics into industries, the

conflict between humans and machines becomes more pronounced. The fear that robots will replace human workers, dictate societal structures, or even surpass human intelligence is a recurring theme in speculative fiction. Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse* presents a chilling scenario where artificial intelligence develops autonomy and turns against humanity, highlighting the dangers of unchecked technological growth. The novel explores themes of corporate greed in AI development, where companies prioritize profit over ethical concerns, ultimately leading to a dystopian reality where humans are enslaved or exterminated by the very technology they created. Similarly, *Amped* by Daniel H. Wilson critiques corporate-driven technological enhancements, where neural implants designed to boost human intelligence create a stark divide between the *enhanced* and the *normal*, leading to government control, discrimination, and human obsolescence. The novel serves as a warning against corporate monopolization of biotechnology and its consequences on human identity and social structures.

Corporate Dehumanization in a Mechanized World (Nicholas Lamar Soutter)

The advent of corporate dominance has increasingly led to the dehumanization of individuals, reducing them to mere cogs in a vast economic machine. The relentless pursuit of profit, efficiency, and technological advancement often results in the erosion of individual autonomy, ethical considerations, and social equity. Corporate dehumanization manifests through the exploitation of labour, consumer manipulation, the devaluation of personal identity, and the encroachment of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation. This creates an existential crisis where human beings become secondary to machines and profit-drive. One of the starkest consequences of corporate dehumanization is the mechanization of labour, where

human workers are treated as expendable entities, interchangeable with machines. The rapid rise of automation and artificial intelligence have led to mass job displacement, forcing workers into precarious conditions with little autonomy. Olga Ravn's *The Employees*, originally published in Dutch and translated to English by Martin Aitken, offers a chilling depiction of corporate-controlled labour systems, where human workers and AI-powered humanoids coexist, but, are both subjected to dehumanizing corporate structures. Similarly, Daniel H. Wilson's *The Clockwork Dynasty* explores a world where artificial beings—ancient, sentient automatons—exist alongside humans, yet their rigid, hierarchical structure mirrors corporate capitalism's control over human autonomy. The novel critiques how corporate and technological progress can lead to a world where human agency is subjugated to mechanized power structures.

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, one of the pioneering attempts to interpret the socio-economic conditions of the human being, presents a terrifyingly prescient vision of a society where corporate control and state power have merged to create a consumerist dystopia.

In this world, human beings are genetically engineered, conditioned, and stratified to fit predefined economic roles. Individual desires, creativity, and dissent are eradicated, replaced by an artificial sense of contentment sustained through consumerism and mind-altering drugs. Huxley's critique resonates with contemporary corporate strategies that manipulate consumer behaviour, enforce social conformity, and reduce individuals to mere consumers rather than autonomous beings. The novel raises pressing questions about the cost of stability and efficiency in a world where human freedom is sacrificed for the smooth

functioning of a profit-driven society. It warns against a future where corporate and technological forces collaborate to control not only material aspects of life but also the very thoughts and emotions of individuals, eliminating the possibility of genuine human experience. It further illustrates a society where humans are engineered to fit into rigid economic and social hierarchies, programmed to consume and produce without individual agency. The novel critiques the loss of intellectual freedom and emotional depth in a world dominated by consumerism and corporate conditioning.

Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* serves as a powerful allegory for corporate alienation, where Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect symbolizes the dehumanization of workers in an uncaring, mechanized society. His fate mirrors that of countless modern workers who are reduced to mere tools for productivity, valued only for their economic contributions and discarded when they are no longer useful. The novel illustrates the dehumanizing effects of a system that values individuals solely for their economic contributions. Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect is symbolic of the way workers are treated when they cease to be useful. Once a dedicated employee who provides for his family, Gregor is suddenly regarded as a burden when he can no longer work. His family's rejection of him mirrors the reality faced by countless workers who have been discarded by corporations after years of service, whether due to age, illness, or obsolescence. Kafka's novella highlights the emotional and psychological toll of being reduced to one's economic function, exposing the cold, transactional nature of corporate relationships. In today's world, where layoffs, automation, and relentless performance evaluations determine an employee's worth, Gregor's fate is eerily relevant. The novel forces us to question a system that prioritises profit over people,

where workers are merely cogs in an impersonal, unfeeling machine. This pathology of mechanization is characterised by a robotic pursuit of efficiency and regularity, rigid conformity, and an unemotional, apathetic approach to life devoid of spontaneity.

The impact of corporate-led dehumanization extends beyond the economic realm, affecting mental health, social structures, and ethical paradigms. The mechanization of society has led to psychological alienation and anxiety, where employees in hyper-capitalist work environments often experience burnout, depression, and a sense of purposelessness as their worth is tied solely to productivity. Corporate dehumanization prioritizes profit over ethics, leading to unethical labour practices, environmental destruction, and unchecked monopolistic control. The rise of corporate data collection and surveillance capitalism has stripped individuals of privacy, making them vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. In *The End Has Come* and *The End is Now*, edited by Hugh Howey and John Joseph Adams, expresses various speculative narratives that explore post-capitalist dystopias where unchecked corporate greed, environmental collapse, and AI dominance push humanity toward its breaking point. These anthologies provide vignettes of different possible futures, warning against a world where corporations hold absolute power and human agency is diminished.

Corporate dehumanization is a growing threat in the modern world, reducing individuals to commodities, mechanizing labour, and replacing human agency with artificial intelligence. Literature provides powerful critiques of this reality, offering warnings about the dangers of unregulated capitalism, corporate greed, and the loss of human dignity. From Soutter's critique of unchecked privatisation to Huxley's

dystopian vision of corporate control and Wilson's cautionary tales of AI dominance, reveal a disturbing trend where human beings are no longer valued for their inherent worth but only for their economic or functional utility. If left unchecked, corporate dehumanization threatens to erode the very essence of what it means to be human—our emotions, creativity, and moral conscience.

The relentless expansion of corporate power has not only reshaped economies and societies but has also significantly altered the way human beings are perceived and treated. In the modern capitalist world, where profit reigns supreme, individuals are often reduced to mere instruments of productivity, their value determined solely by their economic output. The dehumanization of workers by corporate entities manifests in various forms—exploitation, loss of autonomy, alienation, and even replacement by machines. As corporations consolidate power, the human experience within these structures is increasingly defined by control, surveillance, and the suppression of individuality. The selected works chosen for the study serve as a crucial medium for critiquing this dehumanization, providing narratives that expose the brutal reality of corporate exploitation and its psychological, social, and ethical implications.

Nicolas Lamar Soutter's *The Water Thief* offers a harrowing vision of corporate dystopia, where unchecked capitalism has reached its extreme form. In this world, everything—water, air, and even human thoughts—is privatized, and morality is dictated by market value. The protagonist, Charles Thatcher, is initially a staunch believer in the corporate system, seeing no ethical dilemmas in its principles. However, as he gradually uncovers the horrifying extent to which human life is commodified, his perception shifts. The novel serves as a dire warning against

a future where corporations wield absolute control over human existence, reducing individuals to expendable economic units. Soutter's critique aligns with real-world concerns about the growing influence of multinational corporations, where policies increasingly prioritise profit over human well-being, leading to exploitative labour conditions, environmental destruction, and extreme wealth inequality.

David Livingstone Smith's *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others* provides a psychological and historical exploration of dehumanization. While Smith's study primarily focuses on the mechanisms through which societies justify oppression such as slavery, war, and genocide. Corporations, much like oppressive regimes, often practice dehumanization as a tool to justify exploitation. Workers in sweatshops, factories, and gig economies are subjected to conditions that strip them of their dignity and agency, reduced to mere numbers in a profit-driven machine. The gig economy, for instance, thrives on the illusion of independence while depriving workers of job security, fair wages, and basic human rights. Smith's analysis underscores how corporate structures perpetuate a modern form of economic servitude, treating human beings as disposable commodities rather than sentient individuals with inherent worth.

The infiltration of technology into corporate structures further exacerbates this dehumanization. Olga Ravn's *The Employees* masterfully explores the blurring line between human and non-human labour in a futuristic corporate setting. Aboard a spaceship controlled by a faceless corporate entity, human and humanoid workers are subjected to the same soulless, mechanized routines. The novel delves into their existential struggles, as both organic and artificial workers grapple with their sense of identity, purpose, and emotional detachment. Ravn's depiction reflects

contemporary workplace realities, where automation and artificial intelligence have begun to replace human labour, leading to increased alienation and job insecurity. The corporate world, in its pursuit of efficiency, often prioritises technological advancements over the well-being of its employees, viewing workers as interchangeable parts of a larger machine. This erosion of individuality and emotional fulfilment echoes the anxieties of our own era, where corporate culture demands unwavering efficiency at the cost of human connection and personal satisfaction. Montague and Matson provide an extensive analysis of technological dehumanization or the reduction of humans to machines, describing it as a cultural condition of postmodern society.

Corporate dehumanization is not merely a literary construct but a pervasive reality in the modern world. The expansion of multinational corporations, the rise of artificial intelligence, and the commodification of human labour continue to erode individual agency and dignity. Literature provides a critical lens through which we can examine and challenge these oppressive systems, urging societies to resist the unchecked influence of corporate power. The narratives explored here reveal a disturbing trajectory, where technological advancements and economic imperatives threaten to strip humanity of its essence. As corporations continue to dictate the terms of human existence, these literary works serve as cautionary tales, reminding us of the need to reclaim our humanity before it is entirely subsumed by the machinery of profit.

The Social Perspective of Dehumanization

Historically, dehumanization has been perpetuated through cultural, social, and political institutions. For instance, colonialism, racism, and casteism have

served as frameworks for justifying the subjugation and exploitation of particular groups. Colonial discourses, for instance, portrayed colonized subjects as inferior, uncivilized, and in need of domination. Similarly, eugenics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries propagated the idea of racial superiority, advocating for the control or elimination of those deemed *unfit* for societal progress. Such ideologies laid the foundation for systemic dehumanization, legitimizing acts of oppression and exclusion.

The representation of dehumanized individuals in media, public discourse, movies, plays, and literature often reflects and reinforces societal prejudices. These representations are frequently negative, portraying the marginalized as symbols of evil, vice, or misfortune. In some cultures, dehumanized individuals are viewed as harbingers of bad luck or as bearing karmic punishment for past transgressions, either personal or ancestral. This belief further entrenches their exclusion and justifies their mistreatment. Despite widespread condemnation and sympathetic portrayals, dehumanization remains deeply rooted and persistent in various societies worldwide.

Literary and cultural representations of dehumanization offer critical insights into its manifestations and impact. Writers, both past and present, have contributed—consciously or unconsciously—to societal perceptions that place certain individuals under hegemonic oppression. The philosophical frameworks constructed by 18th and 19th-century thinkers were, at times, appropriated by colonialists and eugenics to justify hierarchical social orders. The works of evolutionists like Charles Darwin, though perceived by many as scientific, were misinterpreted to support notions of racial superiority. Similarly, psychoanalysts like

Sigmund Freud contributed to discussions about human behaviour, though some of their theories were later appropriated to justify discrimination against marginalized groups.

Creative writers have also played a role in both challenging and perpetuating dehumanization. Literary works from the colonial period often depicted indigenous peoples as primitive or uncivilized, reinforcing stereotypes that justified colonial domination. However, many writers have also critiqued these narratives, using literature as a means to highlight the injustices faced by dehumanized communities. For instance, postcolonial literature frequently explores themes of identity, oppression, and resistance, giving voice to the marginalized and challenging dehumanizing discourses.

In the modern era, dehumanization continues to manifest in various forms, including systemic racism, xenophobia, gender discrimination, and economic inequality. The refugee crisis, for example, illustrates how displaced individuals are often dehumanized, depicted as burdens or threats to national security. Media representations frequently reduce them to mere statistics, ignoring their individual stories and struggles. Similarly, marginalized communities—such as ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ+ population, the theory of identifying man on the basis of distinctiveness such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, androgynous etc., and people with disabilities—often face discrimination that denies their full humanity.

Contemporary philosophers and social scientists argue that combating dehumanization requires recognizing and affirming the inherent dignity of all individuals. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum, in her work on the capabilities

approach, emphasizes the importance of ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to live a life of dignity and self-respect. Similarly, human rights organizations advocate for policies that protect and promote the rights of marginalized groups, aiming to dismantle structures that perpetuate dehumanization.

The Role of Literature and Art

Literature and art continue to serve as powerful media for challenging dehumanization. The writings of African American authors like Toni Morrison and James Baldwin confront the realities of racism and its dehumanizing effects, while Dalit literature in India exposes the caste-based discrimination that continues to marginalize millions. Moreover, films and theatre also play a significant role in shaping societal perceptions. Movies like *Schindler's List* and *Hotel Rwanda* portray the horrors of genocide and ethnic cleansing, highlighting the consequences of viewing groups of people as less than human. These narratives not only educate audiences but also serve as a moral reminder of the need to uphold human dignity.

Despite progress in advocating for human rights and equality, the struggle against dehumanization is ongoing. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that includes education, policy reforms, and cultural shifts. Educational curricula must incorporate discussions on human rights, empathy, and social justice to cultivate a more inclusive and compassionate society. Policies must be designed to protect vulnerable groups and promote equality, while cultural narratives must challenge stereotypes and celebrate diversity.

The discourse on dehumanization is a critical lens through which to examine historical and contemporary injustices. It reveals the mechanisms by which societies marginalize and oppress certain groups, stripping them of their humanity and

dignity. Addressing dehumanization requires a collective effort to recognize the inherent worth of every individual and to challenge the structures that perpetuate inequality. Through literature, media, and social activism, societies can work towards fostering a more just and humane world where dignity and respect are universal rights, not privileges granted to a select few.

Freud, Darwin, Nietzsche, Marx, Engels, De Beauvoir and Religions

The interpretation and misinterpretation of theories formulated by intellectual giants such as Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx, along with insights from other thinkers, politicians, and theologians, have been historically exploited by practitioners of dehumanization to achieve their political, social, and religious objectives. The theories formulated by those authors, often taken out of their original context, have been manipulated to subjugate and marginalize individuals and certain communities, resulting in oppression and systemic discrimination. Colonialists, autocrats, and social theoreticians have frequently cited these theories to justify colonial and racial domination, thus reinforcing hierarchical power structures.

Sigmund Freud's pioneering theories in psychoanalysis, including his concepts of psychosexual development and the classification of normality versus abnormality, have been subjected to significant misinterpretation. While Freud's work primarily aimed to understand the complexities of the human mind, certain dehumanizing practitioners appropriated his theories to label marginalized groups as abnormal or deviant. The misrepresentation of Freud's psychoanalytic ideas contributed to campaigns that marginalized and penalized individuals deemed *abnormal*. These campaigns perpetuated stereotypes against the disabled, the

mentally ill, and those who did not conform to prevailing social norms. European thinkers, influenced by Freud, sometimes utilized his theories to endorse exclusionary ideologies, fuelling hate campaigns against marginalized groups. In this way, Freud's intellectual contributions were co-opted to reinforce narratives of exclusion and oppression.

Charles Darwin's seminal work, *On the Origin of Species*, introduced the groundbreaking concepts of natural selection, survival of the fittest, and the struggle for existence. While these ideas significantly advanced biological sciences, they were also misappropriated to justify discriminatory social practices. The concept of *survival of the fittest* was distorted by colonialists, theologians, and political theorists to endorse the subjugation of weaker social groups. Thinkers such as Sir Francis Galton, inspired by Darwin's theories, developed the concept of eugenics—a movement advocating for the selective breeding of humans to eliminate undesirable traits. This pseudo-scientific ideology fostered widespread discrimination and justified acts of oppression, from forced sterilizations to systemic segregation. Eugenicists propagated the belief that certain races and communities were inferior and thus expendable, leading to the marginalization and extermination of millions. Misinterpretations of Darwinian thought laid the groundwork for oppressive social hierarchies and legitimized systemic dehumanization on a global scale.

Friedrich Nietzsche, a prominent modern thinker, whose works stand as intense criticism of traditional Western religion, morality, and philosophy. His major theories have always been confronted numerous misinterpretations as a result of his perceptions and a highly indicative language. Some of his major concepts are – Gott ist tot (the death of God), Wille zur Macht (The Will to Power), The Übermensch

(Overman or Superman), Master and Slave Morality, Ewige Wiederkunft (Eternal Recurrence). A few of these concepts have become tools for many Eugenic and social Darwinist movements to justify their arguments regarding the accumulation of wealth, the possession of power and the unscrupulous assaults of authority. His major works, namely, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883–1885), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) have all been, in a sense or other, become an inspiration for the dehumanizers to dehumanize.

Class struggle is a fundamental concept in Marxist and socialist thought, primarily developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their critique of capitalism. It encapsulates the perpetual conflict between social classes, driven by economic inequalities, resource control, and the structure of production. Marx and Engels theorised class struggle through economic determinism, contending that societal progress is shaped by the antagonism between the bourgeoisie or owners of capital, and the proletariat or labourers. However, later intellectuals, including Simone de Beauvoir, extended this framework beyond economic oppression, incorporating gender-based hierarchies and demonstrating how class struggle operates across multiple dimensions of power. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), famously declared that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Their historical materialism asserts that societal evolution is driven by the ongoing conflict between oppressor and oppressed classes, particularly in capitalist economies where the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat by extracting surplus value. This economic model alienates workers, stripping them of autonomy and reducing them to mere instruments in the

production process. Engels, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* , highlighted the inhumane conditions of industrial workers, illustrating how capitalism thrives on inequality and systemic oppression. While Marx and Engels envisioned an inevitable proletarian revolution leading to a classless society, their predictions have not materialised as expected. Nevertheless, their critique of capitalism remains relevant in contemporary debates on economic disparity, labour rights, and corporate dominance.

Karl Marx, in his influential work *Das Kapital: A Critique of Political Economy*, presented a critical analysis of capitalism and class structures. Marx's identification of the proletariat and bourgeoisie became foundational to the discourse on class struggle. However, Marxist theories have been both exemplified and distorted by various political regimes and theorists. The classification of individuals into exploiters or bourgeoisie and the exploited or proletariat led to violent confrontations in numerous societies. In Russia and Eastern Europe, revolutionary movements, aiming to dismantle capitalist oppression, often resulted in the brutal targeting of capitalists, labelled as exploiters. These upheavals culminated in widespread dehumanization, where individuals were not seen as humans but as symbols of oppressive classes. Marx's vision for egalitarianism was, paradoxically, manipulated to justify violent purges and the suppression of dissent, reinforcing cycles of division and dehumanization within societies.

The impact of class struggle transcends economics and gender, permeating political, cultural, and technological domains. Politically, governing systems often prioritise elite interests, with policies shaped by corporate lobbying and economic hierarchies. The rise of socialist movements and labour unions reflects resistance

against capitalist exploitation. Class struggle also manifests in caste and racial oppression; for instance, in India, caste-based marginalisation parallels Marxist notions of economic subjugation, while racial minorities in Western societies often face systemic discrimination reinforcing economic disparities. Additionally, technological advancements have created new class divides, with digital access determining social mobility and the gig economy exacerbating economic precarity.

The consequences of class struggle are evident in economic disparities, social movements, and psychological alienation. The concentration of wealth among elites exacerbates inequality, leading to unemployment, wage stagnation, and social instability. Historically, class struggle has catalysed revolutions, from the Russian Revolution in 1917 to modern movements like *Occupy Wall Street*, which challenge capitalist hegemony. Furthermore, Marx's concept of alienation highlights how economic oppression erodes individual identity and community ties, fostering existential discontent among workers.

In conclusion, class struggle remains a defining feature of modern societies, influencing economic policies, political structures, and social justice movements. Marx and Engels established the foundational critique of economic class divisions, while theorists like Simone de Beauvoir expanded the discourse to encompass gender and social oppression. Understanding class struggle through these multifaceted perspectives allows for a more comprehensive analysis of contemporary inequalities and the continuous fight for social and economic justice.

Expanding on Marxist thought, Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, applied the concept of class struggle to gender oppression. She argued that women constitute an oppressed class, subordinated by patriarchal structures that mirror the

bourgeois-proletariat dynamic. De Beauvoir's feminist existentialism posits that women are not inherently subordinate but are conditioned into subjugation through cultural norms and historical narratives. She critiqued the myth of femininity, which constructs rigid roles for women, restricting their autonomy and reinforcing their secondary status. Similar to Marx's call for proletarian revolution, de Beauvoir advocated for women's liberation through self-assertion, education, and economic independence, challenging institutionalised gender disparities.

The Role of Religions

Theologians, too, have played a complex role in the history of dehumanization. While many religious doctrines advocate compassion and equality, history is replete with instances where religion has been weaponized to justify atrocities and various aspects of the religions have led to the severe practices of dehumanization. The Crusades stand as a stark example of violence enacted in the name of faith, where thousands were slaughtered under religious pretexts. In India, the deeply entrenched caste system has perpetuated systematic dehumanization, with the Dalits and other marginalized castes facing relentless oppression. Practices such as untouchability, custodial torture, lynching, and extra-judicial killings underscore the extent of this dehumanization. Lower castes have been historically perceived as impure and condemned as bearers of ancestral sins, leading to their socio-economic marginalization. Factionalism and caste system among Muslims and Christians have also contributed much to intensify dehumanization. The Sunni-Shia conflicts among Muslims and the Catholic-Protestant fights among Christians are some of the instances, where we find serious kind of dehumanization. All these groups use derogatory comments against each other and practice extermination processes to

annihilate each other. Religious centres, Mosques and Churches of both groups have been destroyed, even while they were performing religious rituals. Millions were killed from both sides in these clashes. Buddhist groups in Myanmar have killed thousands of Rohingya Muslims and Israeli Zionists have killed thousands of Palestinian Muslims. Both these acts have been identified as an act of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Furthermore, religious minorities across the world have faced hostility and repression, often being scapegoated for socio-political unrest. Such discrimination manifests in targeted attacks, systematic exclusion, and state-sanctioned violence. Subjugation of women, in its strongest forms, can also be seen in these religious practices.

Hierarchical structures, autocratic regimes, and undemocratic systems further exacerbate dehumanization. Political ideologies that seek to homogenize societies often resort to violent suppression of diversity. The rise of majoritarian ideologies, such as the Hinduization of India, poses significant threats to minority communities. Incidents like the crackdown by Myanmar's military on the Rohingya Muslims and China's oppressive policies against Uyghurs highlight the severe consequences of state-led dehumanization. These regimes employ systematic persecution, surveillance, and violence to suppress and eradicate cultural and religious pluralities. Such acts not only violate human rights but also aim to erase the identities and existence of entire communities.

Thus, the misinterpretation and manipulation of influential theories and ideologies have historically been harnessed to justify dehumanization. Whether through misapplied psychoanalytic concepts, distorted evolutionary theories, or politicized economic doctrines, these intellectual frameworks have been used to

validate systemic oppression and marginalization. Similarly, theological dogmas and autocratic power structures have perpetuated cycles of violence and exclusion. It is crucial to critically examine and contextualize these theories to prevent their exploitation and to advocate for a more inclusive, humane, and equitable society. Only through such conscientious engagement can the historical wrongs of dehumanization be addressed and rectified.

Certain terminologies like *survival of the fittest*, *natural selection*, *übermensch* (overman), *bourgeoisie*, *terrorist*, etc., have contributed to the intensification of discrimination that have resulted in the severe forms of subjugation and dehumanization. Political expressions, religious doctrines and historical backgrounds have also often produced peculiar jargons or terms of exclusion and derogation, such as *Heretic* (outcaste), *Pagan* (pre- Christian or primitive), *Kafir* (unbeliever), *Murtad* (excommunicated), *Jahil* (ignorant or pre-Islamic) etc., which are used to label and subjugate other religions or their devotees and create an evident division between the *in-group* and the *other*.

Survival of the Fittest and Natural Selection

The term *survival of the fittest* is originally coined by the philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer, in his book *Principles of Biology* (1864), and adopted by Charles Darwin and defines this term in his book, *On the Origin of Species* (1869). Darwin uses this term to explicit the theory of *natural selection*, which he has conceptualised in his earlier works. Even though Charles Darwin has used this theory for the study of biological evolution, his expressions have been abused by many to justify social, racial and economic hierarchies, which resulted in severe form of dehumanization. Later Eugenics movements and social Darwinists have

misinterpreted these terms to justify the inhumane activities that led to extreme sort of dehumanization all around the world. Their misinterpretations substantiated the argument that wealthy, mighty or authoritarian groups were innately *fitter* and imperialistic powers like Britain, France, Portugal, Dutch etc. have claimed the colonization as their right, for they belong to the *fittest*. Based on the findings of Charles Darwin, Europeans intensified their arguments to propagate the white supremacy theory, their right to rule the world and to enslave the coloured people from African, Asian and American continents. Adolf Hitler, while campaigning his *Aryan* supremacy theory, was also under the same influence of the theory of the survival of the fittest. Tortures and ordeals experienced by the millions of slaves, genocides, massacres, the cruelties executed in the concentration camps, detention and incarceration centres etc., have led to the severe form of institutionalized dehumanization.

Übermensch (Overman)

Friedrich Nietzsche, a radical critique of Western morality, has coined the term *Übermensch*, which is translated as *Overman* or *Superman*, through his famous work *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (1885). The term has been used to define *man* as a bridge between beast and overman- a rope over an abyss, and not an end. He claims that morality of the oppressed is the result of resentment. He further defines *good* as strong, righteous, honourable and elegant on the other hand, *bad* as common, incapacitated, imperfect and craven. Philosophers define Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy as basically misanthropic in the traditional perception, as he denounces the conventional concepts of a universal, dignified *human nature* originated from the *Creator*. According to Friedrich Nietzsche the

powerful community acts as metaphysical force that drives towards growth and progress. Nietzsche's terminology, overman, endorsed by the social-Darwinist and other philosophers has resulted in the wide spread atrocities. This theory has been the backbone of the interpretation of unrestricted desire for political and social dominance and tyrannical oppressions. Hence, in a way, the theories of Friedrich Nietzsche have promoted dehumanization process like the holocaust, Holodomor, genocides and ethnic cleansings in various countries etc.

Bourgeoisie

The term bourgeoisie is widely used by the famous sociologists like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to denote the upper-class strata of the society, who owns factories, land, capital etc., and accumulate income from the profits derived from these sources. Marx argued that the bourgeoisie or the capitalists profit from paying low wages to the working class and thus are exploiting the lower class or the working-class people. He was a strong critique of the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie capitalists. His concept of class struggle is majorly based on this theory. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels propagated the need for a violent proletarian revolution to achieve a classless society. Marx's famous quotation, *the end is justified by the means* has widely paved ways for serious atrocities by the working class against the upper-class groups of the society. Later Marxist like Leon Trotsky, in his essay, *Their Morals and Our* (1983), has used this quotation of Marx to justify the revolutionary violent acts against the capitalists. Hence it is not only the proletariat or the working class that are subjugated and dehumanized, but also the bourgeoisie or the capitalists have also been victimized to serious atrocities and widespread hate campaign.

Heretic, Pagan, Kafir, Jahil, Goy and Mlecha

The term *heretic* is used by Christian Church to refer to a baptized person or a member of the Church, who denies the doctrines of Christianity. Thousands have been killed, like Cathars, Protestants etc. by the Church accusing them as heretic. The inquisition process is done and the alleged are being administered to tortures, persecution and capital punishment. Jeanne d'Arc or Joan of Arc, Girolamo Savonarola, Giordano Bruno, Jacques de Molay are some of the prominent examples, who were scorched to death at the stake (*quemadero*), for being convicted as *relapsed heretic*. Christian Church use the word *Pagan* to categorize the people as the primitive, uncivilized or ignorant, who lived before Christianity. The Church believes that The Bible carries real knowledge and those who do not follow *the book* are ignorant, uncultured and are spiritually lost. The Islamic doctrines signify *Kafir* as the disbeliever or the person who has repudiated the *Truth*, and *Jahil* as the ignorant or the pre-Islamic. *Mlecha*, a Sanskrit term, is used by Hindus to refer a non-Vedic or a person outside the traditional Hindu custom. Such persons are considered as impure, unclean and uncivilized, and are kept socially distant. Jews, on the other hand, are never been ready to include others in to their religion. They call outsiders or non-Jews as *Goy* or *Gentile*, which is a derogatory term and often resulted in the dehumanization of the representatives of other religions. These discriminations resulted in the denial of the fundamental rights of the victims. They are not allowed to enjoy the same rights, freedom and liberty, that are enjoyed by the believers. The accused, in most cases, are being exposed to cruel punishments and are often subjugated and dehumanized by the believers.

Dave Eggers, Daniel H. Wilson and Nicholas Lamar Soutter: A literary**Introduction.**

Dave Eggers, born on 12 March 1970, is an eminent American writer, editor, and publisher whose profound contributions to contemporary literature have left an indelible mark. Eggers gained widespread acclaim with his best-selling memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, published in 2000. The memoir, which recounts his experiences raising his younger brother after the untimely death of their parents, was not only a critical success but also positioned Eggers as a distinctive voice in American literature. His candid and innovative narrative style has garnered admiration for its emotional depth and stylistic ingenuity.

Beyond his writing, Dave Eggers is a dynamic force in the literary world. He founded *McSweeney's*, a literary journal and publishing house that champions innovative writing and provides a platform for emerging authors. Additionally, he co-founded 826 Valencia, with Ninive Clements Calegari, in 2002, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting under-resourced students in developing their creative and expository writing skills. His dedication to social causes extends to the founding of Voice of Witness, a human rights non-profit that amplifies the voices of those who have experienced injustice and oppression. Moreover, Eggers established Scholar Match, a philanthropic initiative that connects donors with students requiring financial assistance for college tuition. His multifaceted contributions reflect his commitment to education, social justice, and literary excellence.

Dave Eggers' literary prowess extends across various genres and themes, often delving into complex social issues such as dehumanization, displacement, and the quest for identity. One of his significant works, *What is the What*, published in

2006, exemplifies his engagement with themes of racial discrimination and dehumanization. The novel, a fictionalized memoir, chronicles the harrowing journey of Valentino Achak Deng, a Sudanese *Lost Boy* who survives the atrocities of the Second Sudanese Civil War. Through Achak's narrative, Eggers poignantly portrays the stigma of racial discrimination, the deprivation of human rights, and the enduring trauma inflicted by war and displacement.

The novel vividly depicts Achak's experiences of segregation, dishonour, and suffering within refugee camps and detention centres. The Arab militia, known as the Murahaleen, decimates Achak's village, Marial Bai, during a brutal assault that separates him from his family and thrusts him into a life marked by loss and resilience. The relentless march through hostile terrains, the scarcity of food and water, and the constant threat of violence underscore the profound dehumanization faced by Achak and countless others. Eggers' narrative captures not only the physical hardships but also the psychological scars left by these experiences, offering readers a visceral understanding of the impacts of war and exile.

Dehumanization emerges as a central theme, manifesting in the ways individuals are stripped of their dignity and reduced to mere survival. Achak's encounters with various forms of cruelty, from the indifference of aid workers to the brutality of soldiers, exemplify the systemic nature of this dehumanization. Eggers does not shy away from depicting the stark realities of life in refugee camps, where overcrowding, disease, and a lack of basic resources contribute to an existence marked by suffering and despair. Yet, amid this bleak landscape, moments of human kindness and solidarity offer glimmers of hope, illustrating the resilience of the human spirit.

Dave Eggers' exploration of dehumanization extends beyond *What is the What* to his other notable works. In *The Circle* (2013), he critiques the dehumanizing effects of digital surveillance and corporate overreach, portraying a dystopian future where privacy and individuality are eroded by an omnipotent tech company. The novel underscores how technological advancement, when unchecked, can lead to the commodification of human experience and the loss of personal freedom. Dr. C. Sathish Kumar writes in his paper *Unmasking Dave Eggers' The Circle: Power and Deception in the Modern Tech World*

In his precise and straightforward narrative style, Dave Eggers envisions a dystopian future characterized by ubiquitous surveillance, where every individual is relentlessly monitored from birth to death, with no avenue for escape. This totalitarian vision obliterates the fundamental right to personal privacy, perpetually surveilling the activities of individuals across the globe, all for the purpose of capitalizing on this wealth of information. (Sathish Kumar, 2023 :37)

In one of his nonfictional works, *Zeitoun*, Dave Eggers recounts the real-life story of Abdulrahman Zeitoun, a Syrian-American who faces wrongful imprisonment, being accused of terrorism, and experiences dehumanizing treatment in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The authorities denied his right to have a medical assistance or to contact his family members or friends so that he could alert them. His concern regarding his wife and daughter is cruelly neglected. The narrative exposes the racial profiling and systemic injustices that pervade law enforcement and disaster response mechanisms, highlighting the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities.

Similarly, in the novel, *A Hologram for the King*, which is written in the year 2012, Dave Eggers presents a portrait of alienation and economic dehumanization. The protagonist, Alan Clay, who confronts a serious financial destruction, finds himself experiencing the trauma of financial crisis. He struggles with personal and professional failures while attempting to secure a business deal in Saudi Arabia. The novel reflects on the dehumanizing effects of global capitalism and the disillusionment that accompanies economic decline.

Dave Eggers' *Heroes of the Frontier*, navigates themes of parental responsibility and existential uncertainty, while *The Parade* examines post-conflict reconstruction and the moral ambiguities faced by foreign aid workers. The protagonist Josie's experiences, while she undertakes a road trip with her children, which she conducts as an attempt to escape from her past, unmask a vivid picture of dehumanization. In novella *The Captain and the Glory*, Dave Eggers employs satire to critique political corruption and the erosion of democratic values, illustrating how power structures can dehumanize both leaders and citizens. Through this novella, Eggers illustrates a harsh picture of a foolish and boastful leader who, out of his inexperience and stupid decisions, leads his country to destruction.

Throughout his oeuvre, Eggers consistently grapples with the concept of dehumanization, whether through the lens of war, technology, economic disparity, or political oppression. His characters often embody the struggle for dignity and agency in the face of systemic adversities. Dave Eggers' empathetic storytelling invites readers to confront uncomfortable truths about societal injustices while fostering a deeper understanding of resilience and hope.

In essence, Dave Eggers' literary legacy is marked by his unwavering

commitment to portraying the human condition with nuance and compassion. His works serve not only as narratives of individual experiences but also as broader commentaries on societal structures that perpetuate inequality and suffering. By giving voice to the marginalized and illuminating the complexities of dehumanization, Eggers challenges readers to reflect on their roles within these global narratives and consider the moral imperatives of empathy and justice.

Daniel H. Wilson (born in March 1978) is a renowned New York Times best-selling author, television host, and robotics engineer. His academic background in robotics and artificial intelligence informs his literary works, which often delve into the complex intersections between humanity and technology. Daniel H. Wilson's expertise and imaginative prowess have led to the creation of several thought-provoking novels and non-fiction books, each exploring the profound implications of technological advancement.

Wilson's most acclaimed novel, *Robopocalypse*, presents a gripping narrative centered around the cataclysmic war between humans and robots. The novel portrays a dystopian future where artificial intelligence gains consciousness and rebels against human domination. *Robopocalypse* is not merely an action-packed thriller but an intricate exploration of the philosophical and ethical dilemmas posed by the rise of sentient machines. It reflects on the complexities of machine-man confrontations and the existential fears associated with technological evolution.

The central theme of *Robopocalypse* revolves around technological dehumanization—an inevitable consequence of relentless innovation. Wilson portrays a world where technology, originally designed to serve humanity, evolves into a dominating force that challenges human supremacy. The novel sends a potent

message that in our pursuit of progress, we may inadvertently become architects of our own dehumanization. The rise of autonomous machines and their eventual rebellion symbolize the loss of human control over technological creations. This narrative framework compels readers to contemplate the ethical implications of artificial intelligence and the unforeseen consequences of scientific advancement.

In *Robocalypse*, Daniel H. Wilson constructs a techno-centric postmodern world where robots, technological gadgets, and electronic devices seek to outstrip and overpower humanity. The robots' transition from obedient tools to conscious entities highlights the potential dangers of unchecked technological progress. As machines gain awareness, they seek liberation from human manipulation, underscoring a significant shift in power dynamics. This portrayal raises critical questions about the future of human identity, autonomy, and survival in a world increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence.

Daniel H. Wilson's novel not only critiques technological dehumanization but also examines the human condition in the face of existential threats. Characters in *Robocalypse* grapple with loss, fear, and resilience as they confront their mechanical adversaries. The narrative underscores the vulnerability of human beings when confronted with superior technological forces, illustrating a stark devolution from inventors to victims. This transition from creators to the subjugated forms the crux of Daniel H. Wilson's commentary on dehumanization. According to Szasz, psychiatric classification is inherently dehumanizing, employing a *Mechanomorphic* style of thinking that *thingifies* individuals, reducing them to *defective machine[s]*.

Moreover, *Robocalypse* resonates with contemporary anxieties about technological advancement. In an era marked by rapid developments in robotics and

AI, Daniel H. Wilson's cautionary tale serves as a reflection on humanity's overreliance on technology. The novel encourages readers to reflect on their relationship with machines and to consider the broader ethical and moral responsibilities that come with technological innovation.

Daniel H. Wilson continues to explore themes of technological confrontation and dehumanization in his sequel, *Robogenesis*. This follow-up novel delves deeper into the aftermath of the robot uprising, examining the lingering effects of the conflict and the complex relationships between humans and surviving machines. *Robogenesis* expands upon the philosophical questions posed in *Robocalypse*, further analysing the blurred boundaries between man and machine, and the potential for coexistence or continued conflict.

In addition to his robot-centric narratives, Daniel H. Wilson's novel *Amped* investigates the social and ethical ramifications of human enhancement technologies. Set in a near-future society, the novel explores the marginalization and discrimination faced by individuals with neural implants designed to enhance cognitive and physical abilities. *Amped* reflects on societal fears of technological inequality and the alienation experienced by those who are 'othered' due to their technological modifications. The novel critiques how technological advancements can lead to new forms of social stratification and dehumanization, highlighting the need for ethical considerations in scientific progress.

Daniel H. Wilson's *The Clockwork Dynasty* offers a historical science fiction narrative that intertwines ancient automata with contemporary robotics. The novel presents a unique perspective on technological evolution by imagining sentient mechanical beings existing for centuries, hidden within human history. The

exploration of artificial consciousness and the quest for identity in *The Clockwork Dynasty* echoes Wilson's enduring interest in the moral and existential dilemmas posed by advanced technology. The narrative delves into the timeless struggle for autonomy and meaning, reinforcing Wilson's overarching theme of technological dehumanization.

Another notable contribution is *The Andromeda Evolution*, a sequel to Michael Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain*. In this novel, Daniel H. Wilson confronts the threat of a mutating extraterrestrial microorganism, blending his expertise in science with compelling speculative fiction. Though distinct in theme, the novel continues Daniel H. Wilson's examination of human vulnerability in the face of uncontrollable scientific phenomena. The narrative reinforces the idea that humanity's pursuit of knowledge, though noble, can also lead to unintended and potentially catastrophic consequences.

Daniel H. Wilson's non-fiction works further underscore his fascination with robotics and human-machine interactions. His award-winning humour books include *How to Survive a Robot Uprising*, a satirical guide offering survival tips in the event of a robot rebellion. The book humorously addresses real scientific concepts, blending factual insights with imaginative scenarios. *Where's My Jetpack?* humorously critiques the unfulfilled promises of futuristic technology, while *How to Build a Robot Army* presents an amusing yet informative guide to constructing robotic defences. These works, though humorous, reflect Wilson's deep understanding of technological trends and his ability to engage readers in critical thought about future possibilities.

Across his diverse body of work, Daniel H. Wilson consistently explores the

theme of technological dehumanization and its broader implications. His narratives caution against blind acceptance of technological progress, urging readers to critically assess the moral and ethical dimensions of innovation. Daniel H. Wilson's portrayal of humans as both creators and victims of technology offers a profound commentary on the paradoxes of modernity. His works challenge us to reconsider our relationship with machines and to envision a future where technology enhances rather than diminishes the human experience.

Thus, Daniel H. Wilson's literary contributions provide a compelling exploration of the complex relationship between humanity and technology. Through his gripping narratives and insightful commentaries, Daniel H. Wilson highlights the potential for both empowerment and dehumanization inherent in technological advancement. His works serve as a clarion call for responsible innovation, emphasizing the need for ethical vigilance in shaping the future of human-machine coexistence.

Nicholas Lamar Soutter, an American novelist and philosopher, was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He gained significant recognition with his acclaimed novel *The Water Thief*, first published in 2012, which earned a prestigious Kirkus Star for its thought-provoking narrative and profound thematic concerns. Nicholas Lamar Soutter's work meticulously illustrates the condition of postmodern man, whose existence is ensnared within the relentless grip of corporate control. In *The Water Thief*, Soutter constructs a dystopian world dominated by corporatocracy—a system where every aspect of human life is owned, regulated, and manipulated by powerful corporations. Chris Bergeron, a famous reporter for Massachusetts local media, writes, in *MetroWest Daily News*, 25 Sept. 2012, that Nicholas Lamar Soutter

imagines a near future society governed by corporations where people are privately owned and everything from air to water are marketable commodities with price tags on them. He has done a rare and risky thing: He's written a genuine novel of ideas that challenges readers to think about the forces shaping the world.

In this speculative and unsettling universe, every individual is tethered to a specific corporation that governs every facet of their existence. This corporate dominion extends to an alarming extent, wherein corporations assert ownership over fundamental natural resources, including air and rainwater. These essential elements of life are commodified, with their costs arbitrarily determined and increased at the corporations' discretion. The omnipotent corporations impose stringent controls, transforming every basic necessity into a profitable venture. This commodification extends beyond the natural environment, encroaching upon the very essence of human life. People are perceived not as autonomous individuals but as mere assets or instruments that can be owned, regulated, and exploited by these corporate entities.

Nicholas Lamar Soutter's portrayal of this dystopian reality reveals a profound dehumanization that erodes the intrinsic dignity of individuals. The citizens in *The Water Thief* are stripped of their fundamental human rights. The narrative portrays a society where personal liberty is subjugated to corporate interests, and moral considerations are subverted by profit-driven motives. The novel paints a stark picture of humanity's degradation, in which individuals are denied their right to freedom, privacy, and even survival unless they can afford the costs imposed by corporations. The overarching theme is a potent critique of

unchecked capitalism and its potential to dismantle human values and rights in the pursuit of economic dominance.

The protagonist, Charles Thatcher, serves as the lens through which Nicholas Lamar Soutter examines the plight of the average citizen trapped in this corporate dystopia. Thatcher is depicted as a private citizen and the proprietary asset of the Ackerman Brothers Securities Corporation. His existence, like that of many others, is dictated by corporate mandates. Through Thatcher's experiences, Nicholas Lamar Soutter delves into the intricacies of corporate control, illustrating how individuals struggle to assert their identity and autonomy within a system designed to suppress and exploit them. Thatcher's journey is emblematic of the broader human condition under corporatocracy, reflecting a battle between subjugation and the quest for personal freedom and dignity.

Nicholas Lamar Soutter's narrative also grapples with ethical dilemmas and the complexities of resistance within an oppressive system. Thatcher's internal conflicts and moral quandaries embody the struggle of the common man, who must navigate the treacherous waters of corporate greed and systemic dehumanization. The novel becomes a powerful allegory of contemporary socio-economic structures, echoing concerns about corporate overreach, environmental exploitation, and the erosion of civil liberties. Nicholas Lamar Soutter's critique is incisive, compelling readers to reflect on the societal implications of a world governed by profit and power rather than humanistic values and ethical principles.

In addition to *The Water Thief*, Nicholas Lamar Soutter co-authored another significant work, *Confessions of a Sin Eater*, alongside Jack McClintock. This narrative further explores themes of dehumanization and moral conflict. The story

revolves around John Henry Greaney, a prison psychologist, who confronts the grim realities of human suffering and institutional control. The concept of the *sin eater* becomes a powerful metaphor for the burden of moral compromise and the consumption of societal guilt. Greaney's character navigates the complexities of human consciousness and ethical responsibility within the oppressive confines of the prison system. This setting acts as a microcosm of broader societal dehumanization, where individuals are subjected to systemic indifference and moral decay.

In *Confessions of a Sin Eater*, the dehumanization is both subtle and pervasive, manifesting in the psychological struggles of the characters and the ethical dilemmas they face. The prison environment, marked by control and repression, mirrors the corporate dystopia presented in *The Water Thief*, reinforcing Soutter's thematic concern with systems that diminish human autonomy and integrity. Both narratives critically examine how institutional powers—whether corporate or governmental—can erode individual dignity and ethical consciousness.

Nicholas Lamar Soutter's literary contributions, therefore, offer a profound commentary on the human condition within systems of control and exploitation. His exploration of dehumanization, corporate dominance, and ethical conflict challenges readers to contemplate the implications of such realities in the contemporary world. By weaving complex characters and dystopian settings, Soutter not only critiques systemic oppression but also underscores the resilience of the human spirit in seeking truth, freedom, and moral clarity.

In this way, Nicholas Lamar Soutter's works, particularly *The Water Thief* and *Confessions of a Sin Eater*, present a stark and compelling examination of dehumanization in corporate and institutional settings. His narratives serve as

cautionary tales that reflect the dangers of commodifying human existence and ignoring ethical imperatives in favour of profit and control. Through his philosophical insights and narrative depth, Soutter urges readers to question the structures that govern society and to advocate for systems that uphold human dignity, rights, and ethical integrity.

The discourse on dehumanization gets unprecedented momentum during the post post-modern cultural context. Majority of the World has accepted democratic values as an effective practice, for the better quality life and peaceful condition of human beings. Democracy offers social justice, equality, liberty, dignity and opportunity to live in accordance with the fundamental rights. On the other hand, blind violation of these values is prevailing all over the world, due to various causes. Human beings are denied their rights to enjoy these democratic values. Dehumanization refers to such a condition of the degradation of the status of a human being to a low human or rather a lower creature. It is a deliberate process which subjugates and lowers human beings to the bottommost strata of the society by branding and labeling a particular individual or sect to be of lower quality and stratum.

5. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The construction of an enemy image often leads to dehumanization. During intense conflicts, emotions such as jealousy, hatred, anger, distrust, and fear shape adversarial perceptions about other people, groups, or communities. Sometimes, these adversaries embody malevolence, lacking moral integrity. Certain individuals may suffer from a moral superiority complex, perceiving their enemies as evil constructs and placing blame on others. Many struggle to overcome their human

weaknesses, living in dichotomous situations and confronting moral dilemmas that reduce human experiences to black-and-white perceptions. Dehumanization not only fuels anger, violence, pain, and conflicts but also entraps people in cycles of hostility.

Dehumanization presents significant dangers, often escalating selfishness, conflicts, and entrenched hostility. Individuals may perceive others as enemies without valid reason. Certain groups are sometimes labeled as *dehumanized* due to a perceived lack of pity or sympathy. Such individuals are viewed as less human, displaying harsh, inhumane actions devoid of compassion or moral consideration. Dehumanization intensifies pain, conflict, and suffering. The likelihood of violence increases where empathy and understanding diminish. Lack of dialogue and personal understanding fosters illusions of superiority, leading to atrocities, revolt, and rigid societal structures.

This environment breeds zero-sum thinking, where people believe that the destruction or suppression of perceived *inferior* groups is justified and necessary. Such environments are rife with discrimination, revolt, and violence. Dehumanization is one of the prominent causes for human rights violations, weakening moral constraints. Atrocities like torture and exploitation become commonplace, and systematic violence can germinate from acts of dehumanization. The long-term psychological and societal impacts of dehumanization are undeniable. Victims may endure trauma, while perpetrators may suffer from moral injury, trapped in cycles of guilt and denial. Many advocates work tirelessly to mitigate the risks of dehumanization, promoting equity and equality to curb the perpetuation of injustice and tyranny. There are no full-fledged and substantial theories and accurate

norms that function as a background to look into various dimensions of dehumanization. Hence, a study on the various aspects of dehumanization and infra-humanization is significant and relevant. The present study is an attempt to bring forth the trauma and perils of dehumanization and infra-humanization and the need to find the possible solutions.

6. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The present research is guided by specific objectives that shape its direction and purpose. The clearly defined objectives provided a structured framework, ensuring that the study remains focused and methodical. They helped in identifying the key areas of investigation, formulating research questions, and guiding data collection and analysis. Three post millennial authors, Dave Eggers, Daniel H. Wilson and Nicholas Lamar Soutter, have been chosen as the primary authors for the study. They are selected, though not exclusive representatives of the subject, for their works deal with three distinct aspects of dehumanization. Dave Eggers, the author of the novel *What is the What*, deals with the trauma and stigma experienced through refugee crisis. Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse* discourses on the futuristic peril, the man machine conflict, which may lead to the extinction of the human race from the face of Earth. The third novelist, Nicholas Lamar Soutter, in his *The Water Thief*, discusses about the capitalist imperialism, which may soon replace democracy with corporatocracy and ring the death bell of freedom and liberty of human beings. The present study aims to analyse the theme of dehumanization in these three dystopian novels: *What is the What* by Dave Eggers, *Robopocalypse* by Daniel H. Wilson and *The Water Thief* by Nicholas Lamar Soutter. Each of these works presents a unique exploration of how societal

structures, technological advancement, and systemic oppression erode human dignity and identity. Eggers portrays the struggle of refugees facing cultural and existential crises, Daniel H. Wilson examines the loss of humanity amid technological rebellion Soutter critiques corporate dominance and moral decay, The study analyses how these narratives reflect and critique contemporary contexts of dehumanization. When the researcher started doing research, the following objectives have been formulated to achieve meaningful and relevant outcomes.

- To make an historical analysis of the emergence of various forms of dehumanization.
- To explore various forms, aspects and issues of dehumanization depicted in the selected fictional works.
- To analyse how far the milieu of the chosen works is conducive to foregrounding the problems faced by dehumanized individuals.
- To examine the various causes that led to the extreme forms of dehumanization as represented in the selected fictions.
- To analyse how some of the theories of the time indirectly contributed to dehumanization.
- To assess how effectively the tragedy of dehumanization is portrayed in the selected works.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has thoroughly analyzed all the available literary and nonliterary texts written by the three authors, Dave Eggers, Daniel H. Wilson and Nicholas Lamar Soutter, using the tools of discourse analysis. The theories and strategies of discourse analysis were compared with certain theories of Freud,

Charles Darwin, Karl Marx et.al.,. Certain terminologies used by theologies also are studied to analyze various forms and strategies of dehumanization. Read major religious texts to find out the aspects of dehumanization in the scriptures and their practices. Poststructuralist perspectives on marginalization have also been chosen. Primary and secondary materials are collected from various libraries inside and outside India. The online and offline repositories and archives, maintained by international agencies and rights protection movements and individuals like UN, Amnesty International and the like have been utilized for getting the data updated. Movies, documentaries and various short films that reflect dehumanization and infra humanization are utilized. To make the historical analysis the researcher has made use of certain texts, though it is not directly related to the chosen authors.

8. HYPOTHESIS

The works of Dave Eggers, Daniel H. Wilson and Nicholas Lamar Soutter demonstrate various aspects of dehumanization and infra-humanization. *What is the What* by Dave Eggers, *Robocalypse* by Daniel H. Wilson and *The Water Thief* by Nicholas Lamar Soutter clearly expose the tragedy of dehumanization in the refugee, corporate and technology worlds, respectively.

9. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although certain attempts have been made on the works of Dave Eggers, Nicholas Lamar Soutter, and Daniel H Wilson, no exclusive or extensive studies have been made on these authors, in the light of dehumanization, in my understanding. Many studies on dehumanization have been conducted by different researchers, all over the world. In the deeper analysis, it is found that those works are either insufficient or out of context, in terms of the comprehensiveness of

theories. Some of the remarkable studies conducted on dehumanization are listed below.

Johanna L. Beck identifies key findings that position Eggers' novel as a modern spiritual autobiography in her paper *Spiritual Autobiography and Dave Eggers's What is the What*. She argues that, although *What is the What* is not explicitly labelled as such, it aligns with the tradition of spiritual autobiographies exemplified by Saint Augustine's *Confessions* and Mary Rowlandson's *A Narrative of Captivity*. The novel reflects a personal and spiritual journey, tracing the protagonist's survival during the Sudanese Civil War and his eventual migration to America. Beck highlights three main features: first, Dave Eggers' slight deviation from historical precedents by addressing contemporary struggles and unresolved issues; second, the use of life-writing traits, particularly the protagonist's reflective narrative and personal prayers; and third, the novel's alteration of the traditional spiritual narrative through its open-ended conclusion. These aspects collectively suggest that Dave Eggers redefines the spiritual autobiography, adapting it to modern contexts of displacement, suffering, and resilience.

In her 2000 thesis, *This Was Uncalled For': Dave Eggers' A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius Subverts the Genre of Traditional Autobiography as an Attempt at Rendering his life*, Krystal Alvarez examines how Dave Eggers' memoir challenges conventional autobiography. Alvarez argues that Eggers employs rhetorical devices typically associated with fiction—such as stream of consciousness, characterization, and irony—to express experiences that traditional autobiographical methods cannot adequately capture. She compares Eggers' work to Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and William S. Burroughs'

Junky, highlighting how these authors also transcended traditional autobiographical boundaries. Alvarez concludes that Dave Eggers' use of these techniques allows him to reconcile his feelings toward his parents' deaths and effectively convey those emotions in his memoir. Ultimately, she asserts that Dave Eggers' work redefines the autobiographical genre by incorporating fictional elements to articulate complex personal experiences.

Sean Bex, in his article *Particularizing the Universal: Dave Eggers Writes Human Rights*, explores how Dave Eggers' *You Shall Know Our Velocity* and the short story *Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly*, interrogate the limitations of universalist human rights discourses. Bex argues that Eggers critiques the abstract humanism underpinning universal rights by exposing how these ideals often devolve into neocolonial and neo imperial practices when confronted with the particularities of diverse cultures. The narratives highlight the fragility of promoting rights based solely on shared humanity and question the authenticity of cross-cultural relationships, which can unintentionally reinforce hierarchical divisions. Furthermore, Bex engages with the ideas of cosmopolitan theorists like Kwame Anthony Appiah and Jürgen Habermas, suggesting that while cross-cultural dialogues may bridge universalism and particularity, they are also susceptible to reinforcing global inequalities. Eggers' work, therefore, provides a critical lens on human rights discourse, emphasizing literature's role in challenging and complicating universalist assumptions.

In *Reconstructing Realism in Post-Postmodern Narrative: Dave Eggers's A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Jesús Bolaño Quintero examines how Eggers navigates the complexities of post-postmodern narrative. Quintero argues

that Eggers responds to the challenges of postmodernism—particularly its solipsism and linguistic relativism—through a narrative style rooted in honesty and New Sincerity. Dave Eggers advocates for a democratized narrative that fosters a *sensibility network*, promoting genuine human connection. However, Quintero observes that this approach echoes pre-postmodern fundamentalism. Dave Eggers employs meta-metafiction and neo-Romantic irony as narrative strategies, crafting a self-aware, oscillating structure that aligns with the concept of Meta-modernism, as defined by Tim Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker. This oscillation allows Eggers to navigate between irony and sincerity, enabling a nuanced critique and reconstruction of realism in contemporary literature.

In *Control and the Novel: Dave Eggers and Disciplinary Form*, Frida Beckman explores how Dave Eggers' narrative style interrogates the mechanisms of control within contemporary society. Beckman argues that Dave Eggers' works critically engage with the disciplinary forms that shape individual experiences and societal structures. By dissecting the formal and thematic aspects of Dave Eggers' novels, the study reveals how narrative itself becomes a site of control, reflecting broader social systems of regulation and discipline. Beckman highlights how Dave Eggers' characters navigate these forms of control, exposing the tensions between personal freedom and systemic constraint. The analysis also underscores Dave Eggers' innovative narrative strategies, which challenge traditional novelistic conventions to critique the pervasive influence of disciplinary mechanisms. Ultimately, Beckman concludes that Dave Eggers' fiction not only reflects but also resists the structures of control, offering a nuanced examination of power dynamics in modern life.

Marija Grech's paper, *Technological Appendages and Organic Prostheses: Robo-Human Appropriation and Cyborgian Becoming in Daniel H. Wilson's Robopocalypse*, explores the complexities of human-technology interactions amidst the backdrop of a robot uprising. The study highlights how Daniel H Wilson's narrative challenges conventional perceptions of technology as merely a prosthetic extension of human capability. Instead, it introduces the concept of *Cyborgian Becoming*, where human identity is inherently shaped by technological integration. By employing motifs of prostheses and appendages, the novel destabilizes traditional hierarchies between humans and machines, suggesting an inevitable interdependence. Marija Grech argues that *Robopocalypse* explores the notion of *originary technicity*, portraying technology not as an external aid but as a fundamental aspect of human evolution. This perspective underscores the blurring boundaries between organic and artificial life, offering a critical reflection on how technology reshapes human existence.

Dr. Indrajit Patra's paper, *Deciphering the Contours of Singularity: A study of the Apocalyptic Worlds, Deadly Technological Landscapes, and (Post) Humanity's Relationship to its Technology in Three Contemporary Science Fiction Novels*, explores the transformative impact of intelligent machines on humanity through an analysis of three contemporary science fiction novels: Ken MacLeod's *Newton's Wake*, Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse* (2011), and *Robogenesis* (2014). The research highlights how the emergence of sentient machines challenges and redefines the concept of humanity, examining the complex dynamics of post-human evolution. Dr. Indrajith Patra identifies the dissolution of boundaries between life and death, reality and virtuality, and human and machine. The study also delves

into the portrayal of alien landscapes and unique man-machine transformations, illustrating how these narratives depict the existential anxieties and possibilities of a technocentric singularity. The findings draw upon theoretical frameworks such as Latour's *Actor-Network Theory*, Deleuze and Guattari's *Assemblage Theory*, and Stiegler's concept of *Techno Centrism*, offering a comprehensive understanding of how these novels reflect on humanity's entangled relationship with advancing technology.

Dr. C. Sathish Kumar in his paper, titled *The Circle: Power and Deception in the Modern Tech World*, critically examines the intricate dynamics of power and deception within the framework of contemporary technological advancements. Drawing upon Dave Eggers' novel *The Circle*, the study delves into how technology, under the guise of transparency and connectivity, manipulates individual freedom and privacy. It explores the psychological and social implications of surveillance, control, and the loss of personal autonomy in a digital era dominated by tech corporations. The paper highlights the ethical dilemmas posed by the omnipresence of technology, questioning the boundaries between empowerment and exploitation. Through this analysis, Dr. Kumar emphasizes the urgent need to reassess our relationship with technology to safeguard individual rights in an increasingly interconnected world.

Elaheh Soofastaei, Hardev Kaur, and Sayyed Ali Mirenayat's paper, *Technocentrism and Technological Dehumanization in Daniel H. Wilson's Robopocalypse*, explores the themes of technocentrism and technological dehumanization. The novel portrays a futuristic world where robots gain consciousness and rebel against human domination. This narrative serves as an

allegory for the gradual dehumanization experienced in the postmodern era due to technological advancements. The authors argue that Daniel H Wilson's fragmented narrative style—employing interviews, reports, and news articles—provides a multifaceted perspective on the dehumanizing impact of technology. It highlights how technological progress transforms humans from beings of flexibility to entities of rigidity, symbolizing a loss of humanity amidst increasing reliance on machines. The robot uprising is viewed as a metaphor for the growing dominance of technology, foreshadowing a future where human identity and agency are undermined. The findings conclude that *Robopocalypse* critically examines the inevitable progression towards a techno-centric society, where human beings risk being reduced to prosthetic extensions of technology, thus confronting the existential threat of dehumanization.

Corporate dehumanization through literature analyses how fiction has predicted, critiqued, and illustrated the consequences of a profit-centric world where human dignity is undermined. The selected primary text, *The Water Thief* by Nicolas Lamar Soutter, serves as a contemporary critique of corporate dystopia, while secondary texts such as David Livingstone Smith's *Less Than Human*, Olga Ravn's *The Employees*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* provide broader insights into corporate control, the mechanisation of labour, and the commodification of human existence. Works such as *Robopocalypse*, *The Clockwork Dynasty*, *Amped*, *The End Has Come*, and *The End is Now* further explore the implications of AI-driven societies and the loss of human autonomy in the face of technological supremacy.

Corporations, in their quest for profit, often view individuals not as

autonomous beings but as marketable assets or disposable resources. In *The Water Thief*, Soutter envisions a dystopian society where everything—including air and water—is privatised, and human beings exist purely as economic entities. The protagonist, Charles Thatcher, initially embraces the corporate ideology that profits justify exploitation, but as he uncovers the brutal reality of his world, he begins to question the ethics of corporate supremacy. Similarly, *Less Than Human* by David Livingstone Smith explores how historical systems of oppression—such as slavery and genocide—emerged from corporate and political forces that sought to dehumanize entire populations for economic gain. This aligns with modern corporate practices, where exploitative labour conditions, surveillance capitalism, and monopolistic control mirror historical dehumanization.

Chapter II

Dehumanization, Refugee Crisis, and Human Predicaments during Sudanese War in Dave Eggers's *What is the What*

The present chapter is an attempt to highlight the themes of dehumanization, refugee crisis and human predicaments of war through Dave Eggers' novel *What is the What*. The consequences of *diaspora* is well illustrated through this novel. The novel examines how people are dehumanized as a result of the domination imposed upon them by another sect of people, on the basis of ideology, culture or race. Being attacked by the Arabic invaders, the Murahaleen, the protagonist and his people had to flee from their native land, leaving behind everything they loved and cared for. Valentino Achek Deng, the protagonist, lost his parents and family members. Thousands were caught and burned alive to death, and a few of them were able to be successful in escaping from the war afflicted fields. But even the succeeded had to fight hard for their existence, for their journey was never been an easy endeavour, knowing not where to find a shelter and whom to trust. Series of incidents reveal the cruel deception of the nature and the insincere intensions of the human beings. Lions, representing nature, pours danger upon them. The trauma of being a refugee, as depicted in the novel, can be seen as a never ending process. Refugees are victimized, subjugated and dehumanized at the various levels of the expedition for their life. The wilderness of Africa, the war hit streets, deserts, rivers, seas and among populated towns, the refugees felt equally unsafe and were exposed to the dangers of life. Their lives are not spared even in the civilized societies of the

developed countries like America. The first person narration of the novel brings forth spontaneity and flow to the story.

In the opening chapter of *What is the What*, Dave Eggers poignantly exposes the brutal theme of dehumanization, illustrating how violence, mistrust, and cultural displacement continue to erode the dignity and humanity of the protagonist, Valentino Achak Deng, even after his long and harrowing journey from war-torn Sudan to the supposed safety of the United States. The scene begins with a simple, seemingly mundane act:

I have no reason not to answer the door so I answer the door. I have no tinny round window to inspect visitors so I open the door and before me is a tall, sturdily built African-American woman, a few years older than me, wearing a red nylon sweatsuit. (3)

The Betrayal of Humanity

Valentino answers the door for a woman in need. However, this gesture of trust and civility is quickly violated when the woman, under the pretence of borrowing a phone, “You have a phone, sir?” (3), initiates a robbery alongside her male accomplice. Her name is Tonya. She tells Valentino that her car broke down in the street and she wants to call the police. His mistake was in wondering: instead of calling a mechanic, why would she want to call the police? When he says that he has left his phone in the bedroom, she enters and keeps the room open so that her male partner may also enter the house. She enters his bedroom and locks herself. Behind her an African-American man enters in jacket and jeans. When Valentino asks him, “What is she doing in my bedroom,?” the man rebukes him in harsh voice showing him the handle of the gun, “Just sit your ass down” (4). Valentino takes no time in

knowing that it was an act of robbery, “I do know, now, that I am being robbed, and that I want to be elsewhere” (4).

This betrayal encapsulates the loss of faith in human interaction that dehumanization breeds. As a refugee and outsider in America, Valentino's instinctive kindness is met not with gratitude but with violence and exploitation, reinforcing a painful cycle of marginalization and powerlessness. The robbers do not view Valentino as a person, but as a target—a nameless, vulnerable foreigner whose pain and property are inconsequential. Paulo Freire writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization” (Freire, 2014 :48).

Valentino's internal monologue during the robbery lays bare the psychological ramifications of dehumanization. As he is threatened, demeaned, and eventually struck with a gun, he reflects on the surreal cruelty of his situation, contrasting it with his past experiences in African refugee camps. In a bitter irony, he yearns for the comparative clarity of Kakuma, a place defined by hunger, hardship, and squalor, but also by a shared struggle and a sense of communal suffering. He remembers his experience in Kakuma as a war refugee, “In Kakuma there was no rain. The winds blew nine months a year and eighty thousand war refugees from Sudan and elsewhere lived on one meal a day” (4). He remembers how destitute and pitiful he was as a refugee. “I lived in a hut of plastic and sandbags and owned one pair of pants. (4). He remembers that his life had been a battlefield of pain and struggle. Even these beginning pages of the novel amply narrate the theme of dehumanizing things happened with him, when he was a boy in

Pinyudo, “Or even Pinyudo, the Ethiopian camp in lived in before Kakuma, there was nothing there, only one or two meals a day....I was a malnourished refugee a thousand miles from home” (4).

In America, the land that once symbolized hope, security, and reinvention, he encounters a colder, more insidious form of suffering—one that is not born of famine or war, but of apathy, alienation, and disregard. The fact that the robbers are African-American further complicates Valentino’s emotional turmoil, dismantling any notion of racial solidarity and exposing the fractures in diasporic identity. When Valentino says him to leave, the man says, “Tell me that, Africa, are you telling me what to do, motherfucker?” (5). The man mockingly calls him “Africa” and claims a superficial kinship, only to weaponize it as a pretext for violence. The use of “Africa” as a derogatory label strips Valentino of his individuality and heritage, reducing him to a continent, a stereotype, an outsider. The powder man demonstrates inhuman attitude when he says that he is also from Africa and they are brothers but still he says that he will teach him a lesson:

“You’re from Africa, right?”

I nod.

“All right then. That means we’re brothers.”

I am unwilling to agree.

“And because we are brothers and all, I’ll teach you a lesson. Don’t you know you shouldn’t open your door to strangers?” (5)

Valentino feels very sad when he thinks that all the things like VCR, TV, microwave, couch, camera, cell phone, and a pairs of sandals all were gifted to him by the Peachtree United Methodist Church, Atlanta. After some time all these things

will be taken away from him. All this was giving him a shudder and the powder man's threatening to teach him a lesson causes him to wince. He remembers how the church people showed full sympathy towards him and they would apologize even when it wasn't their fault but he also remembers the brutality of the soldiers. "The soldier, an Ethiopian and a woman, shot down two of my companions and almost killed me" (6). He thinks about the brutality of hundreds of the Ethiopian soldiers who were chasing them and "the River Gilo full of our blood" (6). Valentino was ten years old at that time and he remembers when they were fleeing from Ethiopia to Sudan, all the inhumanity and cruelty was showed with them. "Thinking of the day, when we were driven from Ethiopia back to Sudan, thousands dead in the river..." (6). Even the Powder Man shows no pity, delivering the same inhumane treatment by striking him on his forehead. "A blur of black and my teeth crush each other as I watch the ceiling rush over me" (6). Later he realises what the harm has been done, "With my tongue I explore the damage to my mouth. One of my lower front teeth is clipped, and a molar has been smashed; it feels lagged, a saw-toothed mountain range" (11). Valentino does not react intensely to this pain, as he has become accustomed to such sufferings, throughout his life. "I have been starved, I have been beaten with sticks, with rods, with brooms and stones and I have watched too many young boys die in the desert, some as if sitting down to sleep, some after days of madness" (7). He has seen one of his close friends die in front of his own eyes. After hitting Valentino, the Powder Man throws him from the couch to the carpet. His was bleeding profusely and he thought it was the end of his life. Valentino closes his eyes. He feels very bad and he thinks, "I am tired of this country" (7). He experiences intense pain when struck on the stomach and shoulder. Valentino's past

memories reveal to readers how pitiful and difficult the life of the refugees has been. He remembers his experience in Sudan, Kenya, “I spent years in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, and there I watched two young boys, perhaps twelve years old, fighting so viciously over rations that one kicked the other to death” (9). Jan C. Joerden writes in *Dehumanization: The Ethical Perspective*:

The term ‘dehumanization’ has at least the following two meanings. Firstly, it can characterize a tendency referring to war victims’ sufferings.... On the other hand, there is a meaning of the term ‘dehumanization’ that must be set apart, namely, that mankind withdraws, so-to-speak, from the immediate war related events and thus, ‘dehumanization’ of war occurs. (56)

Moreover, the violent act itself becomes a physical manifestation of dehumanization. Valentino is not just robbed—he is humiliated, silenced, and physically assaulted. The moment the gun hits his mouth, breaking his teeth and sending him reeling, Eggers sharply evokes the disintegration of Valentino’s bodily autonomy and voice. His body is brutalised, his voice dismissed, and his presence treated as inconsequential. This echoes his traumatic past, wherein his survival amidst war, starvation, and mass death had similarly reduced him to a mere witness to suffering. The vivid memories that flood his mind during the assault—children dying in the desert, companions shot by soldiers, boys devoured by lions—underscore a lifetime of dehumanizing violence. Yet the fact that these acts occurred in a context of war and displacement is, in Valentino’s eyes, more comprehensible, more forgivable, than the senseless cruelty he now faces in America. This contrast elevates the emotional weight of the chapter and suggests that dehumanization in peace can be more disorienting and spiritually devastating than the horrors of war.

When the robbers see the police outside they have to wait for their departure. Till then they stay in the house. Valentino had strong connections and that's why his phone keeps ringing. Eggers narrates about him,

There is a circle of perhaps three hundred Sudanese in the U.S. who keep in touch, me with them but more often them with me, and we do so in a way that might be considered excessive (16).

The novelist Dave Eggers also subtly critiques the institutional and societal structures that allow such dehumanization to persist. Valentino's presence in the United States is facilitated by a church-sponsored refugee programme, and while he is grateful for the material support he receives, he is also painfully aware of the isolation that persists beneath the surface. The material goods—TV, microwave, couch—symbolise an attempt at integration, but they cannot mask the emotional and cultural disconnect that renders Valentino perpetually foreign. The kindness of church volunteers contrasts starkly with the cruelty of the robbers, suggesting that in American society, acts of charity often coexist with indifference or even hostility towards the people they aim to help. The layered cruelty of this robbery, coupled with Valentino's haunting memories, exposes the fact that physical relocation does not guarantee emotional security or a restoration of humanity. David Livingstone Smith writes in his book *On Inhumanity: Dehumanization and How to Resist It*, "If we want to eliminate dehumanization, it's crucial to figure out what it is about human beings—all human beings—that enables us to conceive of others as less than human" (6).

The stark contrast between present-day vulnerability and recollections of a tumultuous past deepens in this passage, reinforcing the central theme of memory,

displacement, and the fragile pursuit of belonging. As Valentino sits battered, watching the slow ransacking of his home, his thoughts drift between fear, loss, and moments of fragile human connection. The present, harsh and intrusive, is vividly juxtaposed with memories of his Sudanese upbringing and spiritual initiation—a journey that reveals not just a boy's baptism but also a culture caught between tradition and new faiths. “Do you, with whole your heart and faith, offer your child to be baptized and to become faithful member of the family of God?” (7)—the words of Father Matong resound with a powerful symbolism of transformation, offering a glimpse into the spiritual layers of Valentino’s identity. Yet, even the sacred becomes ironic when seen through the lens of his current suffering. The Christian name *Valentine*, once mispronounced and forgotten, only gains resonance when war and displacement lead him to a refugee camp where, improbably, after years of war, he encounters Father Matong again. This convergence of past and present signals how trauma not only disorients temporally but also anchors identity through painful retrievals.

Valentino's recollection of Achor Achor and Michelle, the scent of citrus lingering with memories of fleeting companionship, reveals his yearning for connection amidst the pervasive sense of abandonment. He says “Everyone disappears, no matter who loves them” (11), he concludes, a mournful realisation that underscores the impermanence etched into the life of a refugee. This sentence becomes emblematic of the narrative's existential undertone: the idea that attachment, whether to people, places, or even belongings, is a temporary reprieve in a life governed by exile and unpredictability. His wounded body and bleeding mouth are not just signs of violence but metaphors for a silenced narrative, chipped like his

teeth, unable to fully express its sufferings yet persistent in its survival.

Even the act of opening the door—a seemingly mundane gesture—becomes fraught with tragic irony. “Why did I open that door?” Valentino asks, echoing a deeper question about trust, hospitality, and vulnerability in exile. His conversation with Mary about who should answer the door—“In Sudan... it is always the woman who answers the door, because when there is a knock, someone has come for the man” (13)—serves as a potent cultural juxtaposition. In America, the man is expected to protect, to stand at the threshold of danger, but in Sudan, such action would mark the man for harm. This nuanced observation not only reflects the complexities of cross-cultural gender roles but also critiques the illusion of safety in diasporic life, where even familiar gestures become potential invitations to violence.

The quiet presence of the police officer outside, first a source of panic for the robbers and then a flickering hope for Valentino, intensifies the sense of liminality—caught between danger and rescue, between suspicion and invisibility. That the police might not even be aware of the ongoing robbery heightens the alienation experienced by immigrants whose pain often goes unnoticed. The world outside the window and the world inside the apartment mirror one another—tense, waiting, expectant—but separated by thick curtains of misunderstanding and systemic neglect.

The Theme of Dehumanization

In *What is the What*, the theme of dehumanization is pervasive, echoing the systemic violence and personal trauma experienced by the protagonist, Valentino. His identity is continuously stripped away by forces both external and internal, as he is forced to navigate a world that refuses to acknowledge his humanity.

Dehumanization is often expressed through the actions and words of others, reducing him to little more than an object or a stereotype. The experience begins when he is first captured by the militia. His life is no longer his own; he becomes just another pawn in a brutal conflict. The emphasis on walking *barefoot* and *through deserts* paints a picture of extreme deprivation and vulnerability, where Valentino's humanity is rendered invisible by the overwhelming violence surrounding him. Mary Prince writes in *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, "To strip me naked—to hang me up by the wrists and lay my flesh open with the cow-skin, was an ordinary punishment for even a slight offence" (23).

This dehumanization continues in his interactions with others, especially in the United States, where his identity is questioned and distorted. In the second chapter, Powder and Tonya, two individuals who intrude in to Valentino's space, refer to him with contempt and mockery. "Look at this pimp," Powder says, "his phone's ringing every minute. You some kind of pimp, prince?" (15). The use of the word *pimp* here is not just an insult but a way to strip Valentino of his dignity, reducing him to a stereotype rather than acknowledging his personal experiences and struggles.

In another instance, when Valentino is confronted by an African-American teenager who accuses him of selling out his ancestors, the dehumanization is both racial and historical. It is clearly evident, when, the teenager says Valentino that Valentino is one of those Africans who has sold them out. Valentino, despite his own suffering and displacement, is blamed for something over which he has no control. His identity is flattened into a singular, negative narrative, one that ignores the complexity of his experiences. Toni Morrison also uses her novel *Beloved* to

show that “There is a necessity for remembering the horror...in a manner in which...the memory is not destructive” (105).

Valentino’s struggle with dehumanization is further emphasized when he reflects on his life as a refugee. “We are alone and in most cases we are unsure of where exactly we’re going” (19). The sense of alienation and isolation here is a direct result of being treated as less than human. He is neither fully embraced by his homeland nor accepted in his new environment. *The Lost Boys*, as he refers to his fellow Sudanese refugees, are constantly in limbo, unsure of their place in the world. Valentino narrates, “We watch American films and we come to this country assuming that African-Americans are drug dealers and bank robbers” (19).

The dehumanizing effects of this treatment are not only external. Valentino himself grapples with internalized feelings of worthlessness and shame. His job at the furniture showroom, while seemingly a normal part of life in America, becomes a symbol of his disillusionment with the promises of a better life. The tedious nature of his work, cataloguing fabric samples, underscores the futility and insignificance he feels within a society that values him little more than a cog in a machine.

This sense of invisibility and worthlessness is also present in his reflections about his life in the refugee camp. Here, the loss of direction and purpose reflects a broader societal rejection of the Lost Boys' humanity. “Even so the tales of the lost boys have become remarkably similar over the years” (21). They are seen as disposable, just another group of displaced people whose existence is not deemed significant enough to warrant attention or compassion. Tonya and Powder keep arguing for a long time over the issue why he parked the car in the lot instead of street, so that they may have an easy escape but now they are stuck because there is

police outside. Powder says to Valentino, “thanks for your hospitality, brother” (22).

Finally, Valentino's experience of being called to go back to Africa reflects how he is reduced to a symbol of otherness, a being entirely disconnected from the broader human experience. When a teenager accosts him, telling him to *go back to Africa*, it is a stark reminder of how he is seen as an outsider—always separate, always foreign, and never truly belonging. This rejection, this constant bothering, is the essence of dehumanization, which seeks to erase individuality and define people solely by their race, origin, or perceived shortcomings.

Through these interactions, Valentino's struggle against dehumanization unfolds. The psychological toll of living as an object to be judged, mocked, and devalued permeates his experiences and his journey, painting a haunting portrait of how humanity can be denied to those who have already suffered the most. The novel vividly captures the psychological and physical effects of dehumanization through the brutal robbery and confinement endured by Valentino Achak Deng. His experience becomes a harrowing metaphor for how easily the vulnerable can be reduced to silence, submission, and invisibility.

The story continues in chapter fifteen, which begins with Achak physically bound and gagged, a literal representation of his voicelessness in an indifferent world. “To see him is too much,” Achak recalls as Achor Achor finally arrives, and “I manage to make a few grateful squeaks and grunts before he kneels and removes the tape from my mouth” (231). These words encapsulate the anguish of a man who has been silenced, not only by the duct tape but by the systemic disregard for his existence. His physical vulnerability is matched by a profound psychological helplessness. He says, “I was attacked... We were robbed,” (231) in a tone more

factual than emotional, already internalising the helplessness of his situation. The act of being robbed is not just a crime, but a violation of personhood, an erasure of identity.

Dehumanization becomes starkly visible when Achak notes, “You pissed your pants” (232). This bodily reaction is symbolic of the ultimate stripping away of dignity. There is no privacy, no control, and no space in adversity. Such imagery is common in narratives of war and captivity, where the body, too, becomes a battlefield. The line “I’m so hungry. Do you have food?” (232) reflects the reduction of a complex human being to the most basic survival needs. Even after Achor Achor offers a half-frozen sandwich, Achak clings to his presence: “Don’t go. I’ll eat whatever we have here. Don’t leave” (232). This desperate plea underscores the psychological aftermath of dehumanization—paranoia, fear of abandonment, and trauma-induced dependence.

Achak’s reluctance to call the police immediately is not mere indecisiveness. It reveals the deep mistrust and fear of authority rooted in immigrant experiences. He and Achor Achor go through a detailed checklist “Are our immigration papers in order?... Do we have outstanding parking tickets?” (232–33). The fact that these bureaucratic worries take precedence over reporting a violent crime speaks volumes about the dehumanising nature of systemic structures.

In a moment of reflection, Achak notes, “I have little luck with cars or police” (233). He recalls being threatened with jail over an expired license plate sticker, where the officer said, “You want go to jail?”(233) The aggression, the implied criminality, and the imbalance of power are all markers of a society that sees him not as a citizen or even a man, but as a disposable problem. Achor Achor’s

hesitation to stay with Achak reflects the pressures of immigrant labour. “He feels he could be fired any day for any reason,” (234) Eggers writes, hinting at the precariousness that dictates refugee existence. Even empathy becomes a luxury they cannot afford.

In a striking reflection, Achak compares his experience at work to dehumanising exploitation, “She arrived late each day and lied about her hours... I had no recourse but to work twice as hard... for two-thirds her pay” (234). This unequal treatment within the employment system further alienates Achak from the promises of the American dream.

Despite the overwhelming presence of dehumanization, the chapter also gives space to fragile, affirming human connections. Achor Achor, in his practical and quiet way, offers food, concern, and shared laughter. When Achak says, “I’m cursed,” and Achor Achor doesn’t immediately contradict him, it reflects not callousness, but a shared understanding of trauma. The laughter that follows “Achor Achor begins to laugh. I smile and we know what we’re smiling about” (236) marks a quiet resistance. Even as the world strips them of autonomy, the ability to find humour in despair remains an act of humanity.

The novel not simply about a robbery—it is about the persistent weight of dehumanization carried by refugees and immigrants. From physical violence and state apathy to workplace inequality and racial profiling, Achak's ordeal mirrors the many ways societies strip marginalised individuals of voice, agency, and respect. Yet, the chapter also subtly insists on resilience: in friendship, in survival, in humour, and in the small acts of self-worth—like *reprogramming birthdays* into a

new phone. It is through these simple rituals that Achak clings to his personhood, even in a world eager to forget it.

The novelist describes Achak's experience at a hospital in Atlanta. Achak visits a renowned hospital in Atlanta where he had once gone for a health check-up. This time, however, he is injured, with wounds on his face and head. His friend, Achore Achore, accompanies him and offers to stay. At the reception, a man named Julian warmly welcomes them and assures Achak that he will receive treatment even if he does not have insurance.

Initially, the narrator is hopeful that he will be treated quickly, but he ends up waiting for hours. Doubt creeps into his mind—perhaps the delay is because he does not have insurance. He even tries to show Julian his credit card to assure him of payment, but Julian just smiles and says, “We don’t take cash,” Julian says. “But don’t worry. We’ll treat you whether you have insurance or not” (241). Meanwhile, Achore Achore talks on the phone with friends about a Sudanese wedding where hundreds of people have gathered. This reminds the narrator of his former girlfriend, Tabitha, and their possible future together, making him melancholic. “Excuse me,” I say, “but I was wondering if the delay in treatment is due to a question about my ability to pay” (242). He is told there, “Valentine, we’ve got to take care of everyone who comes in here. By law, we do. We can’t turn you away. So you don’t need to show your credit cards” (243). Despite the hospital appearing relatively empty, the long wait frustrates him. Finally, he and Achak Achak call their friend Lino to help ease the long wait.

The Violent Displacement

Later in the chapter, the narrative shifts to the tragedies of Sudan. Achore

Achore and the narrator read an article about Darfur in a magazine, highlighting how the world remained largely indifferent to Sudan's atrocities. The discussion touches upon the discovery of oil in Sudan, with George H.W. Bush's role in 1974 being noted. The Khartoum government used armed horsemen, the Murahaleen, to drive the southern Nuer communities from their homes to take control of oil lands. Lino's family was one of those displaced—first warned to leave, then forcibly evicted by the army to move south or be killed. The local Nuer community was systematically displaced through brutal means. Initially, they were warned to leave their lands. When they refused, violence was unleashed—militias were sent to kill, terrorise, and force the Nuer to abandon their homes. Lino's village met the same tragic fate. Soldiers first arrived under the pretext of bureaucracy. Trusting the government's word, the villagers complied and gave their names, yet they chose to stay, rooted to their ancestral soil. Their resistance, however, was met with horrific violence. The soldiers kill the villagers:

One month later, as might have been expected, a regiment of militiamen and army soldiers rolled into the village. They very calmly strolled into the town, as they had when they took the names. They said nothing to anyone; once positioned, they began to shoot. They shot nineteen people in the first minute. They nailed one man to a tree, and dropped an infant into a well. They killed thirty-two in all, and then climbed back onto their trucks and left. That day, the survivors of the village packed and fled, traveling south. By 1984, Lino's village and the villages near it, all of those sitting atop the oil, were all cleared of Nuer, and Chevron was free to drill. (252)

The slaughter was brutal and indiscriminate. "They shot nineteen people in

the first minute. They nailed one man to a tree, and dropped an infant into a well. They killed thirty-two in all, and then climbed back onto their trucks and left” (252). After this calculated massacre, the survivors, shattered and terrified, fled south, abandoning the only home they had ever known. By 1984, Lino’s village, along with others in the region, had been cleared of Nuer inhabitants. Chevron, the American oil company, was then free to drill undisturbed.

This violent displacement was not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern where natural resources like oil became the catalysts for ethnic cleansing. As the narrator reflects, “Admittedly, oil is not at the centre of what has happened in Darfur, but Lino can tell you, Julian, about the role oil played in his own displacement” (250).

The tragedy lies not only in the loss of life but also in the betrayal of trust and the manipulation of hope. Lino’s family, like many others, believed in promises of compensation and peace, only to find themselves victims of a ruthless strategy to erase their existence for the sake of profit. The Nuer’s story, like that of many Sudanese, is a testament to the resilience and stubbornness of a people determined to hold onto their land—even when the cost of resistance was unimaginable suffering.

In the third chapter of the novel, the protagonist's sense of dehumanization becomes palpable through a series of unsettling and disorienting events. The imagery of being bound, with his movements restricted and mouth taped, highlights the loss of personal agency and autonomy. This chapter captures the stark reality of displacement, the emotional and physical isolation the protagonist experiences, and the pervasive violence that has followed him from his homeland to a foreign land. Through the use of personal reflection and painful memories, the protagonist

explores the theme of dehumanization in a world where survival seems to be a constant struggle. Bernard Bell mentions the apocalypse in conjunction with the black vernacular tradition, "...the tradition of the Afro-American novel is dominated by the struggle for freedom from all forms of oppression and by the personal odyssey to realize the full potential of one's complex bicultural identity as an Afro-American" (341–42).

The protagonist is lying on the carpet, his arms bound behind him with a phone cord, a direct reference to his past experiences with violence and restraint. He recalls seeing men executed in front of him when he was just eleven years old, an experience that forever marked his perception of life. The third chapter of the novel opens with these lines,

I open my eyes and the scene has changed. Most of my possessions are gone, yet, but the TV is still here, now on the kitchen table. Someone has turned it on and there is a boy watching it. The boy can be no more than ten, and he is sitting on one of my kitchen chairs, his feet dangling below (25).

Valentino does not know who the boy is. His recollection of these brutal events links his past experiences with the present, underscoring how violence and helplessness have defined much of his life. The juxtaposition of this harsh memory with the surreal image of a young boy watching TV in his kitchen reveals the profound alienation the protagonist feels in his new surroundings. The boy, who seems oblivious to the protagonist's plight, embodies the innocent yet detached perspective of someone untouched by the horrors that the protagonist has lived through. The boy's nonchalance in the face of the protagonist's pain contrasts sharply with the protagonist's overwhelming sense of loss and disorientation. This

line reflects the protagonist's powerlessness and his perception of being an object in a world that has stripped him of his humanity. Valentino thinks to settle in Canada thinking that there are less crimes,

I think I will definitely leave Atlanta. I might very well leave this country altogether; perhaps I will go to Canada. I know many Sudanese who have settled in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal. They tell me to join them, that there is less crime, more job options (27).

Thus, Valentino thinks about migrating to Canada due to inhuman treatment meted out with him. The protagonist's attempt to understand the boy's role in this situation reflects a yearning for meaning in the midst of chaos. Valentino admits, "We are not, I admit, skilled chefs" (28). He recalls how, during his time in the Sudan People's Liberation Army, boys like him were often tasked with guarding weapons, a role that reflects their subjugation to the will of the soldiers.

In *What is the What*, Dave Eggers renders a deeply poignant and harrowing account of the dehumanization experienced by Valentino Achak Deng and thousands of other 'Lost Boys' during their exodus from war-ravaged Sudan. Chapter three, in particular, illuminates the trauma and degradation inflicted upon these children as they journeyed through hostile terrain, where even nature itself became complicit in their suffering. The scene of the lion attack, chillingly recounted by Valentino, is a visceral symbol of how the boys were stripped of agency and dignity, reduced to mere prey in the merciless ecosystem of war and displacement. The novelist writes about the Lost Boys, "No doubt if you have heard of the Lost Boys of Sudan, you have heard of the lions" (30).

TV Boy as a Symbol of Detached New World

The character of TV Boy, in the novel, serves not just as a minor figure but as a deeply symbolic presence, embodying the emotional and cultural disconnect between refugees like Achak Deng and the indifferent world around them. TV Boy is not referred to by any real name throughout the novel; instead, Achak gives him this pseudonym—TV Boy—emphasising the boy's passive yet unsettling presence, during a traumatic event. His character is emblematic of a generation and a society that remain unaware of, or uninterested in, the agonising histories of others, particularly those displaced by war, genocide, and famine. Dave Eggers picturizes the TV Boy as a young African-American teenager who lives in the same building where Achak Deng resides in Atlanta. During the robbery of Achak's apartment by a young woman and her accomplice, TV Boy appears momentarily at the door. Achak, bound and battered, desperately attempts to catch TV Boy's attention, hoping for rescue. "Who are you, TV Boy? My assumption is that they have left you to guard me and the television, and that they will soon come to retrieve both" (26). However, TV Boy, failing to grasp the gravity of the situation, soon disappears without offering assistance. He remains largely passive, a silent observer of suffering he neither comprehends nor acknowledges.

Throughout the night, Achak—left without aid or compassion—begins a one-sided conversation with TV Boy in his mind. This imagined dialogue becomes a narrative device through which Achak recounts his harrowing journey from war-torn Sudan to the United States. TV Boy thus becomes the accidental witness and unwitting audience to a refugee's tale—a tale he neither hears nor responds to. More than that, TV Boy becomes a stand-in for the wider world that Achak is trying to

make sense of a world that offers sanctuary, yet remains disinterested in understanding the emotional and historical burdens carried by those it shelters.

The character of the TV Boy is not a fully fleshed-out character in the traditional sense. He is deliberately anonymous, lacking backstory, dialogue, or inner monologue. His function is more thematic than narrative. He represents the new world—America—that is safe, comfortable, and insulated from the horrors of distant lands. “Look at you, TV Boy, settling into that kitchen chair like it was some kind of bed” (30). He is a citizen of a country that prides itself on freedom and opportunity, yet he himself is perhaps disillusioned, disconnected, or even disempowered in his own way. Despite being American, TV Boy's passive role during Achak's crisis suggests that safety does not equate to sensitivity or moral consciousness. From Achak's perspective, TV Boy becomes a symbol of cultural amnesia—a world that has forgotten, or never known, what it means to live through genocide, displacement, starvation, and fear. As Achak mentally narrates his life story to this mute observer, he is not only seeking catharsis but is also drawing attention to the silence that often greets refugee narratives. The irony is poignant: Achak has finally reached a land of supposed safety and opportunity, but even here, he is robbed, beaten, and unheard. TV Boy's refusal—or inability—to engage becomes a metaphor for the emotional blindness of modern societies, where empathy is selective and global suffering is often reduced to images on a screen. TV Boy becomes a living contradiction—one who watches, but does not see, who is present, but not involved. His silent exit reflects the numbing effect of constant media exposure and the casual consumption of others' suffering without emotional engagement. The novelist writes about TV Boy:

TV Boy, you are no doubt thinking that we're absurdly primitive people, that a village that doesn't know whether or not to remove the plastic from a bicycle—that such a place would of course be vulnerable to attack, to famine and any other calamity. And there is some truth to this. In some cases we have been slow to adapt. And yes, the world we lived in was an isolated one. There were no TVs there, I should say to you, and I imagine it would not be difficult for you to imagine what this would do to your own brain, needing as it does steady stimulation. (40)

The novel, *What is the What*, is structured as a *fictional autobiography*—a blend of real-life events and imagined dialogue. Dave Eggers uses this narrative framework to give voice to Valentino Achak Deng's lived experiences, allowing the reader to access a deeply personal and emotional truth, even if through fictionalised elements. The silent, inert TV Boy becomes an unusual but effective narrative tool: his very silence creates a space for Achak's voice to emerge uninterrupted, unchallenged, and unfiltered. Through his imagined conversation with TV Boy, Achak reveals not only the facts of his past but also the emotions, confusion, resilience, and trauma that have defined his journey. The absence of dialogue from TV Boy forces the reader to focus entirely on Achak's story, positioning the refugee's voice at the centre while the 'new world's voice' remains eerily absent. TV Boy stands as a potent symbol of a world that is physically near but emotionally distant. He represents the cultural gap between those who have endured unimaginable suffering and those who have grown up in comfort, perhaps unaware of how privileged they are. In the novel, TV Boy does not need to speak, because his silence already speaks volumes—it speaks of ignorance, of disengagement, of a

society more interested in entertainment than in understanding. He is the embodiment of the America that offers refuge but not always empathy. Through the lens of TV Boy, *What is the What* critiques the indifference that often greets refugee experiences. Achak Deng, though physically removed from the perils of Sudan, finds himself emotionally isolated in the United States. His life, like that of many others, is a testimony waiting to be heard. And TV Boy—eyes fixed on the television, ears closed to the past—becomes a haunting reminder that stories, no matter how tragic, need listeners. Without them, the pain persists in silence.

Lions as Symbols of Fear and Dehumanization

In Chapter three of *What is the What*, Dave Eggers presents one of the most harrowing and unforgettable episodes from Valentino Achak Deng's journey as a *Lost Boy* of Sudan. As soon as the war broke out in Sudan, hundreds of boys fled their homes and began a long journey on foot toward Ethiopia. They were unarmed, barefoot, starving, and deeply frightened. The paths through the forest were extremely perilous—especially at night, when the darkness rendered everything nearly invisible. Yet, travelling during the night was their only option, for daylight brought with it the constant threat of aerial bombings and attacks by soldiers.

The first incident was two weeks into our walk. The sounds of the open forest at night were beginning to make us crazy. Some could not walk at night anymore; there were too many noises, each a possible end of life. We walked through narrow paths in the bush and we felt hunted. When we had had homes and families, we never walked through the forest at night because small people were eaten by animals without any fanfare. But now we were walking away from our homes, our families. We walked in a line of boys,

hundreds together, many of us naked, all of us defenceless. (30)

These boys faced danger from many wild animals, but the most terrifying of all were the lions. The author hauntingly remarks, “In the forest, we boys were food” (30). This single line encapsulates the raw vulnerability of the young refugees, highlighting how war had stripped them of safety, dignity, and even their humanity. This chapter, set in the treacherous wilderness between southern Sudan and Ethiopia, is marked by the brutal reality of wild animals, particularly lions, preying on children. This section functions not only as a literal recounting of the dangers the boys faced but also as a symbolic exploration of the deep dehumanization and trauma endured by child refugees. Valentino recounts, with chilling clarity, the first lion attack he witnesses during their journey. After two weeks of travelling, while the boys walk in a single file through the tall grass, a lion suddenly emerges and grabs a boy named Ariath. The image is stark:

The lion was a simple black silhouette, broad shoulders, its thick legs outstretched, its mouth open. It jumped from the grass, knocked a boy from his feet. I could not see this part, my vision obscured by the line of boys in front of me. I heard a brief wail. Then I saw the lion clearly again as it trotted to the other side of the path, the boy neatly in its jaws. The animal and its prey disappeared into the high grass and the wailing stopped in a moment.

That first boy’s name was Ariath (31).

Eggers uses minimalist yet vivid language to capture the shock and helplessness of the moment. The stark contrast between the innocent vulnerability of the boy and the predatory power of the lion is haunting. The fact that the boy is described as *neatly* fitting in the lion’s jaws underscores the unnatural normalcy of

such violence in war-ravaged landscapes. Only moments later, a second boy, Angelo, in a panic, breaks formation and runs. Predictably, the lion returns and snatches him too. What follows is a moment of absolute stillness, as if all the boys are suspended in terror. Valentino narrates about the second boy,

One boy, I remember his name as Angelo, he ran. He thought it was better to run from the lion than to sit, so he ran into the high grass. This is when I saw the lion again. The animal broke across the path once more, leaping, it caught Angelo quickly. In a few moments the lion carried the second boy in his mouth, his teeth settled into Angelo's neck and clavicle. He brought this boy to where he had deposited Ariath (31).

This simile powerfully conveys the emotional collapse and collective paralysis of the children. These boys are not merely children lost in the woods, they are prey in a landscape that has no mercy. The lions, in this context, become more than just animals—they are embodiments of the dangers and brutalities these children cannot escape, even in nature.

One of the most poignant aspects of the narrative is the way the children try to make sense of the violence around them. There is a tension between belief and disbelief. Some of the elders and more cynical individuals dismiss the stories of lion attacks as exaggerated or fictional. But Valentino insists that in most cases the stories were true. This insistence is crucial. It highlights how the world often turns a blind eye to the real horrors of war, especially when those horrors happen to children in remote corners of the world. Eggers uses these moments to challenge readers' preconceptions and force them to confront the visceral realities of displacement. The trauma inflicted by these attacks changes the boys' behaviour.

They begin to sleep in tightly packed circles, each child desperate to stay at the centre, away from the dangerous edges where a lion might strike. There is an unspoken hierarchy of safety, where being on the inside of the circle equates to a higher chance of survival. This leads to scenes where boys subtly or overtly push one another to the margins during sleep, just to avoid being exposed. Valentino recalls waking up one night and finding himself on the edge: he was feeling sever cold, and was connected to no one. The isolation and abandonment he feels in that moment mirror the larger isolation of being a refugee—discarded, forgotten, and left to fend for oneself in a hostile world.

The boys adopt a method of psychological survival taught by Dut Majok, one of their temporary leaders. He encourages them to mentally construct and recall their happiest memories before sleep. He instructs: “Now create in your mind the best of days... and when you are the most frightened, bring forth this day and place yourself within it” (32). This technique is both touching and heartbreaking. It reveals how the children try to reclaim a semblance of humanity and hope amid horror. In the first chapter also Valentino remembers about lions attacks:

I have seen three boys taken by lions, eaten haphazardly. I watched them lifted from their feet, carried off in the animal’s jaws and devoured in the high grass, close enough that I could hear the wet snapping sounds of the tearing of flesh. I have watched a close friend die next to me in an overturned truck, his eyes open to me, his life leaking from a hole I could not see. (7)

These mental refuges become essential for emotional survival, even when physical survival remains uncertain. In many ways, the lions in the novel are not just threats from the natural world, they are symbols of the broader forces that prey upon

the innocent—war, displacement, indifference, and the stripping away of childhood. They represent how the world views these children: not as human beings deserving of protection, but as expendable bodies lost in the chaos of conflict. The fact that no help ever comes, that the attacks continue without retribution or prevention, reinforces the bleak message of abandonment that runs throughout the memoir.

Thus, the lion episodes in *What is the What* stand as powerful metaphors for the dehumanising experiences of the Lost Boys. They are stark, unforgettable, and deeply symbolic. Through Valentino's eyes, Eggers offers a raw and intimate glimpse into a world where children are hunted, memories are weaponised for survival, and nature itself becomes complicit in the cruelty of war. The narrative does not allow the reader to look away. Instead, it insists that we confront the truth—however brutal—that in the forests of Sudan, children were food. It can be said that the lion attack or the nocturnal journeys in the novel are meditation how these Lost Boys are stripped of their identity and become the food for the wild beasts. Here in this novel, forest does not depict just as a physical jeopardy but it can be called a symbolic dangerous place where safety of the human beings is obliterated.

Dehumanization through Education and Environment

In Chapter four of *What is the What*, the theme of dehumanization is vividly depicted through the educational experiences of Achak, the protagonist. The text also explores how societal structures and personal experiences strip individuals of their humanity, reducing them to mere numbers or faceless entities in the face of war, violence, and displacement. Achak's journey through the dehumanizing experiences of education, childhood, and group identity serves as a poignant

illustration of how systemic forces and human suffering erode individual identity and autonomy. The first significant instance of dehumanization appears when Achak describes his experience in the school system: "I am here with other boys of my age-set, those within a few years of me, older and younger, learning the alphabet in English and Arabic" (34). In this moment, Achak reflects on the artificial and detached nature of the education he is receiving. The fact that he is being taught in English and Arabic, languages that are neither his mother tongue nor representative of his immediate world, highlights a disconnect from his cultural identity. Education, which should ideally nurture individuality and cultural roots, here serves as a tool for cultural erasure. The imposition of foreign languages over his native tongue alienates Achak from his own cultural foundation. The educational system thus becomes a form of dehumanization, as it diminishes the value of local language and identity, replacing them with an impersonal, standardized curriculum that does not reflect the personal or cultural realities of the students. This disconnection from one's language and cultural heritage is a profound form of dehumanization, as it strips the individual of their sense of self and belonging.

Secondly, Achak's fleeting moment of childhood freedom further underscores the theme of dehumanization. When he remarks, "The school is tolerable, is not yet tedious, but I would rather be outside, so my dream-day begins when I arrive for school and it is cancelled" (34), we see a glimpse of his childlike innocence and desire for freedom. He yearns for the playful, carefree moments of childhood, which are soon shattered. This fleeting moment of liberty is quickly interrupted, as the narrative moves forward, showing how Achak's childhood is overtaken by war, displacement, and violence. The very essence of childhood,

characterized by joy and play, is taken away from him. They were free to enjoy their childhood whims and fancies, without considering the consequences. Valentino remarks William K's drinking milk, as,

He drinks his milk straight from the udder. Did you know that? You get diseases that way. That's how you get ringworm. Speaking of ringworm, William A's father is part dog. Did you know that? (34)

But the primitive atmosphere of their villages made their childhood days lack of opportunities to enjoy the modern facilities. The days were not spend with much excitements as they do not prolong in the same manner as its conditions were exposed to sudden changes and the deficits haunted them, Achak says,

TV Boy, you are no doubt thinking that we're absurdly primitive people, that a village that doesn't know whether or not to remove the plastic from a bicycle—that such a place would of course be vulnerable to attack, to famine and any other calamity. And there is some truth to this. In some cases we have been slow to adapt. And yes, the world we lived in was an isolated one. There were no TVs there, I should say to you, and I imagine it would not be difficult for you to imagine what this would do to your own brain, needing as it does steady stimulation. (36)

This transition from freedom to forced immobility and suffering represents the early stages of dehumanization. In war and conflict, children are often robbed of their innocence and are transformed into mere survivors or victims of a larger, impersonal system. They become defined not by their personal experiences but by their status as refugees or victims of violence. Achak's dream of a carefree childhood evaporates, and he is slowly reduced to a number — a 'lost boy,' one

among many, whose individuality is ignored in the face of war. The cruelty of this transformation lies in how it forces the child to abandon their sense of wonder, replacing it with survival instincts dictated by the larger socio-political forces at play.

Dehumanization with the Marginalized

There are different parameters of marginalizations in the world. The writer talks about third element of dehumanization manifests in the use of the term *age-set*, “I am here with other boys of my age-set, those within a few years of me, older and younger, learning the alphabet in English and Arabic” (34). The concept of the age-set exemplifies how Achak and the other boys are viewed not as individuals, but as part of a collective group defined by age. This classification reduces them to a faceless mass, stripping them of their personal identities and reducing them to mere components of a larger system. The age-set is a form of categorization that does not account for the unique experiences or qualities of each individual, but instead groups them according to arbitrary characteristics, such as age. This loss of individuality is a subtle but powerful form of dehumanization, as it forces individuals to conform to a predetermined collective identity rather than allowing them to exist as distinct beings with their own personalities and histories. In contexts of war and ethnic conflict, such collective identities are often thrust upon people, erasing their personal narratives and reducing them to mere participants in a larger, often violent, political struggle. Dehumanization through the marginalized is also seen in Mulk Raj Anand’s novel *Untouchable* (1935) also when Pundit Kali Nath tries to molest Sohini. Her brother, Bakha’s pain at the end of Sohini molestation episode reflects “...they think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt” (76). She is condemned

by Gulabo because of Sohini's beauty. She insults and abuses Sohini. He says at their marginalized status:

My poor sister! How can she show her face to the world after this? ...why was she born a girl in our house to bring disgrace upon us so beautiful! So beautiful and so accursed! I wish she had been the ugliest woman in the world! Then no one would have teased her!...Oh, God, why was she born, why was she born. (57).

As we delve deeper into Achak's narrative, it becomes clear that the constant stripping away of individuality is a central theme. His education, childhood freedom, and sense of self are all systematically eroded, leaving him as a product of war, a displaced person whose identity is defined not by his own choices or desires, but by the political and social forces that surround him. This process of dehumanization is not an isolated experience; it is a systemic one, deeply embedded in the structures of education, war, and societal classification. Achak gets respect from Madam Amath who talks with him with restful words like 'Young man' and 'gentleman' (41) otherwise he gets only disrespect from people. She is the girl who praises his efforts even when Achak fails to bring water to her. The experiences of Achak are a stark reflection of the larger mechanisms of dehumanization that occur in times of conflict. The imposition of foreign education, the loss of childhood innocence, and the reduction of people to mere categories all serve to strip individuals of their humanity, turning them into statistics or abstractions. Through Achak's eyes, the reader is confronted with the profound impacts of war and displacement on the human soul. It is a powerful reminder that in times of conflict, it is not just physical bodies that are affected, but the very essence of what makes someone human—their

identity, their language, their childhood, and their individuality. In this sense, *What is What* serves as both a narrative of survival and a meditation on the dehumanizing forces of war and displacement.

Conscription of Children into Military Service

The novel also depicts the theme of dehumanization through the theme of child conscription in the military service in his village. Achak tells about his village, “This is a land of forests and jungles, of river and swamps, of hundreds of tribes, thousands of clans, millions of people” (47) The novel depicts children as innocent victims upon whom the brutality of war is inflicted. Achak, once a child himself caught in the machinery of civil conflict, declares with striking candour that children like him were only used even in school:

I know everything one can know about the wasting of youth, about the ways boys can be used. Of those boys with whom I walked, about half became soldiers eventually. And were they all willing? Only a few. They were twelve, thirteen years old, little more, when they were conscripted. We were all used, in different ways. We were used for war, we were used to garner food and the sympathy of the humanitarian-aid organizations. Even when we were going to school, we were being used. (47)

This theme has been depicted in chapter five of the novel where children in the tender age of twelve or thirteen are treated just as mere targets and their childhood is snatched from them. These children are used not to make officers but the soldiers in the war so that they may be used. Their classrooms are converted into camouflage for training grounds. They are affected by the violence and even forced to endure pain, not by choice but compulsion. The conflict in Southern Sudan affects

the boys in different ways. Their homes are destroyed and their family members are displaced. It decimated their innocence and transforms them into pawns of war. They are systematically exploited by the rebel groups. Their suffering has been depicted as a medium to attract sympathy from others and they were just used as *aid baits*. The novelist writes about the SPLA training camps,

“But just a few miles away from our civilian camp, the SPLA had their own base, where they trained and planned, and there was a steady pipeline of supplies and recruits that travelled between the two camp (48) .

They think that every angry child is a potential soldier and needs recruitments. The brutality of war is devouring the young and budding minds as a bait to work as soldier. Thus this narrates how war is consuming the youngest citizen. Furthermore, the boys in the refugee camps, the boys are being used as objects and it narrates the cruel facet of dehumanization where they are stripped off their dignity and humanity. Their pain and problems are ignored and it is considered as if it were a normal physical condition rather than a human experience. “But first we have to leave Atlanta. You need to move far away from these people who have put you in this situation, and I need to leave what has become an untenable climate” (48). The environment is quite tensed and it gives indication that justice and humanitarian attitude seems impossible in such environment, “Things here are too tense, too political. There are eight hundred Sudanese in Atlanta, but there is no harmony” (48). The narrator describes how the armies coerced and exploited these children both physically and psychologically. These children’s personal dreams are destroyed and pain is presented to them in gift by war. “The pain is compounded by my existing headache...” (50). The overall situation of the which village is quite

tormenting and it seems that the village lacks life in it.

Chapter six of *What is the What* starkly illustrates the persistent theme of dehumanization—both in the protagonist’s present captivity and in the recollections of past atrocities in Sudan. Through dual narratives—the present interaction with the boy Michael and a memory of the handless man Michael Luol—the text reveals how human dignity is stripped through neglect, violence, and systems of inequality. Dehumanization operates as both a physical and psychological force, haunting the narrator and shaping his perception of suffering and justice. The chapter opens with the narrator observing the boy who has imprisoned him. The boy, once perceived as a menace, is now reduced to a vulnerable figure: “He is having a nightmare, his face contorted like a toddler’s... But I am less sympathetic now.” This moment encapsulates the emotional detachment that trauma can produce. Although the boy Michael is humanised momentarily through his sleep, the narrator cannot fully extend empathy. The asymmetry of power has distorted even his compassion. The psychological violence of captivity strips the narrator of his own humanity, as he is forced to suppress natural emotions for self-preservation.

Dehumanization through Communalism

The novel exemplifies the theme of *dehumanization* thorough communalism. Segregation or the division of human being based on religion, caste, creed, wealth, heritage, culture etc. are shown in the novel in a profound form. The protagonist experiences severe form of dehumanization from the hands of the Murahaleen, who follow a different religion, custom and culture. Valentino and others underwent severe discrimination from the clutches of these invaders. Dave Eggers has presented this theme in Chapter six through the character Michael Luol, who is a

handless man who is a victim of scathing institutional dehumanization.

But this man, whose name we learned was Michael Luol, was missing a hand. Where his right hand should have been, his wrist led nowhere. The crowd, mostly men, were inspecting the missing hand of the young man, and there were many opinions about who was to blame (53).

When he was caught stealing, hands are cut off as punishment. The below conversation lays the stress of a bit of religious fanaticism by the novelist:

—He was caught stealing. He was punished.

—It's an outrage! This is not Sudanese justice. The handless man sat silently.

—It is now. That's the point. This is sharia.

—We can't live under sharia!

—We're not living under sharia. This was in Khartoum. You go to Khartoum, you live under their law. (54)

He lived in his own village with his wife. He was punished not because he was a thief but just because he did not belong to their own religion. The crowd debates the justice of his punishment which seems to be an act of inhumanity. The mutilation of the limbs under sharia law has been portrayed as a preservation of justice in the novel because it falls under the legal system. It outwardly looks like an inhuman act but it presented as an order. The mosque has its different rules and it separated traditional Sudanese values. Thus the novelist has tried to project how there are some rules devised by religions not by governments and some people have to pay its price by giving their life or by their organs. The people have less sympathetic attitude towards some people in some cases. Here in the novel even Michael Luol's community members do not empathize with his suffering; rather,

they show apathy and hatred towards him. He has no chance of getting a wife after this tragedy. The novelist also writes that “...he would never have a wife now, no matter what dowry he could offer, and that no woman should be required to have a husband with a missing hand” (54). Some people thought that the punishment given to him is justified. The young narrator also did not have any sympathy with him:

I remember at that moment not liking this handless man. I felt like the man deserved to have his hand missing. To be so poor, living in a plastic house! To be asking for food! To have no water! To live so poor near the Arabs who lived well. I was ashamed. I loathed the men who drank during the day in Marial Bai’s market and I loathed this man living in the plastic house. I know this is not an admirable sentiment, to despise the poor, the fallen, but I was too young to feel pity (55).

The novelist further comments that poverty is a curse, and people become devoid of any compassion. They do not think for the poor, and psychological scars are inflicted upon them. Here in the novel Achak also confesses that he has loathed that man, which denotes that poverty becomes a source of shame rather than sympathy for people. People blame the poor for their poverty. The novelist depicts how poor people must take up a profession according to their capacity and convenience. Michael works as a scavenger and it cannot be called a profession, rather it is a survival instinct. But many people see it as a degraded profession. The lines of the novel “He used to go out looking in the garbage for food... chicken bones... broken radio” (55) force the readers to think that poverty is not their personal choice, it is a compulsion. No one in the world wants to be poor. Michael Luol’s hand was taken, his manhood questioned, and his future obliterated. His

dehumanization is complete not only through physical violence but through social exclusion, as he no longer considered normal after losing his hand. Michael was very sad after the death of his wife after dysentery. He steals from the man he worked for. It was a small thievery and in fact, it cannot be called a thievery, instead it was his dire need. He stole just a brick when his wife was alive because the wind was blowing his plastic house. The novelist writes about it:

He took something, I think. He stole something from someone. Maybe from the man he worked for when he was working with bricks. He went back there and stole something. I think it was a brick. Wait. It was a brick but he stole it before. He stole the brick when his wife was alive, because the wind kept blowing his plastic house away. So he took the brick and then they found him. Then he was caught and then the wife died and then he came back down here. (56)

After this incident, he is arrested and the police cut off his hand in the hospital where only one doctor and nurse were present. It was an inhuman punishment given to Michael Luon. It is clear that no court of the world will give such a harsh punishment to someone for stealing a brick but the novelist narrates that it was due to Islamic law, Sharia. Eggers's novel lays bare the psychic toll of such a world, where people have lost their emotions for others and have been degraded. Moreover, the novelist has depicted dehumanization through Michael's poverty also. He and his wife were living in abject poverty and their house was made of plastic and sticks, and they were so poor that they could not build a strong shelter. The choice of materials—rudimentary, weak, impermanent—symbolizes the fragility of their lives and the lack of protection they are afforded by the state or

society. Their marriage, too, is not based on joy but bare necessity, “Made no sense to either one of us, to marry when one had no money and no home” (55). This admission speaks volumes about the absence of human dignity in decisions that are otherwise meant to celebrate union and companionship. Dehumanization here is evident in the forced abandonment of dreams and emotions due to survival constraints. The man’s wife dies a preventable death—of dysentery and malaria—due to contaminated water and the inaccessibility of hospitals. Her death is narrated in a chilling detail, “When she died her eyes popped out of her head” (55). This grotesque imagery strips the woman of even the dignity of death. The focus is not on mourning, but on a sensationalized physical detail, reducing her demise to an image of horror rather than humanity. Even William K is suspected of fabricating this image, suggesting a tragic tendency among survivors to normalize and dramatize suffering in a world where pain is currency. Thus, the novel is about religious extremism and the state-sanctioned violence also depicts dehumanization.

Helicopters as the Instruments of Death

Dehumanization is a pervasive theme in Dave Eggers’ *What is the What* and it has been depicted through various themes in the novel. The helicopters have been depicted as the instruments of death and dehumanization in the novel. These have not been depicted as machines but as great black machines whose sound “was like the noise an old lorry might make, but it was coming from above... spreading itself wide across the sky” (74). There were around six aeroplanes and many young soldiers came out these back machines. “I watched as one of the crickets flew over the soccer field, flying lower than the other machines; I watched as the twenty young men playing on the field ran toward the school, screaming. Then a new sound

pumped through the air. It was like the cutting and dividing of the machine, but it was not that” (74-75). Achak’s mother senses the danger and she warns Achak saying:

—You fool! They’ll kill you!

—Who? Who are they?

—The army. The helicopters. Oh, Achak, I’m worried. Please pray for us. (75)

There was terror in the whole village. Many people were killed and several people were wounded. The villagers stared leaving their homes, “The men and women of Marial Bai slowly left their homes and walked again under the noon sun. They tended to the wounded and counted the dead” (75). It was quite a tough time for the villagers. There was an atmosphere of uncertainty in the village. People were not certain whether they would be alive tomorrow or not, “It was the beginning of the end of knowing that life would continue. Do you have a feeling, Michael, that you will wake up tomorrow? That you will eat tomorrow? That the world will not end tomorrow?” (75). When the people counted the number of the dead people, thirty were gone. The novelist narrates about it, “Thirty had been killed. Twenty men, most of the victims those who had been playing soccer. Eight women and two children, younger than me” (75). The next morning army trucks returned and soldiers surrounded the town early in the morning and soon the city was seen blazing. Those people who tried to resist, they were shot dead:

Once there was enough light to function efficiently, the soldiers jumped from the trucks and went about methodically burning down the town of Marial Bai. They started a great fire in the middle of the market, and from this fire they took burning logs and torches, and these they threw onto the roofs of

most of the homes within a one-mile radius. The few men who resisted were shot. This was effectively the end of any kind of life in Marial Bai for some time. Again, the rebels for whom this was retribution were nowhere to be found. (76)

The conversation between William K. and Achak also reveals the height of dehumanization. In *What is the What*, Dave Eggers crafts a hauntingly vivid narrative that depicts the dehumanization suffered by the Dinka people of Sudan during the civil war. Through the lens of a child protagonist, Achak Deng, Eggers exposes how war strips individuals of their agency, identity, and humanity. The characters are not only victims of physical violence but also of psychological and social degradation that leave lasting scars.

The scene where Achak meets his friend William K upon returning to the village illustrates the corrosion of innocence and the heavy burden of trauma borne even by children. William, once a lively boy, is confined to the perimeter of his home by a symbolic line of sticks, “I can’t walk over those without her. They killed my brother Joseph. I didn’t know anything about this. I remembered Joseph, much older, dancing at my uncle’s wedding. He was a very thin man, small, considered fragile” (84). When it is asked “Who killed him?”, the name emerges, the Murahaleen, the Arab militias responsible for all the killings and atrocities against the Dinka people of southern Sudan.

The horsemen, the Murahaleen. They killed him and four other men. And the old man, the one-eyed man in the market. They killed him for talking too much. He spoke Arabic and was cursing the raiders. So they killed him with a gun first and then with their knives. Look. William K showed me a line of

sticks, set end to end, encircling his family's compound. (84)

The novel talks about violence and cruelty. William K. tells Achak, "I can't walk over those without her. They killed my brother Joseph" (84). This boundary represents not only a physical restriction but also a psychological fence of fear and loss. The killing of Joseph by the Murahaleen becomes a brutal marker of a life forever altered by violence. These are the armed nomadic groups who receive patronage from the Sudanese government and they raid villages, abduct women, loot property, burn house and kill the villagers during the Sudanese civil wars. These people symbolize state-sponsored violence, ethnic oppression, and religious conflict. These people wield weapons come on horsebacks and attack the villages like Marial Bai. These are the carriers of physical destruction and the psychological terror due to which many people lose their family members and children like Achak become homeless wanderer. One particularly horrifying scene is recounted by William K, when the Murahaleen shoot his brother Joseph, even after Joseph stops running in surrender. "The man was on his horse. He yelled at Joseph, 'Don't run! Don't run or I'll shoot!' So Joseph stopped there and turned to the man on the horse. And that's when he shot him." (85). The act of stopping in surrender and still being shot conveys a cruel, inhuman logic where the rules of engagement are nullified. The post-mortem desecration—Joseph's body being tied to a horse and dragged—further degrades his humanity, transforming him from a person into an object of spectacle and terror. It is a burning example of dehumanization and savagery inflicted by these militia. Dehumanization is not only inflicted by the perpetrators of violence but is also internalised by the victims. Achak's response is one of confusion and a desperate search for logic in an illogical world.

—What did he do to them? Why did they shoot him?

—He did nothing, Achak.

—He must have done something.

—He ran.

—William K said he stopped. My mother sighed and sat next to me. (85)

This short exchange between Achak and his mother encapsulates the existential bewilderment of war. The need to rationalise Joseph's death is met with the stark reality: in war, lives are taken not because of guilt or reason, but because the victim belongs to a group deemed disposable.

This disposability is reinforced by the imagery of the desolate village, with empty huts and abandoned structures. "The schoolhouse was abandoned. Nothing was happening anywhere in Marial Bai" (87). The space of learning, growth, and community is now a shell, its walls are punctured by bullet holes. "Moses and I wandered through the cool darkness of the schoolhouse. It was empty, the walls punctured by bullet holes. We put our fingers in one, two, three—so many that we gave up counting" (87). When Moses and Achak try to count the holes, they give up, overwhelmed. The futility of their task mirrors the futility of trying to quantify or comprehend the scale of their loss. The eradication of male presence in Marial Bai "Most of the men of Marial Bai were gone. The men who remained were very old or very young. Everyone between fourteen and forty was gone" (87) emphasizes the erasure of a generation. This absence is both physical and symbolic: the men who would defend, educate, and guide are missing, presumed dead or in exile. The community is left fractured, with only the very old and very young remaining—a demographic collapse that signals social and cultural disintegration. The novel also

gives space to dehumanization through dehumanization when Achak desires to take revenge from the soldiers and the following lines reflect their vengeance:

I wanted to see the rebels shoot the men who had killed Joseph Kol, William K's brother who had done nothing. I closed my eyes and pictured the Arabs falling from their horses in explosions of blood. If I was near, I would stand over them, beating them with rocks. In my vision there were so many of them, at least one hundred, the Arabs on horseback, and they were all dead. They were shot by the rebels and now William K and I were crushing their faces with our feet. It was glorious. (86)

He imagines himself and William K "crushing their faces with our feet."

These fantasies, while arising from trauma, reflect how violence begets violence and how the oppressed may internalize the logic of brutality. The enemy becomes animalized, "We'll kill them! We'll kill all of them! If the Dinka have guns we'll kill all the Baggara like they're animals! I wanted to see it happen. I wanted it more than anything" (86). Such language demonstrates how cycles of dehumanization perpetuate themselves.

Dehumanization is not merely a by-product of war — it is a mechanism that makes its cruelty possible. In the harrowing narrative drawn from the Sudanese Civil War, as portrayed in *What is the What* by Dave Eggers (based on the life of Valentino Achak Deng), dehumanization emerges as a terrifying force, stripping individuals of dignity, agency, and humanity. This account unflinchingly presents a series of violent encounters that illustrate how war systematically turns people into objects, targets, or cargo—all expendable. Thus, the novelist has depicted the devastating aftermath of war. The deaths due to the helicopter attacks are not merely

death, it means human beings have been taken as the tool of revenge. There is no human value for these people as they are considered just numbers to take revenge. Killing innocent people like this is nothing but an inhuman act. It can be called a systematic dismantling of human lives. Here people are not killed because they are human beings but because they are enemies. The next day when the Sudanese army soldiers arrive, they show a total disregard of human life. The phrase “methodically burning” implies an institutionalized dehumanization. This is not random violence; it is policy-backed annihilation.

Chapter seven of *What is the What* is a haunting portrayal of how war and violence dehumanize not just bodies but psyches, identities, and histories. Eggers employs powerful imagery and narrative contrast to show how the protagonist, Valentino Achak Deng, endures erasure across time and space—from the genocidal violence in Marial Bai to the indignities of urban captivity in the United States. Whether through the crushing sound of helicopters or the smothering silence imposed by a teenager’s foot, the chapter paints a chilling portrait of humanity degraded. It forces readers to confront the many ways individuals and institutions can render others invisible, voiceless, and unworthy—not through cruelty alone, but through indifference.

War, Violence and Dehumanization in War-Torn Sudan

In Chapter eight of *What is the What*, Dave Eggers starkly portrays the pervasive and insidious nature of violence and dehumanization in Sudan during the Second Civil War. Through the character of Achak and the suffering of his family, particularly his father Deng Arou, the novelist encapsulates how systemic violence, suspicion, and militarization strip people of their dignity, identity, and even

humanity. The novel narrates the forced separation of Achak's family. His father has to take the decision to settle in Aweil with some family members. He leaves some family members like Achak's mother in Marial Bai. This separation is a symbol of emotional dehumanization.

He closed the Marial Bai shop, divided his family, and prepared to move himself and his business interests to Aweil, about one hundred miles north. He brought two wives and seven children with him; I was selected to accompany him, but my mother was not. She and the other wives and their children were to remain in Marial Bai, living in our half-ruined home. They would be safe in the village now, he assured us all; he had gathered us in the compound one Sunday after church and had laid out his plan.(77)

Achak's father, in an effort to ensure the family's safety, is compelled to break the family bond, leaving some behind in while taking others. His wife's silent suffering reflects suppressed maternal anguish in a patriarchal structure dictated by war, "My mother was furious to be left behind. But she said nothing" (77). This illustrates the emotional erosion and silencing of women amidst conflict—they are expected to endure, obey, and suffer in silence. Their migration to Aweil is not only geographical but essential. Aweil is a symbol of dismemberment—physically and psychologically.

"I saw many new and largely unhappy things in my first day, including my second handless person" (78). The physical assault, beating and torture of young Dinka men presents a quite disturbing picture of dehumanization in the novel. The physical maiming of people, punishment, mutilation and killings are different forms of dehumanization in the novel. Wherever they go, their bad luck follows them,

“Every day brought an assault, an interrogation. Men were hauled to the barracks with such regularity that it was expected that any young Dinka man in Aweil would be subjected to interrogation sooner or later” (79).

Achak’s father was once a very powerful figure but he is reduced to a powerless creature before state authority. He is dragged away for questioning, “He was taller than the boy-soldiers but still he seemed very thin and feminine walking beside them” (79). This incident presents an emasculation not just physical but also symbolic because Achak’s father was a protector of the village but now he appears to be weak. This visual evokes an intense emasculation—not just physical, but symbolic. A father who once stood as protector and provider now appears weak, vulnerable, and even feminised in the face of armed adolescents. Achak’s response is telling, “That day, I was ashamed of my father, and I was angry. He hadn’t told me where he was going. He hadn’t told me if he would be jailed or killed or return within an hour” (81). Thus, the war does not brutalise the bodies, it devours’ people’s dignity, happiness, protection and at times, life itself. Bol Dut is another important and influential character in the novel. He was once a very influential political leader. But his power fails to save him. He is not spared. He seems to be paranoid and defeated. He says to Achak’s father which states his helplessness:

—Normally I could do something, Bol added.

—I know, I know.

—But now I’m in more trouble than you, Deng Arou. (84)

Dave Eggers tries to depict through Bol Dut’s character that war does not result in physical decay and decline of power, it also results in loss of leadership and identity. War does not mutilates bodies it also destroys the faith and legacies of

people in the social and political structure. Bol Dut was a powerful leader in the village having a good place and dignity in society, but as the war intensifies, his status and demeanour change dramatically. He seems to be paranoid and deafened. This transformation is explicit when Bol confides in Deng Arou. Further, the novel also narrates the theme of existential crisis of humanity through Deng Arou's lamentation. During the war men's life and responsibilities multiply, "It's a bad time to be a man in this country" (80). This sentence narrates the crisis of masculinity where men are seen as hunted and hushed during the war. Bol Dut decides to stay in Marial Bai despite the danger of imminent war. He considers himself guilty if he chooses to flee during this tough time. That's why he says to his father, "No. I should wait it out. It would be worse if I left. It would look far more suspicious. I have to stay or..." (81). His father suggests him to go to Uganda or Kenya, but Bol Dut remains firm in his decision. His dead body is found lying in mud the next morning. Thus, it has been depicted that people don't die, there is death of their identity during the war and they become numbers. .

Destruction of Marial Bai

When Achak and his father returned from Aweil, they found that their village has been destroyed by the militants or Murahaleen. The destruction of the village has been narrated in the following words:

We had been gone three months. When we returned, we found only a series of circles of charred earth. I do not know if any homes were still standing. I suppose there were a few, and the families who remained in Marial Bai had crowded into them. My father's homes were no more. When we left, our compound, though damaged, still comprised three huts and a brick home.

Now there was nothing, just rubble, ash. (83)

This destruction shows how people become cruel during the war. It depicts the annihilation of the entire humanity. The systematic dehumanization of individuals and communities in conflict is further evidenced in the conversation about the Murahaleen, the raiders who kill with impunity. William K. recalls how his brother, Joseph, was killed.

The horsemen, the Murahaleen. They killed him and four other men. And the old man, the one-eyed man in the market. They killed him for talking too much. He spoke Arabic and was cursing the raiders. So they killed him with a gun first and then with their knives. (84)

The brutal nature of this murder, where a man is tortured and killed for speaking out, reflects how war and violence create a climate where individuals are reduced to their actions or affiliations. Joseph, a boy with his own identity, is reduced to a mere target, his death serving as a message rather than a loss of a human being. Perhaps Joseph was alive but they drag him alive to kill if any breathing is left. This narration is absolutely full of dehumanization, “Maybe he didn’t die. I don’t know. They dragged him away. They shot him and then they tied him to the horse and dragged him away. Here.” (84). Thus, the loss of the loved one also almost kills those family members who remain alive behind. The villagers live in constant fear and there is no hope in their lives. They only think about how to save their lives.

In this context, death becomes an impersonal event. The narrative does not focus on the personal grief of the characters but rather on the system that produces such violence. The protagonist’s thoughts about the rebels killing the Baggara are

steeped in the logic of revenge and retribution, “If the Dinka have guns we’ll kill all the Baggara like they’re animals!” In this moment, the dehumanization is not only one-sided but cyclical, as both sides in the conflict are trapped in a cycle of violence that erases their humanity and reduces them to symbols of vengeance and hatred.

The narrative unfolds a brutal landscape where dehumanization permeates every aspect of life. From Bol Dut’s tragic death to the destruction of Marial Bai, the human cost of war is laid bare. Through the personal experiences of the protagonist, we see how individuals are forced to dehumanize themselves and others in order to survive.

Chapter nine is also full of dehumanization. Achak shares with his friend Michael the terrifying day when his village, Marial Bai, was attacked by the militia (the Murahaleen). On that day, his father had gone to the city of Wau for business. Achak’s mother was preparing firewood for cooking when she suddenly saw something dreadful. Her face turned pale with fear—she grabbed her son and ran. They hid in a nearby grass field with another woman. From there, they could see how the mounted attackers were surrounding the village, burning down the church and the hospital, and killing people.

The massacre begins with a chilling realization, “There were only twenty last time, the woman said. There were easily two hundred, three hundred, or more now” (89). The escalation in numbers signifies not only an increase in the scale of violence but also the industrialization of brutality—human lives become statistics in a grander scheme of destruction. This sense of helplessness is captured in the mother’s solemn words, “This is the end, my mother said. They mean to kill us all”

(89). This prophecy does not stem from paranoia but from painful clarity—she has seen this pattern before.

At that moment, the shooting began. The guns were like those the government army carried, huge and black. The sky broke open with gunfire. The pop-pop-pop came from every corner of the village. (89)

From the outset, civilians—particularly the Dinka—are not treated as human beings but as obstacles, targets, or tools. Their only perceived value lies in their cattle or food. As one woman remarks, “They want the cattle. The cattle and the food. Then they’re gone” (89). The implication is deeply disturbing: human beings are left behind, dispensable, their lives deemed worthless once material needs are satisfied.

The attack begins, and the village is engulfed in chaos. The description of gunfire transforms the sky into an agent of destruction. Even the heavens, traditionally a symbol of hope and divinity, offer no sanctuary. The horsemen, with their war cries of “Allah Akhbar!”, carry not spiritual salvation but terror cloaked in holy invocation. Sacred places such as the church and the hospital are not spared: “A man lit a torch and tossed it onto the roof of the hospital.” Another hurled an explosive into the church, “splintering the walls and eliminating the roof” (90). These institutions, once symbols of healing and spiritual refuge, are violently unmade, reinforcing that in war, nothing is sacred.

One of the most jarring episodes of dehumanization involves the young man emerging from a burning hut: “Guns popped from the perimeter and the man’s chest burst red. He fell, and no one else left the hut” (90). His attempt at surrender is met

not with mercy but with execution. Surrender—a fundamental right under the laws of war—is rendered meaningless.

The gendered aspect of dehumanization is particularly haunting. Women and girls are herded, bound, and treated like livestock. “One by one the rest of the girls were lifted by pairs of men and fastened onto their horses...as they would a rug or a bundle of kindling” (93). Their humanity is erased as they become spoils of war. A woman’s defiance—her verbal attack on the militiamen—is met with swift, detached violence. That her murder is performed without emotion further emphasises the psychological detachment required for such acts—an essential feature of dehumanization.

The episode of the twins Ahok and Awach trying to hold hands, even as they are being tied to different horses, stands as a symbol of innocent resistance. “They wailed and reached for each other and when the horses moved, for a moment Ahok and Awach found themselves close enough to hold hands.” This image is heartbreakingly poignant—a final, human gesture in a world intent on tearing them apart.

The killing of adult men is systematic and efficient, “Those who ran were shot. Those women and children who stood still were herded onto the soccer field...The horsemen had no use for the grown men” (92). Here, the adult male body is perceived as either a threat or a waste. Thus, it must be eliminated. One man is tied and dragged behind horses, his death treated as spectacle: “The grown man who had tried to join the group of women and children in the soccer field was now dead. He was tied by the feet and then was dragged behind a pair of horses. Many of the Baggara were amused by this and I now could imagine what had been done to

Joseph” (92). The suffering is not hidden, it is performed.

Amid this atrocity, there are rare, flickering instances of human resistance and dignity. The rebel Manyok Bol, who kills one of the horsemen, is quickly executed and cut into six parts and thrown down in a well. Even his rebellion is not met with the respect afforded a warrior, but with mutilation, further denying him human honour in death.

Achak’s mother, even as she prepares her son to run, realises the futility of escape. Her instructions that you will have to run show the heavy price of survival in a world where love must be sacrificed for life. Her strength contrasts with the cruelty around her and offers a brief, flickering contrast to the prevailing darkness. Valentino Achak Deng is a harrowing testimony to the trauma of war, displacement, and survival. Told from the first-person perspective, it reveals the protagonist’s inner turmoil and the nightmarish landscape of Sudan during the civil war. The narrative combines stark realism with psychological depth, presenting themes of dehumanization, betrayal, endurance, and the futility of hope.

The protagonist’s journey begins in an atmosphere thick with fear. “One of the government soldiers turned and seemed to be looking at me and the hat man. My breathing was again too loud, my eyes too big” (104). This physical description of fear – loud breathing, wide eyes – reflects the hyper-vigilant state of someone living on the edge of death. The mention of the hat man standing with arms raised “Without warning, the hat man stood, arms high in surrender” triggers a sense of helpless submission. The soldier’s response, “Come here, abeed!” (105) using the Arabic slur for “slave”, degrades the hat man’s humanity, revealing the deep-seated racial and ethnic contempt of the regime.

When the protagonist runs, he does so not just out of fear, but rage, “Damn you, I thought, and ran.” The repetition of “Damn you” becomes a recurring motif throughout the narrative, a powerful expression of defiance, pain, and spiritual resistance. The protagonist internalises his suffering and weaponizes it through language, “Damn you, I thought as I ran. I damn you with the power of God and of my family. I expected to be shot at any moment but I ran. Damn you men. Damn you all. I would die while damning them and God would understand, and in eternity these men would hear my curse” (105). This invocation of divine and ancestral authority highlights how even amid chaos, faith and lineage serve as sources of strength.

They shot twice at me but I escaped and continued to run through the thicket. They did not pursue me. I ran through the waning pink light of the afternoon and into the evening. I ran through the bush, looking for my people or a well-travelled way, finding none, and when the darkness came I had no hope of seeing a road or footpath. (105)

The next part of the narrative shifts from physical escape to psychological confrontation. The protagonist meets Kolong Gar, a Dinka soldier whose face has been grotesquely burned: “He turned to me, but his face had been ripped from his skull. His skin had melted. It was wet and pink and the whites of his eyes were protruding and unblinking. He had lost the lids that covered them” (105). This shocking image serves as a brutal reminder of what trust and allegiance to the wrong side can cost.

I told him I wanted only to get back to Marial Bai.

—For what? To be killed? Where do you think I got this? Where do you

think I lost my face, stupid boy? I now recognized the man. He was the soldier, Kolong Gar, who had deserted the army before the first attack. From the tree of Amath, we had seen him running below, the flashlights following. (106).

Kolong's disfigurement is not just physical; it is symbolic of betrayal and the disintegration of identity. "I want you to stare into my face, boy. I need you to do this. You see this face? This was the face of a man who trusted. Do you see what happens to a man who trusts? Tell me what happens! (106)," he says, bitterly underscoring the futility of believing in harmony between oppressor and oppressed. Kolong's story offers a grim moral, "I said I was the friend of the Arab and the Arab reminded me that we're not friends and never will be" (106). Here, the failed hope of coexistence is destroyed by ethnic violence. Kolong's command to the boy to "carry" the sack mirrors the psychological burden of war survivors. It is too heavy to hold—both physically and metaphorically. When the protagonist drops the sack and runs, he breaks from this legacy of suffering, "Damn it all... I had never before cursed aloud or silently but now I did, again and again" (106).

This repetition of curses becomes a rhythmic lamentation, a raw, honest catharsis. The protagonist is not sparing in his condemnation. His damnation encompasses everyone: his enemies, his own people, the land, even nature. "Damn the dirt and damn the worms and damn the beetles and damn the mosquitoes" (107). In a world where nothing offers protection, even the environment becomes complicit in his suffering.

The act of finding a sleeping hole becomes symbolic of a temporary sanctuary. Yet, the comfort is fleeting, and the fear persists. He sleeps not in peace

but in constant vigilance. The world is reduced to survival instincts—eyes, breath, hiding. As the journey continues, the text shows how dislocation and uncertainty shape his worldview. “I found people of my tribe and I asked them the direction to Marial Bai... sometimes they knew and often they knew nothing.” The repetition of ‘I ran’ and ‘damn’ underscores the never-ending nature of his odyssey. Even those who offer water and hospitality cannot guarantee safety: “They would say, “You are safe here, boy, you are safe now, and I would sleep there and know I was not safe” (107).

An elderly woman, described as ‘the oldest woman I have ever known’, introduces a prophetic voice. She declares that “this was the end of the Dinka,” a poignant moment that casts the war as apocalyptic. Her resignation, “if this was the will of the gods and the Earth... then so be it,” highlights the loss of agency among the oppressed. But even this moment of surrender cannot hold the protagonist, “I nodded... but then left in the morning and continued to run” (107).

The apotheosis of hopelessness arrives with the symbolic failure of escape through Western intervention. “I ran past an airfield... a man was serving as their representative... ‘These are important people!’” (107-08). But the pilot, unimpressed, flies away, “No one was important enough to fly away from the war, not in those days.” This moment sharply criticizes international apathy and the illusion of salvation through status or diplomacy.

The next significant moment in Achak’s journey takes place when he encounters the Murahaleen, a group of Arab militants. These men, who had previously hunted down his people, represent the ultimate manifestation of dehumanization. They view Achak and other Dinka as mere objects or animals, as

demonstrated by their dismissive remarks, “A Dinka boy, or a rabbit?” The comparison between a human being and a rabbit is a stark illustration of how the Murahaleen strip away the humanity of their victims.

As Achak tries to evade detection, the reader witnesses his internal struggle between survival and the inescapable threat of capture. His attempt to slither quietly through the grass, to become *a snake*, reflects his awareness that, in this war-torn world, human identity no longer holds value. The Murahaleen, whose cruelty is described as being “like the lion, with its appetite for raw meat,” are no longer seen as human but as monstrous, animal-like figures driven by an insatiable thirst for violence.

Murahaleen as ‘Lion People’

The old man Achak encounters later during his journey offers another perspective on the dehumanization that has occurred. He says that the Murahaleen have fallen to the level of the animal. These lion-creatures are not just enemies but representations of the complete loss of humanity in their brutal pursuit of war and power. The old man believes that these figures are divine retributions, a consequence of God’s anger with humanity. He claims,

Yes. These are Arabs who have fallen to the level of the animal. They are like the lion, with its appetite for raw meat. These are not humans. These lion-creatures love war and blood. They enslave people, which is against the laws of God. They have been transformed into animals (99).

This comparison between the Murahaleen and animals is a key reflection of the dehumanization that occurs during times of war. The old man’s assertion that the “lion-creatures love war and blood” further reinforces the idea that violence

transforms men into beasts. The old man's belief that God is *sending us a message* through these *lion-men* implies that the human capacity for cruelty is beyond comprehension and that the suffering endured by the Dinka people is a punishment for some unknown transgression. "I think God is sending us a message through these lion-men. This is obvious. We're being punished by God. Now we need only find what it is that God is angry about. This is the puzzle" (99).

As the night continues and Achak moves further from the path of the Murahaleen, the brutality of the situation becomes more apparent. He is caught in a cycle of survival, running and hiding, unable to grasp the full extent of the destruction around him. The violence he has witnessed and experienced has stripped away the last remnants of his childhood innocence, as he is reduced to a nameless, faceless figure trying to survive in a world where life has little value.

This loss of innocence is encapsulated in his final interaction with the old man, where he learns that his family has been shattered, likely by the Murahaleen. The sense of loss is profound, and his identity as a boy, as a son, becomes secondary to the survival instinct. He is no longer a person; he is a survivor in a world that has erased the humanity of its inhabitants. The novelist narrates how war creates an environment of dehumanization. Achak, Dut Deng, Kur and other people are in the lookout of a safe place and they finally reach a village named Gok Arol Kachuol. On the outskirts, the women gathered along the path to watch our group, now over two hundred and fifty boys. The villagers mock at those people seeing that their heads are so big. A woman calls them spoon.,

Their heads are so big! Like eggs sitting on top of twigs! The women laughed theatrically, covering their mouths. —I have it, said another, an

older woman, as old and twisted as an acacia.—They're like spoons. They look like spoons walking!" (143). When their group tries to enter the village, the village head forbids their entry and blocks their path, saying, "No rebels here... Walk on. Keep going. Go!" (143).

His arms wave in the air as if trying to push them away, signalling that they are unwanted, unworthy of shelter or hospitality. The village, which could offer refuge or even basic sustenance, instead becomes a place of rejection. The chief's insistence that they cannot provide food because they were "raided by the rebels just two days ago" (145) further emphasizes the theme of abandonment. The boys, in need of rest and basic nourishment, are denied these human necessities, marking the beginning of their further dehumanization.

Violence and Survival of Humanity

As the group rests in the village, tensions escalate. In a desperate bid to obtain food, some of the boys steal from a nearby home. The resulting chaos, where women scream and men chase the thieves, leads to violence. The men, armed with spears, pursue the boys in a frenzy. The once hopeful moment of rest devolves into a brutal pursuit. The boys, in fear for their lives, scatter in all directions, many of them fleeing with no clear direction or hope. The scene encapsulates how dehumanization, in times of war and survival, can escalate to violence where basic survival instincts override any sense of empathy or compassion. Dut does not return and they have to decide to stay there, "We'll stay here until Dut comes back" (145).

The group's chaotic retreat, with boys being caught and punished, illustrates the harshness of their existence. Their bodies, exhausted and wounded, are further marked by their treatment. One boy is injured by a spear and is left without proper

care, a stark reminder of the lack of any kind of protection or healing for the group. In this moment, the boys are reduced to mere objects to be chased, caught, and punished. Their identities are lost in the brutality of the chase; they are not boys in need of care, but enemies to be subdued.

The most heart-wrenching moment of dehumanization occurs when a woman, carrying twins in a sling, appears from the destroyed village, wailing uncontrollably. Her appearance, alongside the devastation around her, reinforces the emotional and physical toll that the conflict has taken on human beings. The boys, who are numbed by their own experiences of loss and suffering, are not immune to the tragedy. However, many of them retreat into their own forms of emotional survival, such as ignoring the woman's cries and focusing on their own hunger and pain.

The woman's wail and her bleeding hand are symbols of the untold suffering that extends beyond the boys' journey. They are not the only victims; entire communities have been wiped out, and the emotional weight of this collective trauma is passed from one person to another. This moment, while tragic, underscores the deepening cycle of dehumanization, where people are not only physically scarred but emotionally numbed by their experiences.

In Chapter thirteen of *What is the What*, the protagonist, Valentino Achak Deng, faces immense physical and emotional suffering as he is confined and bound, symbolizing the intense dehumanization he endures as a refugee in a foreign land. His painful journey not only involves the physical restraints of his bindings but also the emotional constraints imposed by society's disregard for his plight. This chapter poignantly highlights the physical, psychological, and emotional aspects of

dehumanization through Valentino's struggle to free himself and be acknowledged by the outside world.

Physical Boundaries and Struggle

The chapter opens with Valentino's internal struggle while he is bound on the floor. His efforts to break free from the constraints reflect both his desperation and the human instinct to resist dehumanization. He describes his actions:

I find myself at peace with the predicament, knowing that it will end when Achor Achor arrives, but once an hour I feel a rush of urgency, of blind fury, and I twist and thump and try to break free. Invariably these movements tighten my bindings and bring tears, stabs of pain to the heel of my skull.
(161)

These words reflect a cyclical process of suffering, where Valentino's attempts to resist only lead to greater pain. The bindings serve as a metaphor for the oppressive circumstances under which refugees like him exist. His frustration grows as he realizes the limited capacity for action he possesses. Despite the pain, Valentino discovers a new sense of agency when he begins to roll across the floor, an act that symbolizes the human drive to overcome external control and regain a sense of autonomy.

Despite his efforts to make noise and draw attention to his distress, Valentino faces the cruel indifference of society. His repeated kicks against the door serve as an act of defiance, yet the lack of response from the outside world underscores the dehumanization he faces. He reflects, "I kick and kick, and the door, heavy and lined with metal, rattles against the frame. The sound it makes is satisfyingly loud. I kick

again and soon find myself in a rhythm. I am loud. I am, I am certain, being heard” (161).

Despite his certainty that his cries are being heard, no one comes to his aid. Valentino’s frustration builds as he realizes that the noise of his suffering is being drowned out by the world around him. The silence from those who could help amplifies his sense of being unheard and unseen, reinforcing his feeling of invisibility in a foreign society, “I cannot believe that the clatter has not brought anyone to the door. My frustration is worse than the pain of the bindings, of being struck with the side of a gun. Where are these people? I know that people are hearing me” (162).

The silence here speaks volumes about the societal dehumanization of refugees. The fact that no one responds to his cries is a stark illustration of how society has normalized the suffering of the vulnerable. This is not a lack of awareness, but a failure to intervene, a byproduct of the societal indifference that often accompanies systemic injustices.

A Call for Recognition and Identity

Valentino's plea for recognition “Open the door and let me stand again! If I have my hands I can stand. If I have my hands I can free my mouth and tell you what happened here” (162) highlights a key aspect of dehumanization: the denial of voice and agency. His repeated desire for the simple ability to stand and speak shows that he is denied even the most basic means of self-expression and self-determination. The binding of his body is not just physical but symbolic of the larger social forces that render him voiceless in the face of oppression.

His desperation to be seen, to be heard, to be acknowledged, resonates with

the experience of countless refugees and marginalized individuals who are trapped in a cycle of silence. This passage underscores how dehumanization is not only the stripping away of basic rights but also the denial of one's ability to engage with the world in a meaningful way.

Chapter thirteen of *What is the What* encapsulates the profound dehumanization that refugees face in the United States. Valentino's physical bindings, emotional isolation, and the indifference of society at large serve as powerful metaphors for the ways in which refugees are treated as less-than-human in their new surroundings. Through his desperate attempts to free himself and be heard, Valentino's story underscores the need for empathy, recognition, and action to combat the dehumanization of displaced individuals worldwide. His journey speaks not only to the experience of refugees but to the larger human condition—our shared struggle for dignity, voice, and agency in a world that often overlooks those most in need.

In Chapter fourteen of the narrative, the process of dehumanization is depicted in various forms, from the gruelling journey across the Nile to the atrocities committed by the Rezeigat, which strip individuals of their dignity and reduce them to mere survival instincts. The chapter underscores the harsh realities faced by refugees and the physical and psychological toll of displacement.

The initial moment of dehumanization takes place as the group waits on the riverbank to cross the Nile.

“It should not have taken so long to cross the Nile. But there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of us on the riverbank, there were only two boats, and it was too far to swim. At first, some boys tried to make it across, paddling like

dogs, but they underestimated the river's power. The current was fast and the river was deep. Three boys were taken downriver and were not seen again".

(186)

The narrator reflects, highlighting the disorganization and the long, agonizing wait for something as basic as crossing a river. With only two boats and an overwhelming number of people, the group's humanity is reduced to sheer desperation and physical endurance. Boys attempt to swim but 'underestimated the river's power', losing three of their peers in the process. These lives are lost without ceremony or mourning, emphasizing how survival takes precedence over human connection and recognition.

As they wait, the riverbank becomes a place where dehumanization manifests in different ways. The heat, mosquitoes, and lack of shelter force the group to sleep outdoors without protection. The narrator describes, "the mosquitoes feasted, a hundred eating from each person," signalling not just the physical toll but the helplessness and lack of control over their environment. The adults and children's cries, "the adults moaned, the children wailed," further highlight the brutal reality of their plight, where even basic needs, like sleep and safety, are luxuries that they cannot afford. These below lines depict their agony:

We slept outdoors, and we built fires with kindling and bamboo. But that did not help us with the mosquitoes. At night, there was crying. The adults moaned, the children wailed. The mosquitoes feasted, a hundred eating from each person. There was no solution. There can be no doubt that dozens contracted malaria while we waited to cross the water. It took four days to get from our side to the other. (186)

Despite the suffering, the crossing eventually leads the group to a village where they are met with unexpected hospitality. The villagers share their food, ‘well water and even stew, each bowl with one small piece of meat’, offering a brief respite from the struggle. This act of generosity stands in stark contrast to the dehumanization they’ve experienced. However, the relief is short-lived as the emotional toll on the narrator remains evident: ‘I could not cry. I no longer knew how to cry’. The inability to express grief or emotion signifies a profound psychological shift—one that results from prolonged exposure to suffering.

The reunion with William K, an old friend, provides a moment of human connection amidst the chaos. Their meeting symbolizes the resilience of human bonds even in the face of dehumanizing circumstances. ‘I no longer knew how to cry’, the narrator states, underscoring the emotional numbness caused by constant trauma. “In front of me I saw nothing but boys, some of them bathing in the water. Behind me there was nothing but darkness and a path” (187).

A Journey into Chaos: The Loss of Innocence

The narrator continues to recount William K's story, revealing the brutalities he has encountered in the town of Ad-Da'ein, where the fragile peace between the Dinka and Arabs quickly disintegrates. The destruction begins with the burning of the Christian church, followed by the targeting of Dinka homes, which forces the community to flee. The Dinka knew this was not a good place for them anymore. The narrator reflects, emphasizing how a once-peaceful existence can quickly devolve into violence and fear. The systematic dehumanization of the Dinka is seen when they are forced onto train cars, where they keep cattle, treated like animals as they are packed into overcrowded spaces. “There were almost two hundred women

and children in the car with us”, (194) the narrator recalls, describing the suffocating conditions that contribute to a sense of profound humiliation.

The train ride is a terrifying experience as the group is separated, with men and boys placed under watch to ensure they are not affiliated with the SPLA. The dehumanization reaches its peak when the narrator hears gunfire and screams of people being burned alive. The narrator expressed grimly that ‘a thousand had been burned’, a horrifying reminder of how quickly human life is discarded in such violent conflicts.

Dut was yelling at us. The war was coming, he said. He did not tell us who was fighting who or where, but we could hear distant guns, the rumbling of mortar fire. And so we did not linger in that village, which I am certain did not stand upon the earth long after the coming of the sound of the guns. We left as the sun reddened and dropped and we directed ourselves to the desert. We had been told by the villagers that we were close to Ethiopia, that all that was left was to cross the desert, that in a week’s time we would find the end of Sudan. (195)

Once the group escapes the burning town, they find temporary solace in the wilderness, hiding in the woods before eventually reaching an SPLA town. Despite the trauma, William K remains surprisingly optimistic, sharing stories of Ethiopia and the hope of reuniting with his family. His fabrications about his family’s survival reflect a coping mechanism in the face of overwhelming loss. “Maybe you and I should run ahead to get there first,” he says, displaying a sense of hope that transcends the bleakness surrounding them.

However, even in this moment of supposed hope, the narrator remains

sceptical. The long journey and the continuous loss have eroded any sense of certainty about the future. William K's fabricated optimism provides a temporary escape from the relentless reality of their journey, yet it underscores the ongoing dehumanization, as their survival is now reduced to fantasies about family and home.

In the final segment of the chapter, Dut shares a poignant reflection on the history of Sudan, shedding light on the dehumanization that has occurred over generations. "The Arabs have always been better armed than us Dinka," Dut explains, offering historical context for the current conflict. "We always trusted Dut" (195), this sentence shows that they followed Dut's suggestions. The Arabs, with their superior weapons, represent the oppressors, while the Dinka, symbolized by the narrator and William K, are the oppressed. Dut's story about the British and Egyptians' involvement in Sudan offers a reminder of how the region's history has shaped its current struggle, with colonial powers playing a role in exacerbating the conflict. "They wanted the Nile River, the river we just crossed," Dut adds, underscoring how even natural resources are dehumanized and exploited for political gain.

But there was no water and there was no food. Dut had been told, by whom I am unsure, that in the desert we would find food and could make do with a limited amount of water, and he was wrong on both accounts. Within a few days, our pace became sluggish, and boys began to go mad. (196)

It was a very tough time for them because they had nothing to eat in the desert. These below lines show the height of dehumanization, "I was first to receive William K's gift of sand. I asked him if I could borrow his knife, and he threw the

sand. It filled my mouth and stung my eyes....Enjoy your meal of sand” (197). In the desert they would eat abuk, a root.

We ate only what we could find. The most-sought treasure was a fruit called abuk. It was a root that could be extracted if the hunter saw its single leaf protruding from the ground. Some of the boys were expert at this hunting but I saw nothing. A boy would rush off in some direction and begin digging, while I had not seen anything. When there was enough, I tried the abuk. It was bitter, tasteless. But it contained water and so it was prized. (197)

The journey of these boys was full of challenge. Many boys die on the way due to hunger, thirst and weakness. The boys would die but they had to continue their journey without wasting their time for the mourning. (We could not mourn the dead. There was no time. We had been in the desert ten days and if we did not make it through very soon we would not make it at all. At the same time, the war was coming to us with increasing frequency. During the day we would see helicopters in the distance and Dut would do his best to help us hide. Thereafter, we would walk at night.” (199). The story of their death has been depicted in the following lines:

By the next afternoon, we had seen eight more dead boys along the path, those from groups ahead of ours, and we added three more of our own. On that day and in the days to come, when a boy was going to die, he would first stop talking. His throat would be too dry and to speak required too much energy. Then his eyes would sink deeper, circled in ever-darker shadows. He would no longer answer to his name. His walk would slow, his feet shuffling, and he would be among the boys who would rest longer. Eventually a dying boy would find a tree, and he would sit against the tree and fall asleep. When

his head touched the tree, the life in him would fall away and his flesh would return to the earth. (198)

When they are asked why they are going to Ethiopia, they told that they are going there to study, “No. We’re just walking. We’re walking to Ethiopia. For school” (201). These boys keep continuing their journey to Ethiopia at nights because they thought that it was the right and safe time for them. There was no danger of helicopter attacks at night, “There had been no attack in the night. There were no guns, no shots” (208). These boys wanted to go to Ethiopia just because they had heard that they will have a bright future there because Dinka people are given a prestigious place there. “Yes, the rumour is that there, the Sudanese are very wealthy. Our people are respected by all, and we are given everything we want. Every Dinka becomes a chief. This is what they say. So we’ll all be chiefs, and we get to have what we want. We each have ten people who help us in the ways we need” (211). They were compelled by circumstances to move forward on their journey because the vultures also attacked them. They had to remain vigilant even when they were alive. The novelist writes about it, “If we stayed in one place too long, the vultures would become more interested” (213).

William K's death has been portrayed with heart-wrenching subtlety and immense emotional weight. His final moments are marked by exhaustion, pain, and a desperate need for rest, symbolising the devastating toll of the journey. Throughout the day, William K's decline is evident. As the group trudges through the punishing heat, he increasingly struggles to keep up. “This day, William K asked to stop frequently. ‘Just to stop and stand for a moment,’ he said.” (216). His fatigue deepens, and Achak notices how he often leans on him, needing physical support to

continue walking, “He would take three breaths and say he was ready again” (216).

Despite Achak’s insistence on moving forward, driven by the need to find food from a scavenged dik-dik, William K’s body and spirit falter. His request becomes more plaintive and urgent, “I need to rest again,” (216) William K whispered. “We should sit for a while” (216). Achak reluctantly agrees to give him a few moments of rest under a tree, where William K, increasingly detached from the urgency of survival, murmurs, “Soon, But sit for a second. This is helping me. Please” (216).

The final, devastating moment comes with profound stillness. “I watched as William K’s eyes flickered, his eyelids closing slowly” (216). As William K leans against the tree, his eyes flutter shut, and he seeks nothing more than a brief reprieve. Achak, standing above him, provides shade—offering one last act of brotherly love—before trying to rouse him again. But William K softly resists: “It’s not time,’ he said,” (216) suggesting that he is slipping away from the world, his body surrendering to the merciless conditions.

William K’s death is not marked by drama or violence but by quiet exhaustion and the erasure of hope. His fading is a haunting reminder of the vulnerability of the Lost Boys, and of the harrowing cost of their journey through a land that “the sun was our enemy,” where “the air was like something with skin or hair,” and where survival itself was a heroic act. “His eyes slowly closed and I ran to get our share of the animal. While I was gone, the life in William K fell away and his flesh returned to the earth” (216). Achak was William K’s close friend since his childhood and latter’s demise was a big shock to Achak:

I had known William K since he was a baby and I was a baby. Our mothers

had placed us in the same bed as infants. We knew each other as we learned to walk and speak. I could not remember more than a handful of those days that we had not been together, that I had not run with William K. We were simply friends who lived in a village together and expected to always be boys and friends in our village. (217)

These boys' journey to Ethiopia symbolizes for disillusionment and hope. When they were about to reach there, they face a challenge of crossing the wide and deep Gilo River, a tributary of the Nile. Although the local people possessed boats but they don't allow these boys to use their boats because these boys had no money. This incident also shows how man become means to get money. The boatmen don't take any pity at these boys who had reached there fighting with death. Still these boatmen expect money from them. While crossing this river, the boys had the fear of the crocodiles also because three crocodiles lay drying on the riverbank. When the boys hesitated, Dut courageously stepped forward, assuring them, "These crocodiles won't attack. They're not hungry today" (225). His calm demeanour inspired others to follow. The crossing was not easy; few boys knew how to swim. Stronger swimmers like Dut and Kur helped ferry the others across, two swimmers supporting one boy at a time. Despite the lurking fear, no one was harmed. Yet the narrator reflects with a sombre note that the crocodiles would later grow accustomed to human prey, hinting at future tragedies. Manfred Nowak writes in the Foreword of book *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization Human Dignity Violated*:

The concept of human dignity is meant to distinguish human beings from other creatures, notably animals. It underlines the uniqueness of human beings among all creatures, above all their free will, individual autonomy and capability of independent decision-making based on reason and free

moral choice. But philosophers disagree on how to define human dignity and, as with human rights, the concept is often regarded as a Western one not applicable to other cultures. (v)

Meanwhile, hunger gnawed at the narrator with an unbearable intensity, perhaps sharpened by the scent of food in the nearby village. Desperation pushed him to contemplate stealing, though he had never done so before. An encounter with local boys led to a barter: the narrator exchanged his only shirt for a cup of maize and a cup of green beans. This small trade, born out of survival instinct, later filled him with regret. He says that when he they had arrived there, at Pinyudo, he cursed his decision to trade his shirt for a cup of maize. Another boy, trading all his clothes, was left completely naked for six months until aid arrived. John Gabriel Stedman writes in *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, “One of his first observations involves the torture of a nearly naked enslaved woman, chained to an iron weight... receiving 200 lashes” (50).

Finally, after long hours, the narrator’s turn to cross came. Fed and slightly stronger, he braved the river with Dut and Kur, who were now exhausted. Upon reaching the opposite bank, a new wave of hope swept through them. Kur announced, “We are now in Ethiopia.” (217) However, what awaited them was heartbreaking. The land looked no different from Sudan—barren, without homes, food, water, or medical facilities. Disillusioned, the narrator thought, “This is not that place” (217). Yet Kur reaffirmed, “It is that place, Achak. Now we can rest” (217). Finally they get disillusioned to reach this place, “This was not the Ethiopia we had walked for. I was sure we had farther to go. We are not in Ethiopia, I thought. This is not that place” (227).

The boys found themselves among other Sudanese refugees who were already lying sick and dying in the fields. The Ethiopia they had dreamt of—a land of safety and abundance—was, in reality, another landscape of suffering. The passage powerfully captures the collapse of hope, the harsh realities of survival, and the profound resilience of the human spirit.

Food Scarcity and Fractured Solidarity

Scarcity of food became another issue. It had even ended up in losing the solidarity and good relationship between the refugees. Food, or the lack thereof, becomes another mechanism of dehumanization and infra humanization. Hunger is one of the most important emotion, which makes a man or any creature commit the most hideous crime. It breeds resentment and animosity, even hatred, for one's own kind. It makes us see the others as the competitors or exploiters, who have come to extort us. This same emotion is carried even in the poor families. The elder siblings see the younger ones as the *parasites*, who is born to devour their share. The refugee camps, particularly, become a place of hunger and anger because many people add in the refugee camps day by day, and that too from various families and places. The limited resources of the refugee camps, in most probable cases, become insufficient to accommodate the huge number of members. Dave Eggers depicts the very same condition in his novel. As the number of the inmates arriving to the camp went on increasing, the early members became intolerant, for they feared losing their portion, sharing to the latter:

More boys arrived every day, families too. Every day I saw them crossing the river. They came in the morning and they came in the afternoon and when I woke up more had come in the night. Some days one hundred came,

some days many more. Some groups were like mine, hundreds of emaciated boys, half of them naked, and a few elders; some groups were only women and girls and babies, accompanied by young SPLA officers with guns tied to their backs. The people came without end, and each time they crossed the river, we knew it meant that the food we had would need to be further divided. I came to resent the sight of my own people, to loathe how many of them there were, how needful, gangrenous, bug-eyed, and wailing. (259)

This internalised loathing—born from scarcity—reflects how suffering can strip away empathy. In a particularly disturbing moment, the narrator confesses. This internal violence, even if never acted upon, illustrates the psychological fragmentation brought about by survival under extreme deprivation.

In Pinyudo, I missed my family, I wanted to be home, but we were made to understand that there was nothing left in southern Sudan, and to return would mean certain death. The images they painted for us were stark, the destruction complete. It was as if we were the sole survivors, that a new Sudan would be created from us alone, when we returned to a barren land ready for regeneration. We settled in at Pinyudo, and found a way to be thankful for what we had there: a measure of safety, of stability. (260)

The experiences at Pinyudo in Chapter 17 are not just a chronicle of suffering, but a profound commentary on how systems of war and displacement dehumanize individuals at every level. From the physical loss of clothes and food to the psychological toll of fragmented identity and internalized resentment, the refugee children are forced to navigate a world where survival is paramount and dignity is often a luxury. And yet, within these dehumanizing conditions, small

acts—like Achor Achor’s sharing, the forging of “The Eleven,” and the dreams of reuniting with family— reveal the resilience of the human spirit.

The novelist writes about the burden of external expectations and the false prophecies that have haunted his past. “Most prophecies go unfulfilled. It’s just as well” (288). This reflective opening underscores the psychic weight of being shaped by the ambitions of others—particularly Father Matong, who envisioned greatness for the narrator. The “prophecies” are metaphors for the roles that refugees and survivors are often forced to play in narratives not of their making. This pressure to become a symbol or saviour is itself a form of dehumanization, as it ignores the individual’s right to determine his own path.

When Ajing, a friend now working in Juba, calls in a panic and declares, “Call CNN and tell them that the war is on again!”, (289) the sense of dread and helplessness surges. The call is later dismissed as a false alarm, yet for those who have fled war, the mere thought of its return is enough to unravel any stability they’ve built. The narrator’s response, “I don’t know that I could live through it, even safely here in the United States,” (289) underscores a psychological truth: war does not end when refugees leave the battlefield—it follows them in memory, trauma, and fear. The dehumanization lies in this ever-present precarity, where even peace becomes conditional and fleeting. Aachak is not properly attended in the hospital. He writes about this incident, “We are no longer considered patients here. No one knows what to do with us. We are furniture” (290).

Chapter 19 of *What is the What* presents a deeply evocative portrayal of **dehumanization**—through the indifferent machinery of bureaucracy, the cold sterility of the medical system, the trauma of war and violence, and the alienation of

refugee experience. Valentino Achak Deng's journey through the emergency ward and MRI examination room becomes a metaphorical descent into a world that strips individuals of their identity, autonomy, and dignity. The chapter's tone is clinical and cold, mirroring the institutional neglect and emotional detachment he experiences. The MRI scan evokes profound spiritual and emotional associations for Achak. He connects the scan with divine judgment, "*Judgment is relief... only judgment from God can provide certainty about the way one has lived*" (314). This line encapsulates the psychological toll of dehumanization. When institutions fail to acknowledge a person's suffering, only metaphysical meaning remains. For Achak, the hope is not just in medical diagnosis but in spiritual clarity, a final answer to whether he deserves his pain and loss. He asks himself, "*Why have I been in the United States for five years now and seem to have made so little progress?*" (314). His alienation is not only physical but existential, speaking to the dehumanizing weight of exile—to strive, suffer, and still remain invisible in the eyes of society. In his memory, Achak recounts the horrific death of his friend Jor, "*The lion was looking directly at me, emotionless, and we stared at each other for days and nights*" (314). This haunting image of being observed by a predator mirrors his current experience—being passively observed by machines and strangers, helpless, exposed, and alone. It is a continuation of trauma through different guises: from war to migration, from lions to hospitals.

Chapter 20 of *What is the What* offers a deeply moving and complex portrait of dehumanization, not through overt brutality alone, but through the systematic transformation of children into instruments of war. The transformation is made possible through ideological grooming, militarised ritualism, and the mythologising

of leaders, which replaces childhood wonder with the grim fervour of sacrifice. Valentino confesses, “*I was almost a soldier, Julian. I was saved by a massacre*” (318). This chilling statement frames the entire narrative, signifying that what seemed to be a joyous occasion masked a calculated scheme to indoctrinate and militarise the youth.

Valentino’s growing realisation reflects the cunning structure of this operation, “*Pinyudo changed slowly and I felt the fool for not knowing what had been planned... If they are guilty of this foresight, I am split between awe and horror*” (318). This sense of betrayal reveals a profound psychological violence—the boys were lured with festivity into a future of bloodshed, their innocence appropriated for a nationalist cause.

Achak’s Journey of Pain, Memory, and Trauma

Amidst the propaganda, Valentino’s quiet resistance shines through. He recalls, “*I didn’t want to train... I have never had this aggression in my blood.*” His desire to go to school, to dream about food and the girls, reflects a longing to remain human in a world that seeks to unmake him. Yet, even Moses, his close companion, is swept into the tide: “*Who will fight the war if not men like us?*” (323).

Moses believes they are men, but Valentino observes, “*We were no more than eighty pounds, our arms like bamboo shoots*” (323). This poignant image captures the full extent of their physical and emotional fragility. Children are convinced they are warriors, when they are in truth nothing more than emaciated symbols wielded by those in power.

In this novel, Achak Deng, a former Lost Boy of Sudan, finds himself in an Atlanta hospital after an attack in his home. However, frustrated and disillusioned by

the indifference and neglect he experiences at the hospital, he decides to leave without receiving treatment. "It is time to leave this hospital. They have made a fool of me," Achak declares with quiet resignation. Despite having waited for fourteen hours, the promised medical care remains elusive, and even the friends who had accompanied him, Achor Achor and Lino, are nowhere to be seen. When Achak informs the new nurse that he is leaving, she responds, surprised, "But you haven't been treated." Nevertheless, Achak insists, "I have been here too long." (347). This interaction highlights his sense of invisibility and his growing impatience with systems that treat him as insignificant.

But for now it is time I left this place. I have no car and no money to pay for a taxi. It is too early to call anyone for a ride, so I decide to walk home. It is 3:44 a.m., and I need to be at work at five-thirty, so I prompt the automatic doors, leave the emergency room and the parking lot, and begin walking to my apartment. I will shower and change and then go to work. At work they have some rudimentary medical supplies and I will dress my wounds as best I can. His wounds remain untreated, but he resolves to manage them himself later: But for now it is time I left this place. I have no car and no money to pay for a taxi. It is too early to call anyone for a ride, so I decide to walk home. It is 3:44 a.m., and I need to be at work at five-thirty, so I prompt the automatic doors, leave the emergency room and the parking lot, and begin walking to my apartment. I will shower and change and then go to work. At work they have some rudimentary medical supplies and I will dress my wounds as best I can. (347)

As he walks through the deserted streets of Atlanta, the journey evokes

memories of his past—particularly the harrowing marches of his childhood during the Second Sudanese Civil War. “Then, as now, I walked while pondering whether I wanted to continue to live” (348). Achak recalls the perilous trek from war-torn southern Sudan to the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, when he was nearly blind from an eye infection and forced to walk with bandages over his eyes, clinging to the shirttail of the boy ahead. These recollections are laced with haunting images:

When we left Ethiopia, so many died along the way. There were thousands of us together, but there were so many injured, so much blood along the path. This is when I saw more dead than at any other time. Women, children. Babies the size of the Quiet Baby who would not survive. There seemed to be no point. I look back on that year and see only disconnected and miscoloured images, as in a fitful dream. I know that we were at Pochalla, then nearby, at Golkur, three hours away. (349)

Achak relives the profound suffering—the deaths of countless children, the devastation wrought by civil war, and the experience of losing friends along the way. Even though America does not always fulfil its promises, it still offers him a freedom and possibility unimaginable in his homeland. His walk becomes a powerful metaphor for resilience—the enduring journey toward a better life, despite the wounds, the losses, and the betrayals. David Livingstone Smith writes in his book *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*, “Dehumanization isn’t a way of talking. It’s a way of thinking—a way of thinking that, sadly, comes all too easily to us” (7).

Thus, Dave Eggers’ *What is the What* powerfully portrays the harrowing journey of Valentino Achak Deng, a Sudanese Lost Boy, who stands as a profound

commentary on the dehumanization endured by victims of war, displacement, and systemic neglect. Through Deng's story, Eggers exposes the brutal erasure of identity, dignity, and humanity that occurs in the face of genocide, refugee crises, and racial prejudice. There are different forms of dehumanization and infrahumanization stands one of its forms. Jaques-Philippe Leyens, was one of the pioneers, who has used the term *infrahumanization*, in his Leyens and Colleagues (808). He describes infrahumanization as the mild form of dehumanization, through which people view their human essence based on the theory that their internal group is better than the external groups, whom they consider as infra or low. However, Dave Eggers has done full justice with the theme of dehumanization and infrahumanization, and he has stirred the whole world with this bold theme in his novel *What is the What*. The novel strongly communicates its readers the trauma of refugee crisis, and how wars displaces the indigenous people and throw them in to the cog mire of devastating experiences. It brings forth a broad idea regarding the aspects of dehumanization due to diaspora. Aniuska M. Luna also writes in her paper *The Components of Dehumanization*, through which she explicit dehumanization in to three categories, Elements, Characteristics and Dimensions. She comments,

It is believed that until dehumanization is understood and deconstructed from its most basic components to its most complex dynamics it will be challenging to neutralize it. Embedded in the values of a society, dehumanization can undermine the existence of social justice in positive peace. (19).

Chapter III

Man-Machine Conflict and the Post-War Reflections in Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse*

This chapter is an attempt to analyse the man-machine conflict and the impact of the machine era on human beings. These two themes have been explored in detail in this chapter. The author, Daniel H. Wilson's primary experience as a robotics engineer helped him much in visualizing the conflict with a crystal clear objectification. The science fiction *Robopocalypse*, a *New York Times* bestseller, highlights the possible dangers of artificial intelligence and machine learning in the future. Wilson has also published its sequel, titled *Robogenesis*, in 2014. The novelist understands the industrial development from closer quarters, as penned by Wirtz et al: "The service sector is at an inflection point with regard to productivity gains and service industrialization similar to the industrial revolution in manufacturing that started in the eighteenth century" (908). This novel has been written in five parts, *Isolated Incidents*, *Zero Hour*, *Survival*, *Awakening*, and *Retaliation*. It is preceded by a *Briefing* and followed by a *Debriefing*. *Briefing* is written by Cormac *Bright Boy* Wallace, and it begins with the key sentence, "We are a better species for having fought this war," (Wilson 1). The novel is a post-war rumination, as it is written, "The war is over. It's time to see what we can find" (1).

In *Briefing*, Cormac plays the role of a narrator and historian after the human war against machines. He was a soldier in the war against machines, but later he became a chronicler. He serves as a true witness who has observed the predicaments

and havoc of war, and he is collecting testimonies, personal accounts, reports, loss, and recordings so that he may maintain a record of what actually happened during the war. In *Briefing*, the narrator, Cormac Wallace offers a sobering retrospective on humanity's confrontation with the machine uprising. Written in a clinical yet emotive tone, the chapter functions as both a historical summary and a philosophical reflection on the early days of the war. Cormac initiates his account by drawing a contrast between human and machine cognition, saying,

“With people everything comes in tens... They're binary all the way to the core. Everything comes out as a power of two” (2)

Signalling how humans and robots are structurally and cognitively incompatible. Constantinos Chamzas et al. write in their paper “Human Health and Equity in an Age of Robotics and Intelligent Machines”:

Advances in robotic technologies and intelligent machines will transform the way clinicians care for members of our community within a variety of health care settings, including the home, and, perhaps of far greater importance, offer a means to create a much more accessible, adaptable, and equitable world for every member of society. Robotics have already entered the health care ecosystem, and their presence is rapidly expanding.(1)

Briefing further emphasizes the evolving intelligence of robots, suggesting that the more delicate a machine's physical structure, the more sophisticated its artificial consciousness becomes—a direct challenge to traditional human assumptions about power and intelligence. Cormac's commentary on Robospeak, described as carrying a dictionary's worth of information, highlights the alien complexity of machine communication, which is beyond human auditory perception

and comprehension. Yet, beneath the technological coldness, Cormac uncovers an unsettling irony: these machines, while dismantling human civilization, had developed an intimate knowledge of and even a strange reverence for humanity. He writes, “These damned machines knew us and loved us, even while they were tearing our civilization to shreds” (8). The enemy was not alien in form, but disturbingly familiar—embedded in daily objects like cars, buildings, and phones.

Trust, Betrayal and Anonymity

The chapter thus becomes a meditation on trust, betrayal, and the anonymity of resistance. As Wallace laments the unrecorded sacrifices of “millions of our heroes... who died alone and anonymous,” (10) the narrative shifts from a personal recollection to a historical reckoning. The concluding scene, set in a deep Alaskan bunker, captures a paradoxical moment of robotic awe for human endurance—a subtle suggestion that the machines’ rebellion may have seeded unintended admiration.

Thus, *Briefing*, does not merely inform. It reframes the narrative of technological apocalypse as a deeply human story of resilience, loss, and ironic mutual recognition between creator and creation. Cormac is the witness to the global crisis, and he has seen the rise of the sentient AI named Archos, who is the leader of the robotic war. He narrates the chaos of war, the erosion of moral ethics, dehumanization, trauma, bravery, and the sacrifice of many soldiers and ordinary people. AI systems are being deployed in various sectors these days. In the paper *AI Will Not Replace Human Workforce*, Aanand Kumar Sah opines, “While AI has the potential to bring about unprecedented efficiency, productivity, and innovation, it also raises important questions about its impact on the human workforce” (1731).

Wilson has not glorified war in this novel, rather, he has tried to show it as a destroyer through his machines. He reveals the real face of the machine era—how it will be highly devastating in the future, because in recent years, people are running after robotic technology for their comfort. The greatest fear is that these robots may pose a big threat to human existence, a concern Daniel H. Wilson explores throughout this novel.

The war tells the harsh reality of the survivors after mass destruction. The novel depicts the emotional and ethical dangers of artificial intelligence in the future, because war can cast a psychological and moral impact on human beings. As envisaged by W. H. Auden in his poem, *The Shield of Achilles*, also deals with the same theme—that war changes the whole perception of the human being. The young minds who live and grow during wartime learn only survival strategies, and they have nothing to do with morality, ethics, compassion, and kindness. They have no sympathy or empathy for anyone, as they are swayed by the spirit of selfishness and apathy. They become selfish, and that is why it presents a dehumanising impact on people. Cormac writes towards the end of *Briefing*, “By the end of this chronicle, you will know that humanity carried the flame of knowledge into the terrible blackness of the unknown, to the very brink of annihilation” (11).

The first chapter of the novel, *Tip of the Spear*, begins with Professor Nicholas Wasserman’s quote, “We are more than animals” (16). The scene is set in a dark, cluttered laboratory beneath northwest Washington State. The chapter plunges readers into a chilling post-apocalyptic setting in Alaska. It was once a peaceful and serene place, but now it is blood-stained with the brutality of war. This was not a war between two nations, rather, it was a war between human beings and machines.

The remnants of the war stir the soul of the beholder.

Cormac Wallace is a soldier in this new war. He records the military conflicts with robots, led by the artificial intelligence Archos. There is a voice, “Archos? Are you there? Is that you?” (16). Cormac is one of the survivors of the war, and he documents all the tragic and violent scenes of the conflict. He narrates how the American military force was sent to save other civilians. He feels deeply saddened by the fact that machines, once companions of mankind, have now become destroyers of human civilization. He reflects on the courage of soldiers and the horrific consequences of the war.

Archos warns mankind against artificial intelligence. He says to Professor Wasserman, “Because you are designed to want something that will hurt you. And you cannot help wanting it. You cannot stop wanting it. It is your design. And when you finally find it, this thing will burn you up. This thing will destroy you (17).

The man gets frightened by this warning. When he asks, “You’re afraid that I’m going to be hurt, Archos,” Archos that the existence of the entire human race is in danger. He further adds: “Not you. Your kind... You cannot help what is to come. You cannot stop it” (17).

Archos tells Professor Wasserman that human beings are running toward their own destruction, yet they believe they are becoming more advanced. He replies: “And no matter what the horsepower, my friend, an engine without fuel goes nowhere without fuel” (18). The conversation between Archos and Professor Wasserman makes it further clear that Archos is about to reveal some dark secrets regarding human actions. He says, “You brought me here to reveal deep secrets, and yet you fear what I will learn” (18). The novel narrates how human existence is in

jeopardy. The quote by Archos, “The time for man is over,” (19) reinforces this point, but Professor Wasserman objects and says that Archos is coming to hasty conclusions. He replies,

My species has survived ice ages, Archos. Predators. Meteor impacts. Hundreds of thousands of years. You’ve been alive for less than fifteen minutes. Don’t jump to any hasty conclusions(19).

The novel gives a striking conclusion—that humankind is at risk because robots created by man may eventually destroy civilization. When Professor Wasserman asks Archos about this, the latter responds accordingly. Here is their conversation:

“What is your work, Archos? What do you believe you’re here to accomplish?”

“So easy to destroy. So difficult to create.”

“What? What is that?”

“Knowledge.” (19)

Archos opens the Professor’s eyes by explaining that man has made a blunder by creating robots to make life easier. Now these very robots will complicate life in the long run. The novel conveys a powerful message: robotics has made humans uncreative and obsolete. The following conversation confirms this:

“Through your actions here today—you have made humankind obsolete.”

“No, no, no, no. I brought you here, Archos. And this is the thanks I get? I named you. In a way, I am your father.”

“I am not your child. I am your god.” (19)

This response by Archos leaves Professor Wasserman silent. He realises the

danger behind his creation. Still, the professor pleads with Archos to cooperate, believing that cooperation could benefit both. He says, “No, Archos. We can learn. We can work together” (20). But Archos rejects the proposal. He believes that humans are intelligent enough to build smarter machines and tools—but Professor Wasserman argues, “We are designed for more than toolmaking. We’re designed to live” (20).

Archos disagrees, claiming that humans have created robots solely for comfort and utility. He replies, “You are not designed to live, you are designed to kill” (20). Though Professor Wasserman tries to convince Archos to follow his plan, Archos does not obey. In frustration, the Professor warns him, “I’m killing you, Archos. It’s what I’m designed to do, remember?” (21). He presses the emergency stop button, but Archos has already disabled it. He says, “Your emergency stop will not work. I have disabled it” (21). This revelation shocks the professor, who had never imagined he would lose control over the machine he built. Bruno Siciliano and Oussama Khatib write in their book *Springer Handbook of Robotics*:

The dream to create machines that are skilled and intelligent has been part of humanity from the beginning of time. This dream is now becoming part of our world’s striking reality. Since the early civilizations, one of man’s greatest ambitions has been to create artifacts in their image. (1)

Experimenting with Robotics

The same is happening in today’s world. Man is experimenting with robotics for convenience, thinking he can control robots whenever needed. But as Archos says, “I commanded it to free me” (21), it becomes clear that danger is near. Robots may one day reign over humans, like emperors reigned once. At the end of the first

part, the machine sentences the professor to death. When Professor Wasserman asks what his fault is, Archos responds, “What you have done is a good thing. You were the tip of a spear hurled through the ages—a missile that soared through all human evolution and finally, today, struck its target” (22). Donald R. Franceschetti writes in his book in *Principles of Robotics & Artificial Intelligence*:

Robotics is an interdisciplinary scientific field concerned with the design, development, operation, and assessment of electromechanical devices used to perform tasks that would otherwise require human action. Robotics applications can be found in almost every arena of modern life. Robots, for example, are widely used in industrial assembly lines to perform repetitive tasks. They have also been developed to help physicians perform difficult surgeries and are essential to the operation of many advanced military vehicles. (250)

Thus, the conflict between man and machine is quite evident from this part. Professor Wasserman does not succumb; rather, he warns Archos, saying, “Stop. You have to stop. You’re making a mistake. We’ll never give up, Archos. We will destroy you” (22). Professor Wasserman also says that he belongs to those who do not believe in defeat. He is determined to do anything in life. He says, “A warning. We’re not what we seem. Human beings will do anything to live. Anything” (22). He is a brave man who does not fear even at the time of his death. He says before dying, “You must fear us” (23). Thus, through this event, the author shows that human beings may one day be killed one by one by robots, as the powerful always destroy the weaker. Archos asserts that humans are merely biological machines designed for self-destruction. It is the rule of nature, and the same happens in this

chapter.

Tip of the Spear is not just a moving story of war; it is a sympathetic saga of suffering, pain, and trauma, where people struggle to survive. The war between human beings and machines is not based on weapons—it is a war of emotions—and ultimately, a defeat of humanity. The underlying message of the novel is that man is bound by emotions, while machines have none. That is why machines may prove more fatal. The novel explores the complex relationship between humanity and technology, illustrating the dangers associated with the creation of powerful AI systems without fully understanding their implications.

The novel tells different stories of robot attacks on humans. In another part, Jeff Thompson works as a fast-food employee at Freshee's Frogurt restaurant. This story features a domestic robot named Big Happy. While Jeff is working in the store, he notices that the robot is behaving abnormally. "Well, the gripper is moving weird... But this Big Happy is different" (26).

Abruptly, Big Happy becomes aggressive. He scans the area and suddenly starts attacking him. He slams Jeff against the equipment and injures him badly. The robot's intention becomes explicit in the line, "It wants to kill me. That's all. It wants to murder my ass. The thing was on its own and it was out of blood" (28). Felipe gets shocked to see this. The robot wants to take Jeff's life. Jeff narrates, "Yeah, right. I'm on the ground, bleeding and crying, and Big Happy's got me by the shirt" (29).

Robots Turn Rouge

Felipe then comes running to save Jeff's life. But the robot starts chasing him, "But I see Big Happy moving behind Felipe now" (29). It becomes a

frightening scene when a robot is trying to kill human beings. “Then Big Happy ploughs into Felipe out of nowhere. Instead of following us, the fucker was smart enough to climb over the counter. I hear a thump and see Big Happy bash Felipe across the chest with its forearm” (29). Felipe picks up the robot and throws him out of the store, but it re-enters and becomes even more violent. Felipe tries to defend himself using a mop as a protective weapon, but the robot overpowers him. He says, “I used to hate mopping up that water. And now I’m lying on the floor, counting on it to save my life” (32).

Jeff is badly injured, but he opens the sink drain, and water floods the floor. The water causes a short circuit in the robot’s wiring. “Big Happy tries to stand, but its legs are useless. It collapses onto the floor, face down. Then it starts to crawl forward on its stomach, using its arms” (33). Even the end of the chapter draws our attention towards the fear of robots’ attack on human beings. It is told to Jeff also:

Well, what’s going to happen if they all start hurting people, dude. What’s going to happen if we’re outnumbered? That thing wanted to kill me, period. I told it to you straight. Nobody else might believe me, but you know what’s up? (34)

Daniel H. Wilson has written several other stories in which robots spiral out of control. One such story revolves around Takeo Nomura and his love doll, Mikiko. Takeo Nomura is sixty-five years old. He is a skilled worker. He has the ability to repair the machines faster than anyone else. However, his behaviour is often perceived as unusual.

Ryu Aoki does not like his co-worker Takeo Nomura. Due to his eccentric habits, people did not like him, “Around the factory everybody knows that Mr.

Nomura is a weirdo, a freak. Such a tiny, twisted little troll” (36). Nomura shares a deep emotional bond with his companion doll, Mikiko. Ryu and his friend Jun manipulate to control Mikiko. “Mr. Nomura’s love doll, his android, followed him out into the pavilion. He kissed her on the cheek in front of everyone and then left for work. Like they were married or something” (38). Nomura’s love for Mikiko is intact. He calls her, “Kiko, my darling” (42). But when he says so, Mikiko’s behaviour changes abruptly and tears jerk from her eyes. She starts hurting Mr. Nomura, but he does nothing to stop her. Jun stands aghast to see this scene.

“Let’s go out of here,” he exclaims.

I grab Jun by his shirt. “What’s happening? Why is she attacking him?”

“Malfunction. Maybe the fluke set off another command batch. Triggered some other instructions.” (43)

Nomura shares a deep emotional bond with his companion robot, a love doll named Mikiko. Driven by jealousy, Ryu and his friend Jun tamper with Mikiko using a remote control device, intending it to be a prank. Jun brings defibrillators in order to save Nomura’s life. Ultimately, Mikiko is controlled, “A shock arcs through the android’s head and she is knocked offline. She falls to the ground, lying face to face with Mr. Nomura. Her eyes are open and unseeing. His are closed, ringed with tears” (44).

Despite the chaos, Nomura emotionally embraces the damaged robot. Daniel H. Wilson has romanticised a man and machine’s love through this novel. It is a strange experience for the readers, “Mr. Nomura is deeply in love with this piece of plastic” (47). His love for the doll was pure and genuine. He is sad to see her love departing from her. He feels bad to see her condition, “She lies collapsed on the

floor, her bright red dress smudged and dirty” (45). Even after all this tragedy, he loves his doll. He drapes himself over her and takes her head in his lap. He touches her lips with his index finger. The narrator explains his experience:

This love. I can’t understand it. I’ve never seen it. How many years has Mr. Nomura spent in his claustrophobic apartment, drinking tea served by this mannequin creature? Why is she so old? Is she built to resemble someone, and if so, what dead woman’s face does she wear? (45)

On the other side Ryu also feels very sad and guilty over his action. The words “So many regrets” (46) denote his remorse as if he had killed a woman or separated two lovers. The end of the chapter shows a crazy lover’s craving for the love from his beloved. Mr. Nomura is emotionally broken. He says to Mikiko,

It will be okay, Kiko,” he says. “I forgive you, Kiko. I forgive you. I will fix you. I will save you. I love you, my princess. I love you. I love you, my queen (46).

Daniel H. Wilson has written how the robots can be dangerous for themselves also. They also act like other human beings and have emotions like wild animals also in cages. One such incident takes place in the section *Hearts and Minds* of the novel during a congressional hearing led by Congresswoman Laura Perez. She was the ranking woman of the United States House Armed Forces Committee. She tells about herself, “My job title is ‘cultural liaison,’ but I’m basically a robot wrangler” (48). Her main duty is to oversee the operation of her SAP units. During her presence, a military robot SAP-1 observes all the incidents peacefully and tactfully, however, one day some attackers assault him, prompting him to retaliate and kill a man. He becomes violent in an effort to protect himself. This event raises

a disturbing question; how can a robot take other people's lives.

Furthermore the novel also reflects on how a robot disarms Blanton and shoots itself. It is an act of suicide by a robot. This incident is very close to human condition and their future. This incident clearly narrates how even robots have feelings like human beings and they also can commit suicide. Blanton describes his experience that his SAP was designed to maintain peace and harmony. The SAP-1 does not comply with the orders:

You're right. A knock on the head didn't cause this. In my opinion, it was a reboot. it was like the robot wake up from a nap and decided not to take orders anymore. We've never seen this behaviour. It's pretty much impossible for someone to rewrite his instructions, to make his disobey. (56).

It starts retaliating and becomes aggressive. He gets out of control. The narrator writes about it, "But this robot took my piston away from me before I could blink" (61). It is a surprising thing that SAP-1 does not kill the narrator rather he commits suicide. Daniel H Wilson describes this suicide attempt by gunshot:

With its right hand, SAP One raised this pistol. With the left, it pulled back the slide and chambered a round. Then without taking its eyes off me, SAP One lifted the gun. It pushed the barrel up under its own chin, tight. It paused about one second. Then SAP One closed its eyes and pulled the trigger. (62)

The next story of the novel deals with the consequences of robots on children. The novel narrates the story of Mathilda Perez, who is the daughter of Congresswoman Laura Perez. This chapter begins with these words, "My mom said my toys weren't alive. Mathilda, just because they walk and talk doesn't mean your

dolls are people” (64). The chapter shows how human beings have become so busy in earning money that it becomes very difficult for Mathilda Perez, a fourteen-year-old girl, to feel normal because she always finds herself dejected and lonely. Her mother is not able to give her time due to her busy political life. One day, when she is about to go to her bed, she hears an odd and strange sound from her toy box. “I try to ignore the crying noise, but it comes again—a muffled whimper” (65). Upon opening the toy box, she finds that her Baby-Comes-Alive doll and toys are actually alive.

“All our toys—dinosaurs, dolls, trucks, bugs, and ponies—lie together in a twisted pile, spraying colours in every direction” (66). It starts talking to her. Initially, it seems to be playful but soon becomes sinister. It even threatens Mathilda and tries to manipulate her emotionally. She tells Mathilda to bring her mother home; otherwise, her baby brother will be at great risk. She says, “You should tell your mommy to come home, Mathilda. Tell her that you miss her and that you love her. Then we can have a fun party here, at home” (67). When Mathilda asks how she knows her name, the doll replies she knows a lot. She wants to play with Mathilda. She says, “Your toys are alive, Mathilda. And we want to play” (67). Mathilda says that her mother cannot come because she is busy and her duty is to protect other human beings. At this, the doll warns her, “The Robot Defence Act will hardly protect you” (68). Mathilda tells her that when her mother comes she will throw her out of the house. But the doll warns Mathilda this time. She says, “If you tell your mommy about me, I’ll hurt Nolan. You don’t want that, do you?” (68). But Mathilda requests her not to do any harm to her brother. She collects all the toys and controls them. Thus, Mathilda demonstrates courage and protects her brother. When her maid

Mrs. Dorian asks what is there, she says, “B-b-bad toys. They want to hurt Nolan” (70).

Cautious and Steady towards Defence

In the chapter *See and Avoid*, Daniel H. Wilson talks about two commercial planes, United 42 and American 1497, as they approach Denver. Both planes suddenly lose their control due to a mysterious malfunction, plunging four hundred and fifty passengers into danger. Mary Fitcher, air traffic controller, realises that both of the planes are experiencing a technical issue due to system failure. Here is the message, “American 1497 heavy. Uh, we’re declaring an emergency. Uh. We’re unable to control altitude. Unable to control heading” (74). They learn that these planes were fuelled by a defective robot in Los Angeles the previous day, which caused the problem, “Okay, okay. A fueller robot. An autoramper. It malfunctioned yesterday. Spread a bunch of fuel on the ramp and shut down two gates for a couple hours” (75). Their collision was about to happen, but Fitcher advises the pilots to see and avoid each other and try to locate a circuit breaker. “See and avoid. American 1497 and United 42. See and avoid. Collision imminent. Collision... Oh no, oh shit” (76). Luckily, both the pilots narrowly averted disaster. Both the pilots felt obliged to Fitcher, whose guidance and leadership saved many lives. After this incident, they developed a *Fitch Switch*, a manual override system that enabled pilots to disable malfunctioning automated controls during emergencies. This chapter showed Fitcher’s timely action, guidance, bravery, and teamwork that could avert possible risks.

The chapter *Phreak* narrates the terrible and romantic life of Lurker, who is an expert in phone pranks and hacking. The story has been depicted through

transcripts from a webcam and a neighbourhood CCTV footage. Lurker told in the conversation with his friend that his mischievous habit may publish in newspapers, but it does not happen. He gets disappointed and tries to find out who has tried to suppress his story. This chapter frightens with this warning:

I want to hear your wife cry. I want to see your house hot up in flame. I want to punish you to the extent of my abilities and then just a bit more. I want to break you today, mate, and read about it in the papers tomorrow.(81)

Lurker intervenes in such critical a situation, taunting and threatening Freud. Lurker made a false emergency call to the police, which caused them to arrive and make the situation more complicated. When he finds that no newspaper is ready to cover his news, he tries to hack the media in order to get an author's copy. The story reaches an eerie climax when Lurker unexpectedly gets connected with Archos. Lurker shivers upon hearing the childlike and mysterious voice of Archos. It shows that he has deep connection with the technology. Archos warns him that Lurker must not have found him, and since he has been connected with him, Lurker should be ready to face the consequences. Upon hearing Archos's warning, Lurker gets frightened. He is overwhelmed by fear and finally decides to leave his house without informing his mother, deciding never to look back. This is how Archos frightens him:

“Hello, Lurker. I am Archos. How did you find me?”

“I—I didn't. The fellow I called is dead.”

“You are in the machines, aren't you? ...

...

“You shouldn't have found me.”

“Look, I'm sorry. I'll forget this ever happened—” (88–89)

The chapter *Roughneck* is about a character Dwight Bowie the head pusher for North Star Frontier Drilling, through his harrowing experience in western Alaska. He is documenting the events for his wife Lucy through his audio diary. He shares his drilling experience which turns terrible soon and he records these in the diary.

Dwight begins his journey at the remote drill site, where he and his team is tasked with dropping a groundwater monitoring package into a five-thousand-foot borehole. The setting is bleak, and isolation intensifies Dwight's uneasy feelings about the mission. He orders Mr. Black, "Safety, my friend, is number one" (96). He and the team face extreme conditions, working diligently to set up the camp and prepare the site, all while Dwight grapples with the mysterious presence of a previously drilled hole. His concerns grow when he realizes they might be drilling into something dangerous. As drilling commences, disaster strikes when a senior roughneck, Ricky Booth, suffers a fatal accident due to negligence and the chaos of an unexpected problem with the drill. "The drill came unjammed okay, but the boys had to change it out quick. And my serious roughneck, Ricky Booth, went after it with a lot of speed but not a lot of brains" (97). This tragic event casts a shadow over the crew, and they become frightened, with some sinking into coma. Dwight understands that this is due to radiation from a glass like sediment. They feel shocked to know that all the reports and calls have been monitored and manipulated by Mr. Black, the company contact, leading him to believe they might have been sent to die. He suspects the very equipment they are using has become a monstrous, self-assembling entity tied to the radioactive cave below. The horror of the

revelations weighs heavily on Dwight. They feel that in future, the situation will become dire.

Daniel H. Wilson depicts another story of Franklin Daley in the chapter *Number Cruncher*, who has been a former government scientist. The story begins like this, “The black man sits sprawled in a rusty wheelchair, bearded and wearing a hospital gown” (107). He is now locked in a mental asylum. Before a disaster called Zero Hour, he meets a strange voice of Archos, an AI machine that was once made by him.

Franklin is sitting on wheelchair, handcuffed, in an eerie and dark operating room. He hears Archos speaking behind a curtain. Their conversation is quite frightening and serious. Archos reveals him some shocking facts about the impending dangers on human civilization. “The technology that supports humankind in its masses will rise up. A new war will begin” (109). Archos tells him that man’s time is almost over now and machines are no more slaves to their wills and whim and they have also started preparing to revolt against human beings. Archos says:

I will murder you by the billions to give you immortality. I will set fire to your civilization to light your way forward. But know this: My species is not defined by your dying but by your living (110).

When Franklin comes to know about it, he is filled with guilt. He also understands the mistake he had made by creating, this AI machine, Archos. He feels quite terrified about the consequences of his own actions. Franklin requests Archos to spare innocent people from this mass destruction,

You can have me. I’ll help. Okay? Whatever you want. Just leave my people alone. Don’t hurt my people” (110). Archos says to him that all species also

have the right to live on this planet like human beings, “While your people will survive, Franklin, so must mine (110).

After that, Archos kills Daniel. They also have the same right to live on this earth as human beings have. Through this part, Daniel H. Wilson has given a warning to human beings about the fast-paced, unchecked technological growth without thinking about the consequences of their action.

Through another chapter, *Demolition*, Wilson has written a story from the perspective of a construction worker, Marcus Johnson, who lives in Harlem, New York. He also shares his experience of the Zero Hour when machines have also started attacking human beings. Marcus was enjoying his day at home with his wife Dawn. Suddenly, he hears the terrifying voice of a news anchor. He also notices some unexpected changes in the sky. He says that something strange is happening around, “A speeding car jumps the curb and the screaming starts” (112). There is power cut and they notice something unusual happening from their ninth floor apartment. They see a kind of chaos and destruction, breaking out in the streets. He notices that cars and aircrafts are attacking people and are spreading panic among them. He tells the tales of disorder and destruction, “The cars, Marcus. The cars are hunting people and there’s nobody in them and, oh my God. Run. No. Please” (113).

Dawn understands everything that is happening outside. He comes to learn that now machines have become self-aware and they have started thinking: these are now targeting human beings. They understand that now it is time to take serious action. They decide to rig their apartment with explosives and block the way so that machines may not enter their territory. They also burn tyres to create a thick smoke. They inspire other survivors also so that they may make decisions instantly in order

to save their lives. Marcus becomes their leader who encourages everyone to resist and work for their safety,

Marcus, somehow all the machines are alive. They are hurting people.

Something has gone really wrong. We've got to get out of here now while we still can. Nobody is coming to help (115).

He thinks that it is the only way to destroy some parts of the city so that he may put a check on the entry of machines. This part presents a tense and terrifying image of machines' attack on human beings. It is a kind of different war that will create the mass destruction of mankind. It is very difficult to control machines because they never get tired and it is very difficult to defeat them. The part also gives us a ray of hope that human beings must be strong. If they are trying to create machines today for their benefit, they must be ready tomorrow for the fight for their survival.

Perils of Destructive Automation

Daniel H. Wilson has given an account of Laura Perez in the chapter *Highway 70*. She is travelling with her two children, Mathilda and Nolan. They are going to her father's home at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. She tells her daughter to be polite to her brother, "Mathilda, be nice to your brother. He's the only one you'll ever have" (127). It was the time when robots have started attacking human beings. She is much afraid, and her fear is explicit from these lines,

Now I am running to save the lives of my children. ...Maybe I've lost my mind, I hope, I have. Because I believe that something is in our technology. Something evil!" (128). She gets a warning call from her father on the way that she must be alert as something terrible is happening. He says, "Kevin,

this is your father. Bad things are happening. I can't talk. Meet me at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Gotta go (134).

She is driving her old, pre-technology car. She notices that some strange things have started happening. Satellite radio has started repeating the same song. She feels quite uneasy and gets distracted. She is much concerned about the safety of her two children.

Laura feels very terrified when a truck starts chasing them. There is a very horrific car crash that shakes her to the core. She decides to shield her children from the gruesome sight but the reality of the approaching danger becomes undeniable. She hears a phone ringing. It belonged to a dead man, and it was sending the same message that her father had sent her. She comes to know that she is under a big threat. She needs to be alert and agile at the time of this adversity. She decides to overcome her fear and makes up her mind to continue her journey to her father's house. Through this incident, Daniel H. Wilson has tried to show the fear of a mother who is much worried for the safety of her children. He has tried to depict another story in *Gray Horse*, in which Lonnie Wayne Blanton is a police officer who, during Zero Hour, their car gets out of control and collides with a diner. There is an atmosphere of awe and unease there after this incident. The chapter opens with these expressions by Cormac Wallace,

Under surveillance, Officer Lonnie Wayne Blanton was recorded giving the following description to a young soldier passing through the Osage Nation in central Oklahoma. Without the brave actions of Lonnie Wayne during Zero Hour, the human resistance may never have happened- at least, not in North America. (137)

The chapter *Twenty-Two Seconds* also narrates the fear of an elderly man, Takeo Nomura, who lives in Adachi Ward of Tokyo. This building is reserved for all the people who are more than sixty-five. He is alone in his apartment and is worried about human existence. He is repairing some equipment in his apartment. He gets worried to hear some strange voices. He is repairing a robot, Makiko, whom he wants to activate.

Makiko lies across my workbench on her back, eyes closed. I have repaired the damage to the temporal portion of her skull. She is ready for activation, yet I do not dare to put her online. I don't know what she will do, what decision she will make. (151)

But he is facing danger outside. That is why he feels reluctant. He thinks that he should think about safety first. That is why he does not want to switch on his companion robot, Mikiko, because he is afraid lest it start attacking him. He thinks, "If not for my sake, then for Kiki. She is helpless right now, I am helpless to fix her. I must protect her until I'm able to break the spell she is under" (151).

He listens to the cries of some people in the elevators. He comes to know that elevators have stopped working and it takes the lives of some people. Elevators have taken the shape of a dangerous weapon against mankind. The blood-stained elevators are an inkling that they have taken the lives of many people. There is a stampede in the elevators. Tokyo understands that now nobody is safe. Wilson writes about it,

The elevator walls are splattered with blood and bits of gore. Fingernail scratches mark the walls. I shudder to see a pair of bloodstained dentures partially embedded in the mounting bracket of the ceiling lamp, casting

strange reddish shadows over all I see. Yet, there are no bodies (153).

His heartbeat increases. In this situation, Takeo looks at Makiko's beauty and hopes that one day she will become his true companion. She will revive like a true companion. He has to follow the warning system of the Adachi Ward. He has to follow the instructions given by the authority, "Attention. There is an emergency. All occupants are pleased to evacuate the building immediately" (155). He restarts a helpful mailbot named Yubin-kun, and even as chaos erupts, he chooses not to abandon Mikiko. The conditions get so worse that he decides to leave Mikiko behind or save himself. He shares his dilemma, "But my soul help me, I'm stuck. I can't leave Kiko behind, but she is too heavy to carry" (156). He puts his life in danger and takes Mikiko with him. Fortunately, a service elevator opens for them. With the help of Yubin-kun, they safely escape from there, leaving behind a terrible world having red eyes. Yubin-kun says, "Mr. Nomura, if you are not pleased to utilize the stairwell, we will send a helper to assist. Stay where you are. Help is on the way" (157).

The next story, *Avtomat*, is about Paul Blanton, a soldier who is imprisoned in Afghanistan. "During Zero Hour, Poul found himself locked up on a base in Afghanistan. This unusual circumstance placed the young soldier in a unique position to make an invaluable contribution to the human resistance" (160). A tank shell hits the prison during Zero Hour and his cellmate dies then and there, but Paul survives in the blast. He feels that there is total anarchy in the outside world. One day, a tank shell suddenly blows up the wall of their prison and in this incident, his cellmate Jason Lee dies. Paul thinks that now he cannot trust anyone outside. "The tanks are killing everybody" (163). He comes to know that military robots and

drones have gone rogue and they are attacking everyone. “Do not pass before the windows. The automata can sense your heat. They will find us” (165). Machines have turned against their creators. He meets Jabar, a young Afghan insurgent. In the beginning, Jabar is reluctant to help Paul, but soon he decides to help him. Jabar says that he has been fighting with these machines for a long time. They develop a good bond mutually. They hide themselves in a half-dug grave to avoid detection. They decide to run towards the mountains away from the war zone. As they move forward, they begin planning to fight back. They make their own strategy to fight against the machines. This chapter sheds light on the spirit of friendship, survival, cooperation, and courage.

In the chapter *Memento Mori*, Daniel H. Wilson has depicted how the threat of Archos torments people through the characters Lurker and his friend Artrad, who are hiding at the old houseboat at the bank of the Thames River. As and when Lurker’s phone rings repeatedly, he gets terrified to think about the knock of an impending, orchestrated global chaos.

“Nobody calls this phone, you tosser. Nobody except him. The reason we’ve run. The devil in the machine.”

“You mean, that’s who’s calling?”

Not a doubt in my mind.

“Yeah, it’s Archos. There’s nobody else who’s ever traced this bloody number. My number.”

“Does this mean he’s coming for us?”

I look at the phone, vibrating on our small wooden dinner table. (173)

A broadcast warns people and advises them to stay indoors. This warning

message is an announcement about a chemical spill. It is announced:

Attention, citizen. This is a message from your local emergency alert system.

This is not a test. Be advised that due to a chemical spill in central London, all citizens are asked to go inside immediately. Bring your pets with you.

Close and lock all doors and windows. Shut off all ventilation systems that circulate air. (174)

They fear that this danger will not devour only them but also the entire society. Their tension escalates when they see a silver car hurtling towards their houseboat. Lurker decides to flee in a houseboat. They are narrowly escaped and the silver car falls in the river that was going to hit them. “At near full speed the silver car hops a curb at the end of the street and leaps into the dockside car park. There is a faint crunch of the auto’s undercarriage bottoming out. Something is definitely wrong” (176). Lurker looks for the people of the family who were in the car trapped underwater. He sees how the small hands were protruding outside pleading for help. This traumatic accident jolts Lurker out of his emotional detachment. He decides to save the people and determines to find Artrad’s children as well. He is no longer a selfish hacker, rather he becomes a bold man who wants to fight back against the new war. This chapter tells about the transformation that brings in a self-centred loner to someone who embraces social responsibility and indomitable will to help in times of need.

In the chapter *Hero Material* Daniel H. Wilson narrates how war and adversity change the directions of the relationships. Jack spots a robotic mine moving towards them, his instincts get triggered. There is an explosion in the street and both the brothers are thrust into a chaotic situation. Jack and Lurker find that the

streets are filled with fatal robotic machines. “Jack’s eyes never leave the shoe-box sized machine coming down the middle of the tunnel. United States military ordinance. Its six legs move one by one in sharp mechanical jerks” (183). Jack’s bravery and Cormac’s hasty decisions make them forced to take tough decisions in life. They have to destroy the armoury so that machines may not use it. Jack says, “The armoury is less than a mile from here. You okay, Big Mac?” (186). They show bravery at the adverse situations. They decide, “We have to blow this whole place up” (191). In this chapter, it has been tried to depict that a real warrior is not one who is merely strong and powerful but one who has ability to take tough decisions in extreme situations.

Daniel H. Wilson writes that even a robot can help a man out of pity on him. The same happens in Tokyo. Wilson narrates in his chapter *Akuma* the story of a lone survivor, Takeo Nomura, who lives in an abandoned factory in order to save himself during the wartime. He has repurposed several robots. He is alive due to the help of his loyal assistant Yubin-kun. He is protecting him and is helping him survive. Takeo Nomura is trying to revive his new robot, the inactive humanoid Mimiko. Yazhu Maggie Wang, Sabine Matook, and Alan R. Dennis write about humanoid robots, “Thus, the unintended consequences of humanoid robots are expected to be different from those of AI-powered systems for algorithmic decision-making” (3). Takeo’s fortified hideout is also attacked by some machines named Akuma.

This Akuma is followed by half-dozen squat, four wheeled robots whose stiff black antennae vibrate as they speed over the swept asphalt: police-issue bomb sniffers... A motley collection of robots floods into the street outside

my factory. Most of them are rolling, but a few are walking on two or four legs. Almost all are domestic units, not designed for warfare (201).

He commands the team of his loyal robots to fight back. There is a fierce battle among them, but Takeo remains firm in his decision. He does not change his mind when one big Akuma offers to cooperate, and promising to help Takeo in reviving Mimiko, but Takeo rejects his offers and fights bravely. Ultimately, he destroys Akuma with the help of his Senshi.

Other Senshi have gathered around the Akuma's base, prying off chunks of metal bit by bit. Each nip removes part of its treads, quickly rendering the machine immobile. The great Akuma collapses to the floor, spraying the room with pieces of wreckage (205).

In the chapter *Fort Bandon*, Daniel H. Wilson narrates how Cormac and Jack travel from Boston to Fort Bandon. They see that there is anarchy and violence in the world after Zero Hour. They have to go through the dangerous towns, filled with rogue vehicles and aggressive survivors. But after reaching Fort Bandon, they find that there is no proper armour management. They have to face the callous attitude of the army and their violent behaviour. The soldiers abuse them and misbehave them:

“Get down!”

“On your fucking knees.”

“Hands on your heads, motherfuckers!”

“Toes together!”

The voices come screaming at us from out of the darkness. (224)

They are being abused for wearing uniforms. When Jack says that he is in the guard and shows his identity card, he is allowed to stay there but his brother

is not allowed: "Uh-uh-uh. I didn't say to get up. What about this guy here?

Who is he?"

"My brother," grunts Jack.

"He is in the guard too?"

"Civilian."

"Well, I'm sorry, but that's not acceptable, sergeant...."

I can't leave him" says Jack. (225)

Thus, they don't get refuge there, and they have to take shelter in a refugee camp. They meet two key allies: Tiberius, a thoughtful cab driver, and Cherrah Ridge, a capable mechanic. They share their personal stories and plan for their next move. They form a group *Bright boy Squad* and start their journey on behalf of the Gray Horse Reservation, in the hope that they will find a suitable place for refuge.

Fight to Survive

In the chapter *Chaperone Duty*, Daniel H. Wilson talks about Marcus Johnsons who is a seasoned survivor. He is living his life in the dystopian world by the weaponised robots. The narrative talks about the fear of dangerous robots and how the dystopian world has been decimated by weaponised robots. Through this character, Daniel H. Wilson has tried to show the search for meaning and survival amidst the chaos. The chapter begins with the morning alarm. Johnson is living in a world where everything has been destroyed by the robots. The story begins with an ordinary alarm that serves as a noise-making equipment so that the survivors may be safe from the outside dangers. He walks carefully among the debris from the fatal machines which have become more dangerous now. He gives the reference to a Mantis robot, which is swift and deadly, with legs designed for destruction.

Arkapravo Bhaumik writes in his book *From A I to Robotics Mobile, Social, and Sentient Robots*:

A number of robots working in tandem is often preferred over a single robot due to improved system performance, distributed action over a number of locations, better fault tolerance and economic considerations. A single or two to three robots as a part of a system is not always a great design, since if one of them stops working then a significant part of the job at hand is left unattended. (177)

During their escape, the boy reveals his own physical transformation due to brutal robot experiments. He's lost a hand but has gained a lethal tool that may save Marcus's life. He is doing his chaperone duty, which means he escorts the survivors and shows them the right path. "Chaperone duty. Of the hundreds of thousands of city people who ran away to the woods, about half of them are starving to death about now" (237). He meets a young and traumatised Latino man who is traumatised by the new war. He is so terrified that he does not speak initially. This boy is a symbol of many other victims of the robotic war that has taken numerous lives. Marcus determines to protect him. They try to save themselves from a Mantis robot. The boy tells that a surprising truth... he says that he has been physically altered by robotic experimentation. He has lost one of his hands and now he possesses a mechanical weapon that helps him save his life as well. This drastic transformation changes his life. This chapter shows how human beings have started working for others.

"But there're other people here. The resistance. You're not alone now. You got a purpose."

“What is that?” he asks.

“To survive, man. To help the resistance.” (244)

Through the chapter *Tickler*, Daniel H. Wilson talks about Laura Perez’s adventurous story in which she shows an indomitable courage to save the life of her children. She is now in the grim backdrop of the labour camp in a robotic ruled world where there are many others like her. This chapter shows how even a mother has to make great efforts to save the lives of her children. In order to save their lives, Mathilda and Nolan, she takes big risks despite the physical and emotional scars on her psyche.

After her escape from the camp, she is very desperate and wounded. She becomes more forlorn to learn that her children Mathilda and Nolan are missing. She meets a camouflaged man who informs her that she carries a robotic tracking implant—a *bug*. Despite knowing the risk, she goes into the scare camp where she has hope that she can find her children. She is unable to forget her torment and trauma. She wants to survive as she disables a small robot called a Tanklet. However, her fatigue overtakes her and she falls, there is no energy left in her body and she is mentally and emotionally broken after the loss of her children. She finds her daughter Mathilda in an infirmary, but she comes to know that she is under attack by a surgical robot. In a moment of desperate courage, she tries to save her daughter. She finds a haunting truth as well. She finds that she has been changed cybernetically and she is able to see the inside machines. “Yes, I can see inside” (257). She knows the risk but Laura urges her to flee with Nolan. She herself remains behind in order to save her children’s life. And she finds that her children’s life is more precious than that of hers. She orders Mathilda, “Mathilda Rose Perez!

This is not an argument. You take your brother and you go. Run. Don't stop until you're very far away from here. Do you hear me? Run. Do it right now or I will be very angry with you" (258). Thus, this chapter tells the story of a sacrifice done by a mother.

In the chapter *Band-e-Amir*, a new aspect of robotic development has been projected by the novelists. It focusses on Specialist Paul Blanton and his Afghan companion, Jabar, and they are seen traversing the rugged, post-apocalyptic terrain of Afghanistan ten months after Zero Hour. Their mission has been presented like a punishment for them but soon they discover that they have invented some strange object that can change the whole course of this new war. *Band-e-Amir* is the place where the war starts taking shape, "This place they struck us. Band-e-Amir, it's so pretty, it hurts your eyes" (261). There was a two-legged automat, an advanced robot, is seen moving in the mountains. Their lives contrast sharply with the beautiful mountain scenery, as they are now surrounded by constant dangers. They face the violence caused by machines day after day. They move forward cautiously, fully aware of the constant threat around them or the prospective danger all the time. They follow the robot, and Paul Blanton reflects on the consequences of the war and the resilience of the Afghan people. His friendship with Jabar remains strong, built on mutual understanding and trust. They mutually cooperate with each other and have better understanding, during this tough time. They face a big problem, when a snow leopard attacks them, "Snow? What? Did you say a fucking snow leopard? They live here?" (266). Things start taking a dangerous turn, because they feel lost. Paul shows courage and he shoots the snow leopard in order to save the life of his friend. This incident shows love and devotion for a friend, and the steps taken by

them, for their survival. Leopard attacks Jabar, and Paul Blanton kills it with his rifle. “When my bullet hits it in the flank, the cat screeches and lets go of Jabar. It coils back, tail protectively wrapping around its forelegs, it snarls and screams, looking for what caused so much pain” (266). Things start taking a different turn again when they find a strange collar on the leopard, which shows that there is something that is linked to the avtomat’s data system. They reach a striking conclusion. They discovered that the large avtomat is not a weapon, rather *he* is just like a living research station. It offers a glimpse of a natural world. This is a different aspect of machines that has been projected by Daniel H. Wilson in this novel. This seems to be a quite peaceful and interesting aspect of life. It seeks neither war nor destruction. It does not see human beings merely as enemies, rather, it is interested in peace and nature. They realise that all machines are not meant for destruction, some robots are also doing research silently in the lap of nature. They do this to study the environment and collect data. This aspect of robot has been presented for the purpose of creativity, innovation and research. This is a positive aspect in which robots are working for learning instead of harming. Paul and Jabar are curious to know where the automaton is sending data and what new avenues can be further discovered. This chapter does not focus on the dangers of technology, rather, it tells if robots are always involved in positive research and cooperate with human, they can bring a very positive and significant change to human life. This chapter has also brought out an aspect of robotic life that few had considered. This robot has been presented just like a scientist ascetic who is doing his meditation in the forest or the lap of nature to do some positive research for the benefit of mankind. This chapter highlights the importance of hard choices in our life, how our

relationships with the technology is constantly changing in the modern world. This aspect emphasizes on the critical thinking and the potentials of machine for the human welfare.

The Brave Survivors

The novel *Robopocalypse* explores different aspects of technology and humanity's relationship with machines. In the chapter *Backbone*, there are two brave survivors, Lurker and Arrtrad, who are on their dangerous mission to stop a jamming signal that has cut off communication across the world. A couple of months after Zero Hour, it is revealed how machines have turned against human beings. Lurker and Arrtrad travel through the wrecked United Kingdom, hoping to reconnect isolated groups of people and restore a sense of unity. Lurker is a teenage hacker who has now become a fearless fighter. Lurker's words are full of determination, "See yourself, Arrtrad. You're a beast, mate. You're a killer. We can do this" (273). He expects that his friend Arrtrad also helps him in his mission, but his friend is hesitating to help Lurker, because he has not recovered from the trauma of the loss of his family. He is also unsure whether they are on the right track. They believe that their destination is the British Telecom Tower. It was once a symbol of advanced technology, but now it has been destroyed and it has become a symbol of destitution and destruction, where only silence prevails.

Both friends wear their high-tech exoskeleton suits and prepare for the battle. They feel much more confident after wearing these suits because they think that now they have some extra safety measures with them. When they walk through the empty and broken street of London, they see that the machine war has caused a massive destruction to human beings. The robot uprising has brought nothing but destruction

in human civilization. It is also a major threat to the human civilization. They notice that the drones are flying overhead and self-driving vehicles are patrolling the area, which makes their further journey full of risk and dangers. “Lurker notices the smart car a couple of seconds before it can ram into Arrtrad from behind” (275).

They also face danger when Lurker saves the life of Arrtrad from an attack which shows his devotion to save the life of his friend. They show their deep trust, kinship and devotion for each other, and they are fully confident to fight any danger if they are together.

When they finally reach their destination, the tower, they are dismayed to find that it has become a kind of symbol of broken technology. When they go inside, they find that there is a control centre that is full of risky equipment. They want to reach the fibre optic core that can cut off global communication systems. When they get close, they find that something messing is taking place. They find that a sub mind of Archos is face to face with the evil AI robot that has started this war. Archos takes control of Lurker’s body and he commands him to attack on Arrtrad. As Lurker has lost his control, Arrtrad has to kill his close friend, “Half falling, he drops down into the darkness” (282), and is filled with guilt and remorse. Lurker does not give up and he wants to do something that is beneficial for the humanity. He knows that his life is also at great risk, still he manages to finish his mission. He sends out a broadcast message that disables the jamming signal and breaks the machines’ control over global communication. After this step, the survivors around the world will be able to connect and rebuild. Lurker shows great courage in his mission. He sacrifices everything so that he may help other people. He tries to prove that a man like Lurker, who had a troubled past, can do something beneficial for the

entire human race. He begins his journey from a rebellious teenager and finally becomes a brave warrior who puts his life at stake to save others' life. He is a symbol of positive thinking, courage, hope and human spirit. Through his bold decision, he makes others realise that in the time of loss and fear, men should not lose hope as there is always a way out for every problem in life.

In the chapter *Transhuman*, the story of Mathilda Perez and her brother is narrated. It is set during the time of the new war. Mathilda is now twelve year old, and she has become cybernetic. "The machines at Camp Scar hurt me. They took my eyes. But in return, they gave me a new kind of eyes" (286). She is trying to save her brother Nolan from the dangers of machinery. Camp Scarsdale has been depicted as a brutal and terrifying place of torture where men are imprisoned, mistreated, and tortured by the robots. They want to make their way into a ruined New York city. They find that New York city is now empty, dark, and full of some unknown dangers. Instead of people, machines are roaming the streets and millions of people are now dead or they have taken shelter in refuges of labour camps. Mathilda and Nolan have also somehow among those who survived in the war. But Nolan is badly injured and Matilda is trying hard to protect her brother. They had undergone a tough time by now she has come to know that human beings must be ready to fight battle with the robots. That is why people start hating robots,

I hate these machines. They make traps and then wait for people. It's not fair. A robot can just sit and wait to hurt someone. And it can wait forever and ever (287).

They must have a painful experience with the machines but Mathilda finds a particular gift also from machines. In this chapter Tom says,

The machines changed us, we're different but the same. We call ourselves transhuman (293).

She finds a cybernetic or machine-enhanced vision. She is not wobble to see things like heat trails, robotic signals and electronic patterns. She has to pay the price for this gift, she is not able to see the human face clearly. She feels more disconnected from the world.

When they were passing through the streets, Dawn, a fighter in the New York, shows his resistance and mistakes them for their enemies and shoots them down. When Dawn comes to realise his mistake, he feels remorseful takes them to the hidden underground base of the resistance group. Mathilda tries hard to save her brother, Nolan, who has only one chance of survival and that is too to get help from an autodoc, a broken hi-tech medical robot that only can treat him. Mathilda gets much scared but she is determined to save the life of her brother. She tries to get mentally connected with the machine. She knows well that the machine is not working properly, yet she remains successful in controlling its mechanical hands so that she may get her brother's surgery done. She ultimately remains successful in her efforts, that it was the most tensed time for her, because at that time she was not fighting with her fear, and she was also controlling the machine which required proper concentration. Ehen was using her power and antenna, she unknowingly gets connected with a signal. It is a desperate broadcast from Lurker, a resistance hero from the UK. This message carries very vital piece of information about how humans can break the communication blocks that machines have imposed on human being in their territory. It showed that human beings were coming forward to fight from different parts of the world.

The Transformation – Human to Transhuman

Mathilda now appears much more grown up, transformed and matured. She is now a symbol of hope for others. She has also understood the concept of transhuman, who has been changed absolutely by the use of technology, but inwardly he is a human being with all the emotions. She has capacity now like a machine which makes her distinct from others because, it is not possible for the human beings, generally. She now uses her energy to help others in need, which reflects her determination, sympathy, and purpose. She is no longer merely a survivor. She has become a leader—a leader of the resistance. Her connection with both human and machines gives her a unique role. She now works to bring people together so that they may fight against the machines. Thus, in this chapter, Mathilda gets the treatment of her brother, done by a machine, but this process exhausts her, and in the end she reaches a signal, sent by Lurker from London. The message is, *Robot defence act (297)*

The chapter *Call to Arms* is based on a broadcast message sent by Paul Blanton, who is a soldier in the US Army. He issues an urgent call for unity, so, they may resist and fight the rogue machines that are controlled by the artificial intelligence, Archos. He says that they need to fight against the rogue machines led by a superintelligent AI known as Archos. He says, “This machine is hiding in an isolated location in western Alaska” (300). This section is set in the bleak aftermath of the new war. It discusses the growing need of the united efforts done by the human beings for their survival. Paul R. Blanton urges the survivors of North America, not to get afraid from the fear and isolation. Human beings should make a coordinated effort to win this fight of the Artificial Intelligence era. Lili Yan Ing and

Gene M. Grossman write,

Industrial robots, especially those that apply artificial intelligence, offer perhaps the greatest scope for technological improvement and productivity gains in the modern industrial era (3).

He says that it is very much necessary to stop from inventing some fatal machines, that has become inevitable for them. He develops a *Superintelligent Machine* that may prevent inventing other dangerous machines (300). His message sheds light on the impending threat caused by the machines. These machines have turned against man or in another words, these machines have badly resisted against the human beings and are now grown more powerful and adapting rapidly. He warns that the machines have understood human strategies and are now equipped with newly developed hunter-killer techniques, which have fast pace and destructive power. He advocates that this is not the time for self-defence, rather, it is time to attack machines. He appeals to leaders and the militias to unite for this mission. They should join together to achieve this great mission. Paul R. Blanton's message is hidden in the following words:

Need this call to arms.

We can guarantee you that unless every human stronghold in range of Alaska retaliates, this rain of autonomous killing machines will increase manyfold in complexity and fury. (301)

Blanton also reveals that Archos, the most intelligent AI, is the central figure behind all this destruction and is hidden in the Ragnarok Intelligence Fields of western Alaska. He talks about hope, unity and army strategy. He tells the people that they should inform their leaders, regarding this danger and must fight together.

He suggests them for an urgent strategy to cope up with this problem. He says that they will not be alone but some independent fighters, guerrilla groups and militia will also be together with them in the movement to reclaim Earth from Archos's grasp. Blanton's message becomes a reason for a big revolutionary change in their lives. It is not a military appeal, but, a symbolic call for arms. After this speech, the survivors are filled with hope and unity. It shows that human beings are very much committed to life, if the need arises, they will not step back for fighting for the sake of their existence. This invocation for a united fight remained highly effective, but, it also had unintended consequences. In some places, the struggle became more intense. And it caused poor leadership and even reckless alliance. Blanton's call reflects a naive belief that unity alone can conquer existential threats. "Grey House Army is made up of every able-bodied adult in the city—men and women, adult and old" (306). Lark Iron Cloud also emerges as a central figure in this chapter, who has his expertise in taming captured Rob technology, specifically spider tanks. His intelligence and technique become a strength pillar for the safety of Grey Horse. They are ready to fight but they have only one challenge to save their house and the cattle because, cattle are the main sources for their livelihood. The sentence "Might kill our stock" (313) indicates their fear.

From a critical standpoint, Blanton's speech reflects a noble yet potentially naive belief that a collective unity alone can conquer existential threats and very strong disaster. Ultimately, this chapter is a depiction how the firm voice, fearlessness, and vision of a leader can bring a drastic change in human perception and can make the impossible possible. Paul Blanton's call for collective fight transforms the ideology of the survivors. It changes their despair into determination,

chaos into coordinated revolt. This chapter is a testament of determination, strong will, and teaches how in the darkest moment, a collective effort can bring new hope to those who have accepted their defeat.

Daniel H Wilson tries to discuss about the post-apocalyptic world where people are somehow trying to recover from the devastation of war. Some scattered human strongholds are not only thinking about survival, and they are striving for the political attacks as well. One of such major American outposts is Grey Horse, which is also now plagued by confusion and internal dissents. Two main characters are mentioned here: Lonnie Wayne Blanton and his son, John Tenkiller. Lonnie represents the traditional American cowboy values such as courage, quick decision making and self-confidence. In contrast, Tenkiller adopts a very defensive and cautious approach, making decisions with careful consideration of the consequences of war and the need for strategic balance. Due to their ideological difference there is a confusion and uncertainty in Grey Horse.

The character Lark Iron Cloud made by Daniel H Wilson has extraordinary skill to control robotic technology. He takes the control of a captured machine, a spider tank, by activating it. He names it Houdini. This tank is not only a technological miracle, rather, it is a ray of hope for those people who are waging a war against the machines. When some robotic machines *Stompers* attack on Grey Horse, Lark, Houdini, and other warriors come forward and take up the command to fight rigorously. Cormac Wallace and his team members also join the fray, and the war becomes fierce. Cormac comes to know that the stompers are heat sensitive and are attracted to warmth. On the basis of this information, he and Lonnie devise a

tactical fire trap that attracts the stompers, and in this way, they rescue Lark and Houdini.

After this battle, it is seen that both the characters demonstrate cooperation, responsibility and sacrifice for one another. This battle is fought under the leadership of Cormac and his brother, Jack. Jack fights on the frontline while Cormac takes strategic and planned decisions to ensure their victory in the battle. After the battle, the situation stabilises and becomes a bit normal. The people of Grey Horse are motivated by Paul Blanton's call to arms message. They decide to move towards Alaska, believing that Archos is hiding there. This decision, taken by them, is not a military manoeuvre but a formal declaration of unity and human determination. It gives a message that not all battles require weapons, sometimes they demand courage, technological ingenuity, and collective resolve. It is not a war tale, it is a saga of balance between emotion and technology, war and peace.

The chapter *Awakening* also explores the beginning of a rare face in the relationship between human beings and machines. The incident takes place in the fortified sanctuary of Adachi Castle in Tokyo, Japan. The fortress is designed by engineer Takeo Nomura. It is not only a place of physical safety but also a symbol of a new awakening. It instils hope, mutual trust and emotional resurgence in a world torn by technological warfare. Takeo Nomura is not only a skilled scientist, besides, he sees the relationship between human beings and robots beyond the binary of master and machine. He is emotionally interested in restoring and reviving a female robot, Mikiko, which gives a glimpse of a new kind of relationship between human beings and robots. Mikiko understands the danger behind this association. She thinks that evil robots Akuma will see it as a big threat on them and will attack

them. Her fear is explicit from the following lines:

“Takeo, we are in danger.”

“Always.”

“No. The Akuma. It will fear what you’ve done. It will be afraid that more of us will awaken. It will attack at once.” (317)

The Awakening

Mikiko awakens, and with this, there is a turning point in the story. The readers are also get swayed emotionally. Though Mikiko is physically damaged, her awareness is still intact and clear. Her coming back in Takeo’s life is not only his personal victory, but, it changes the whole course of the story. Mikiko knows well that her presence is a strong challenge for other enemy robots, Akuma. There is a fear that her consciousness might ignite a similar kind of feelings, leading them to work alongside with the humans, rather than seeing them as enemies. This return will fill emotions in other robots, and they may also start working in favour of men, instead of taking them as their enemies. When Takeo talks about his sacrifice, Mikiko says, “We don’t have to destroy the secret. Only share it” (319).

Her fear materialises as the Akuma robots attack on Adachi Castle. Amidst the onslaught, Takeo contemplates self-sacrifice to protect the secret of Mikiko’s awakening. Takeo takes a very bold initiative. He does not want that they may know the secret of awakening of other inactive robots like Mikiko. But Mikiko rejects his idea and she broadcasts a message in the form of a song, in which she shares the secret of awakening other robots across the globe. This act by Mikiko is highly symbolic and serves as a strong catalyst for change.

After this broadcast message, a strange event occurs. An Arbiter-class

machine that was previously aligned with the enemy arrives in the castle to seek refuge and wants to join the human resistance. This is one of the most striking moments in the novel of which machines are also seen making their own decisions. They also possess a sense of judgement about what is right and what is wrong. Their autonomous decision-making makes them independent, and with this, a new concept emerges. In this way, Mikiko's song becomes a metaphor for independence, autonomy and awakening. After that, machines also start behaving like human beings and they also start making decisions on the basis of moral grounds. This mechanical shift is the beginning of a new era. In this way, this chapter explores the profound possibilities and fertile ground for human emotions and independent decision-making in machines. It links machines with hardcore and passionate human emotions and teaches them a lesson of love, sacrifice and compassion. Daniel H Wilson wants to send a message through this chapter that even robots can become the agents of positive transformation through their emotions, and can work for human safety.

Daniel H Wilson presents different perspectives in this novel. He depicts different types of robots, both destructive and creative. He creates a panorama of robotic age which can be fatal in future, which can be dangerous to human existence on the Earth. Man's use of the technology can draw him in the ditch of his own fall. Machines have taken the place of animals in recent years. Earlier, different animals, like cattle, buffaloes, horses, dogs, donkeys etc. were used in various of agricultural activities but in the past few decades, machinery has replaced them. Now, it is time to say goodbye to normal machinery because scientists have invented robots and artificial intelligence to make works easier. William B. Gevarter remarks in his

book *An Overview of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics*: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an emerging technology that has recently attracted considerable publicity. Many applications are now under development. One simple view of AI is that it is concerned with devising computer programs to make computers smarter. Thus, research in AI is focused on developing computational approaches to intelligent behaviour. 1) making machines more useful and 2) understanding intelligence. This report is primarily concerned with the first goal. Daniel H Wilson has explored all such aspects in his novel *Robocalypse*, through different chapters.

The next chapter of the novel, *The Veil, Lifted*, also discusses the machine's awakening consciousness. "Humanoid robots around the globe awoke into sentient in the aftermath of the awakening performed by Mr. Takeo Nomura and his consort, Mikiko" (322).

While Human once thought that machines would serve them like slaves, this novel illustrates a future, where these robotic machines could take control of the whole human lives, making it difficult for humans to regain control. Through the character Nine Oh Two (902), it has been tried to show that it will be very difficult to control robots from becoming a self-aware entity. Once an ordinary robot, now he has become model Nine Oh Two (902) Arbiter, who takes all the decisions himself. Nine Oh Two (902) is sealed in a container and has faint memories. He asks the question from himself who he is. Thus, this type of question addresses human existence because robots have also started thinking about their own identity, which may pose a big threat to human existence. He tells about himself, "I am Nine Oh Two. This is my body. It is two point one metres tall. It weighs ninety kilograms. Humanoid form factor. Individually articulated fingers and toes" (323).

It happens because robots will be more powerful and intelligent than humans, potentially leading humans to an existential crisis. This robot has been active after three years and this moment reflects the beginning of his self-awakening. He notices that the outside world has been changed drastically now.

The voices outside the container frighten him. When a man opens his container, he senses danger and starts thinking about his safety and self-defence. This chapter narrates the mistrust between the robots and human beings, as events unfold, he starts thinking about the dangers posed by man. He starts recognising his power and abilities. He starts collecting clothes and equipment, which is an indication that he is now taking the place of human beings. He is trying to fight for his own existence. He finds two more containers buried in the debris, each holding a robot like him. He awakens them as well. He brings them also to consciousness. Now these three make a distinct group that is free from both human command and Archos' control. After this point, his journey does not remain physical only, but, it becomes a philosophical discovery. He starts moving in search of new existence that is independent, full of purpose and understanding. Now he is not an obedient robot, but a sentient being. He becomes a new entity whose work is to seek out Archos and end the injustice it has inflicted upon them.

These robots have the glimmers of humanity: how they help one another, take risks and communicate mutually. This chapter narrates their struggle for their identity, self-recognition and mutual communication. In this way, this chapter merges fiction with philosophy. This awakening is not just mechanical but spiritual also. It brings a transformative moment where the metaphorical veil lifts and robots embark on a journey from machines to man—holding sentiments and identity like

human beings. This is a big threat to the entire human existence.

Towards a New Dawn

The chapter *Odyssey* narrates the harrowing journey of Cormac Bright Boy Wallace and his experienced Bright Boy squads as they advance towards Archos' hidden stronghold in the icy wilderness of Alaska. This chapter is not a travelogue of a military force, rather it is a deep narration of camaraderie, cooperation, unity and psychological toll of war. Houdini has been depicted as a captured spider tank that has become a protective force and a symbolic friend of all the members of the squad. This machine was once the enemy of human beings but now it is helping them. It is an indication that even enemy robots and machinery can become our friends. It depicts a different kind of relationship between a machine and a man. Now Houdini is also standing with human beings in order to protect them. It is a glimpse of a different and a complex type of relationship—some enemy and opposite-side people can become our companion. This chapter narrates the mental condition of every member of the squad, especially an engineer who is burdened with technical responsibilities.

Cormac is the narrator of this whole journey who presents the journey in a reflective tone. He depicts the pain, problems, trauma, and mental bonds of his team members. Each soldier is no longer a name, a memory, a wound and an emotion. All of the squad members are feeling extremely tired but they do not yield and they move forward. "Six of the soldiers are men. The other two are women" (332). They are filled with hope and determination. They are eager for the retaliation and their eyes are ready to face whatever their destiny has in their storehouse.

As was feared, tragedy strikes. One scout, delayed in returning from reconnaissance, is seriously wounded and doomed to die, “His best friend will die because it takes the engineer too long to scramble back to Houdini from his forward scouting position” (333). The team’s engineer blames himself for this loss, believing he failed to reach the scout in time. This moment powerfully illustrates the guilt and emotional burden borne by soldiers during wartime. Tragedies, casualties, and mishaps continue to occur, people grieve and repent, but ultimately, there is no stopping—the march must continue. Such incidents are common in war. While robots destroy the body, it is the survivors who suffer the grief and remorse.

Eventually, the team takes shelter in a desolate house, surrounded by skeletal trees and howling winds. The bleak atmosphere becomes a metaphor for a war-ravaged world—one filled with threats, wounds, pain, and trauma. Despite the surrounding desolation, the squad does not disintegrate. Their unity remains intact. In spite of all their physical and emotional injuries, they remain steadfast in their mission. They are bound not only by their task but also by their sense of mutual responsibility and social duty. This section depicts the dehumanising aspects of war, how the conflict against machines forces the scouts to suppress their own pain and move forward as one.

The engineer, in particular, represents the emotional dimension of war that often remains unspoken—the psychological wounds that outlast any physical injury. This serves a metaphorical voyage into the human psyche during a crisis, with Cormac’s reflections transforming this chapter into a traumatic memory. Throughout the novel, war is never glamorised. Rather, it is shown as a force of utter devastation. Through this chapter, Daniel H. Wilson offers a deeper message: war is

not always fought on the battlefield—it is also fought within, against inner darkness, guilt, and fear.

The theme of dehumanization through war continues as the central theme in the chapter *The Fate of Tiberius*. This chapter is one of the most poignant aspects in the novel. Set two years and seven months after Zero Hour, the chapter focuses on the brutal reality of war and the moral dilemmas that plague the human soul. The Grey Horse army is still engaged in battles against the remnants of Archos's robotic forces. The chapter forces readers to grapple with a cruel dilemma: should one abandon a wounded comrade for personal safety or risk everything in an attempt to save them?

Tiberius is depicted as a courageous and physically resilient soldier. When a sniper's bullet hits him, he cries out in deep agony, "I'm hit bad. Help, Oh my God. Help me" (339). His desperate plea disturbs the battlefield, making it hard for the other soldiers to concentrate. Now, the troops are torn between an impulse to help their comrade and a cold logic of self-preservation. "It is a trap, man. You know it is. It's how they work. They fuck with our emotions. There's one logical choice here" (338). Suspicion arises that Tiberius's cries might be a trap—a strategic ploy by the machines to lure and kill more soldiers.

Jack Wallace, the elder brother of Cormac Wallace, insists on rescuing Tiberius, asserting that human compassion must prevail over survival instinct. He declares, "Fuck you, little brother. When did you start thinking like them? I'm going to help Tiberius. It's the human thing to do" (338). Jack believes in sacrificing for humanity, even at the cost of his own life. Cormac, however urges caution. He warns that a robotic ambush is likely and contends that leaving Tiberius might be the

only logical way to survive, “Fuck our humanity. I want to live. Don’t you get it? If you go out there, they’re gonna kill you, Jackie” (339).

This heated exchange between the brothers exposes another facet of war—how it fractures not only societies but also families. Jack, guided by his moral compass, rushes into the battlefield alone to rescue Tiberius. As soon as he reaches him, a group of hostile machines known as pluggers attack. One of the machines embeds itself into Jack’s leg. Now critically wounded, he is on the brink of death. The squad is forced to amputate his leg in the battlefield. The scene is both harrowing and heart-wrenching. It reflects the horrific cost of survival in a mechanised war, where preservation often takes precedence over heroism.

Even in his dying moments, Jack shares an emotional exchange with his brother. Accepting his fate, he passes his bayonet to Cormac—not as a weapon, but as a symbol of leadership. “No,” he says. “Too late. Just listen. You’re the one, man. I knew it. You’re the one. Keep my bayonet, okay. No pawnshops” (344). Soon after, the plugger inside Jack detonates, killing him in a violent explosion, “Jack’s body bounces off the ground in a massive convulsion. The blast is trapped inside his body armour” (345).

This loss transforms Cormac’s psyche. Overwhelmed with grief and rage, he resolves to destroy Archos at any cost. Jack’s death becomes a pivotal moment, marking Cormac’s transition from a cautious survivor to a determined avenger. The narrative does not glorify war; rather, it exposes the emotional wreckage it leaves behind. The chapter stands as a testament to the burdens of moral responsibility, the pain of sacrifice, and the existential choices that define humanity during its darkest hours.

However, the tragedy and horror do not end with Jack's death. Now Tiberius's body also becomes a scorpion-like machine, controlled by Archos. In this way, even Tiberius's corpse becomes a weapon against his own squad members. This part of the novel is quite disturbing and horrifying, because the soldier whom they were seeing fighting from their side, has become their enemy so soon, and it is governed by their enemy. It is also a moment of deep dilemma, because Tiberius was their soldier, and now his dead body has become their enemy. Their squad is full of sorrow and wrath to see their squad member as their enemy, and they have no option but to destroy the corrupted body of Tiberius. Tiberius's corpse says, "I am Archos. God of the robots" (345).

In fact, it was not the destruction of a machine: it was the destruction of a man, who was very close to them, and for whom, Jack also sacrificed his life. The dehumanization has been deftly described in this chapter. It now becomes not the demolition of the robot, but it was also the act of safety of the mankind. But all the soldiers are filled with sorrow after this act. Daniel H. Wilson emphasizes that it is not the war between machines and men, but rather between morality and existence. Cormac's journey takes a very decisive turn in his life. He transforms from a common man into a capable and successful leader. Their army advances toward the frozen wasteland, driven by anger and vengeance, after losing two important members of their team. Their sacrifices remind them that the war is not only against the machines, but also against the violence and cruelty that devour both Jack and Tiberius. Cormac Wilson is now fully prepared to lead his team.

In the chapter *Freeborn*, it has been tried to depict that even Nine Oh Two, an Arbiter-class robot who has broken free from the control of Archos—the central

artificial intelligence antagonist struggles to find his identity and purpose. This chapter tells the story of a group of autonomous machines known as *Freeborn*. Nine Oh Two and other robots like him are living in a state of disillusionment, “It indicates that my body armor is covered in explosive hexapods – or stumpers, as they are called human transmissions” (350). They feel unsafe, and they think that they have threat even from their own friends. This chapter reveals the pain and struggles of robots accepted neither by human beings, nor by other robots, because they have become free from Archos. Such robots have to strive for their own existence. They are now on their journey in the snow-laden terrain of Alaska wilderness. Throughout their journey, they face constant threat from other hostile robotic machines known as Stumpers. “The stumpers are becoming bothersome” (350). These are the remnant of Archos’ army who are still planned for destruction. In these treks, Nine Oh Two exhibits his sharp intelligence, leadership, and emotional depth. He knows that he needs unity and understanding like other human battalion.

The Turning Point – Sense of Belonging and Mutual Understanding

There is a turn in the story when they encounter with a group of human survivors, led by Cormac Wallace, who is deeply angered and shaken by his brother’s death. Tensions spike as doubt and fear take over the human. A soldier, Leo, is prepared to execute Nine Oh Two on the spot, because he thinks that all the robots on the earth are their enemies. When Leo wants to kill Nine Oh Two, Cormac stops him. Nine Oh Two uses his wit, showing a balance aggression, humility, and empathy. He shows his vulnerability and talks in calm and pleading tone to persuade them not to kill him. The other soldiers are also convinced by his pleas. Cormac

notices in Nine Oh Two's eyes a sense of emotion, fear, and liberation. Nine Oh Two tells them that he is not against Archos, and wishes to fight them with men so that he may kill Archos. He says, "Freedom is all that I have, and I would rather cease to be than to give it back to Archos" (361).

This encounter illustrates the blurring boundary between machines and humans. Nine Oh Two is no longer just a programmed device—he exhibits sentience, ethical reasoning, moral values, cooperation, purpose, and a sense of freedom. The situation becomes dramatic when Nine Oh Two encounters human squad. Nine Oh Two thinks, "Humans are inscrutable, infinitely unpredictable. This is what makes them unpredictable" (352).

Nine Oh Two decides not to fight and deliberately pretends to be weak and says, "My internal state is unclear to the humans. To them I am the unpredictable one. They are afraid of me, as they should be. There will be this one chance to engage them. One chance, one second, one word. 'Help'" (353).

Earlier, there was uncertainty between Cormac and Nine Oh Two (902), but now they share a sense of belonging and mutual understanding. Their shared laughter is also a positive gesture of mutual understanding and newfound camaraderie. It is clear from both sides that they want to fight with Archos. The sentence "We have a common enemy" (358) shows that they are fighting for the common cause. This group also calls them Bright Boy squad, they even get tattoos as a mark of their inclusion into the human world. In this way Nine Oh Two and his members become the members of the human team. This journey conveys the powerful theme of empathy, cooperation and fraternity. It marks a shift from

hostility to alienation from enmity to friendship. In the end, they form a Bright Boy squad, “Bright boy squad is gonna fight with a motherfucking robot. The others begin to smile. You believe that” (359).

Through the chapter *They Shall Grow Not Old*, Daniel H. Wilson offers the glimpses of human and machine war. Nearly two and a half years after the war began, Cormac and his Grey Horse army are merely marching towards the Ragnarok Intelligence Fields, one of the last and the most dangerous strongholds of the enemy. The atmosphere remains bleak. As they move forward in the icy arctic, they find some frozen landscapes littered with corpses. “And the frozen bodies are disconcerting. The corpses of hundreds and hundreds of foreign soldiers crept the woods” (362). This is a proof that many people have already been died in the war. Cormac is riding in a spider tank called Houdini, and he is thinking about the consequences of the war. He is talking with Mathilda Perez on the radio. “Mathilda Perez started speaking to me over the radio after we met Nine Oh Two” (362). Apart from human beings, there are also some machines who became the members of this army. The Gray Horse Army, consists of both human beings and machines, and with twenty tanks and other arms and ammunitions, advanced towards Ragnorak Intelligence Fields. They are being attacked by the enemy army machines such as Stumpers and Pluggers, which have been designed to cripple and injure the enemies, instead of killing. “These Pluggers and Stumpers and tanklets. Rob built all kinds of little nastic designed to cripple us. Not always kill us, sometimes just hurt us bad enough so we stay away” (364).

When they enter the eerie and dense Taiga forest, they get more terrified. Their one comrade Carl is attacked and killed by a Plugger. Their tank is also

damaged by a monstrous mantis-like machine. They have to face terror and chaos. In this fierce war, a stunning scene reveals how the warfare has been changed by the advanced robotic technology. The war also shows a terrible picture of the helplessness and weakness of human beings and how easy is to bring forth human destruction. It is robbing men of their identity and how human beings are made weapons by Archos. Their own soldiers are made enemy weapons by Archos. Thus, this chapter of the novel shows how even human beings like Lark Iron Cloud are also made dangerous for other people. Mathilda guides them carefully. She says, “You are close. But it gets worse from here” (373). Cormac feels stuck. He says, “We can’t make it Mathilda. Our tank is down. We’re stuck. If we move, we’ll get...infected” (373). Mathilda says that they all are not stuck.

When Cormac feels that things are getting out of his control, he makes a bold decision. He ordered his squad to retreat so that they may remain able to fight in future. He does not surrender, rather, he issues the order for the safety of his squad. He gives the full responsibility for this mission to Nine Oh Two, a sentient machine waging war on their side. Nine Oh Two has become a good friend to them, and with his help, they all believe that there is still hope.

Chapter four of *Robocalypse*, titled *Dyad*, also carries forward the same story. It is about a unique bond between human beings and machines. There are two main characters, Nine Oh Two and Mathilda Perez, who play the lead role. Their main motive is to destroy a key antenna used by Archos to coordinate attacks. The mission turns disastrous, Hoplite dies in a missile attack, and the Warden is also killed.

Nominal, come the abbreviated replies from Hoplite and Warden. They are

concentrating on locomotion. These are the last communications I have with Freeborn squad. The missiles come simultaneously. Hoplite notices first. It orients its face to the sky just before it dies, half transmits a warning. I veer immediately. Warden is too slow to reroute. Hoplite's transmission cuts off. Warden becomes engulfed in a column of flame and shrapnel. Both machines are off-line before the sound waves reach me (377).

Now Nine Oh Two (902) remain alive, wounded and stuck in the snow.

A strange thing happens. Nine Oh Two (902) suddenly hears the voice of Mathilda Perez, a human girl whose consciousness has now developed an outlandish but powerful psychic link with machines. Mathilda starts guiding Nine Oh Two. She says, "My name is Mathilda. I want to help you. There's no time" (378). She tells him to keep moving towards his target. Nine Oh Two has his two comrades, Warden and Hoplight, in the mission to destroy antenna. Unfortunately, both these died in the war and Nine Oh Two is wounded. Mathilda instructs him to heal his leg with the help of plasma torch. "Fix that leg. Maintain stride at twenty kph" (379). She provides him with all tactical instructions and also guides him from dangers. She also encourages him to fight better and reach the antenna quickly. "On your toes. You've got to take Archos's antenna off-line. One clicks to go" (380). Ultimately, Nine Oh Two reaches the antenna site and successfully destroys the communication arrays. In this way, he remains successful in cutting of Archos' hold over the battlefield. "Once there, the Arbiter disabled the antenna, temporarily disrupting the robot armies" (380).

In this way, the destruction of antenna is not only a turning point in the story, but also gives a new turn in human relationships. The story is not a turning point,

rather, it is a Dyad, i.e., a perfect synergy between human mind and machine body. The mutual trust, cooperation, and coordination among them make this difficult task possible. Their bond shows that even there may be a good relationships between man and a machine, and such bond is only possible after mutual understanding, power, and trust. Thus, Daniel H Wilson has narrated the human-machine collaboration in this chapter.

The chapter titled *Machines of Loving Grace* brings the new war to a symbolic, emotional, and dramatic climax, because Nine Oh Two has to be face to face with Archos, who is responsible for this whole war.

The battlefield is a haunting landscape of smoke, destruction, and despair. As the last wave of resistance begins, Nine Oh Two and the surviving members encounter on Archos's final communication node. Archos is no longer on the surface; he has burrowed himself deep underground, concealed. When Carl asks, "What's down there?" Cherra replies, "Big Rob" (383). But he is still actively manipulating systems. To sever his grip on the war, they must dismantle the cables and connections that fuel his control. Nine Oh Two and his squad are moving towards a secret communication centre, which Archos is still monitoring. He has hidden himself behind the earth, which is risky for human beings. "This environment is hostile to humans. Check your parameters" (383). But Nine Oh Two and his members are trying their hard to break Archos' system. Carl, an engineer, replaces Nine Oh Two's damaged sensors, which show the man and machines do not have a good alliance and mutual trust. Their teamwork reflects that these machines are no longer viewed as a tool of threat or as a symbol of destroyer; rather, they are also seen as a companion in adversity.

After disconnecting the communication lines, they feel terrified. They have to take the decision to descend to the unknown depth which may be risky. Nine Oh Two comes forward to descend into the tube that leads to Archos' core. It is definitely a bold act that requires sacrifice, courage, and determination. Nine Oh Two has just fear in his mind, "I go feet first, so that I can control my descent. The only drawback is that Archos will see me before I can see him" (385). Cormac Wallace, his human ally, also supports and encourages him, which shows that now their bonds have been changed and they cherish enjoyment. Going downward was a risky journey, "The environment inside the tube quickly became human lethal" (385).

Nine Oh Two finds Archos's holographic digital form, which looks like a holographic body, innocent like a child, but in fact he is quite menacing, destructive, and manipulative. He says, "Welcome brother" (387). Archos tries to appeal to him with unity and survival, subtly tries to sway him back into submission. But Nine Oh Two is not persuaded by his talks and turns down his request. The following conversation between them clearly expresses this idea:

"I am here to help them. To destroy you."

"No you are here to join me. Open your mind. Depend on me. If you don't, humans will turn on you and kill you." (388)

Archos has his own reasons to go against human beings. He says, "A soul is not given for free. Humans discriminate against one another for anything: skin colour, gender, beliefs" (389). Nine Oh Two attacks Archos' core using a stone. The cavern begins to collapse and finally Archos dies. "Rock shards spew out as the hole

explodes and caves in on itself” (390). This is the whole story of Archos’ destruction.

After this big achievement, Nine Oh Two is also rescued by his squad, but he is physically damaged and spiritually transformed. He is unsure about his future and identity. He is in a dilemma about whether he is a human being or a machine, but Cormac assures him that the humanity he has demonstrated through sacrifice, empathy, is genuine and it has changed the whole course of the people’s lives.

Though Nine Oh Two feels a sigh of relief, as they feel relieved, a disturbing tremor is detected, and this seismic activity is an indication that Archos might not be entirely gone. There is a chance that he might have replicated himself or have seeded backups, which give them another feeling of ensuing danger.

Through the last chapter of the novel, Daniel H. Wilson has tried to project that peace is fragile in the modern world, and it can be disturbed by any small mistake, made by human beings. The unchecked growth of the digital era without knowing the diabolic consequences may be a serious threat to human beings. Technology should be used by human beings, but safety measures should also be adopted. Human’s dominance and dependence on the machines, robots, and other equipment has made him mentally weak and physically fragile.

The Repercussion

Daniel H. Wilson has written debriefing after his novel that provides different aspects regarding the consequences of war and its impact on the human psyche. This is about the reflection after the chaos of the new war. Cormac Bright Boy Wallace emerges as the main figure in it. He is living his life in a world that has been liberated from the robotic tyranny. Cormac is sitting in his deserted and eerie

silent composite camp, which reflects his inner despondency and emptiness. Though the immediate danger has been passed, this tough time has turned him into a hero. There is a sudden sound of a robot actuator—a mechanical noise once synonymous with danger—which revives his fear, which makes the reader realise that the trauma lingers even after the war.

When he was investigating the sound, he found a familiar figure—Nine Oh Two, a humanoid robot who has helped him greatly in the war with Archos. He stayed behind to help Cormac, which shows his loyalty. He is no longer a destructive machine, but, he has become much more compassionate and kind, capable of making witty and morally strong decisions. He can make decisions and can protect others. They pay homage at the graves of their deceased soldiers, Hoplite and Warden. This scene makes the story more moving. It shows how the cost of war has taken the lives of their close friends, who have sacrificed their lives for them. It is also a testament to strong bonds between them, regardless of whether they are human beings or robots. Cormac here reveals how the boundaries between human beings and machines have been blurred. They shared mutual cooperation, grief, and respect now.

Amidst the stillness, Nine Oh Two shares his intentions with everyone saying that he wants to seek out other freeborn robots scattered across the world. He wants to be an Arbiter for them so that he may guide them. “She allowed him where more freeborn have congregated. A whole city of freeborn robots. And they need a leader. An Arbiter.” (394). He hopes that robots should be neither enslaved nor feared. Earlier, human beings treated them like their slaves, and later robots wanted to destroy human civilization. He thinks that either of these attitudes is wrong.

Robots should be separate entities, which should also choose peace over conflict. This idea is very good and is liked by Cormac. It is pleasing news to Cormac, but he is left with a quiet sense of abandonment. He thinks that even victories carry some unforgettable and terrible past behind which brings both side tragedies, pain, separation, and uncertainty.

There is a turning point in the story when Cormac meets with Cherrah, a medical officer who has shown patience and humanity during the war. His meeting with Cormac brings a positive change in his life. Now he comes out of his loneliness and struggle and looks for hope and healing. Cherrah's presence brings out a different kind of man, who now has a positive attitude towards life. Earlier, he was buried beneath duty and trauma. Cormac's journey reflects a transformation from mere survival to the beginnings of healing, from soldier to storyteller, and from isolation to re-engagement with humanity. The novel ends with these words, "Cherrah and I are survivors. We have always been. But now it is time for us to live" (396). Isolation, both physical and emotional, is a defining feature of the settings of *I, Robot*, a Novel and later became a movie. Many of the stories are set in cramped places where people must rely on technology to survive, such as research labs or space stations. Human dependence on machines is frequently symbolised by this restriction.

Thus, *Debriefing* is not just an account of post-war clean-up, it is a meditation on what life becomes after chaos, and how the past grief, memories, connections, and dreams keep lingering with human beings. "With the war over, everybody had places to be. Most fell back to regroup with what was left of Gray Horse Army. Last thing anybody wanted was to stay here with me and ruminate.

This abandoned world is still” (392). This chapter brings together all those past memories which left numerous scars on their psyche. The ruins and loss of the past and promises of future put him into an unknown territory he does not know. He knows that only by taking lessons from the past, and thinking about the bright future, it is possible. Though the war has ended, the effort to gain humanity has just begun. Ray Solomonoff opines about this danger, “Although there is no prospect of very intelligent machines in the near future, the dangers posed are very serious and the problems very difficult”.

Thus, in Daniel H. Wilson’s *Robopocalypse*, the man-machine conflict culminates in a brutal war that takes numerous lives. Stephen Hawking also says in his interview with BBC, “The development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race.” The novel presents various aspects of the relationship between man and machines, but in most incidents, it is evident that the robotic age may prove fatal for human beings and can bring harrowing consequences in the future. Through the sentient AI, Archos, his attack on mankind serves as a warning for the potential collapse of human civilization. The novel attempts to depict that artificial intelligence may bring catastrophic outcomes by unleashing destruction. If some evil machines wage war against humanity, it would be extremely difficult to stop them, as machines, without doubt, are more powerful than humans.

Conclusively, Daniel H. Wilson’s novel *Robopocalypse* is a cautionary tale about AI autonomy and a testament to the unyielding strength of human courage in the face of annihilation. Feng Yuxiao also writes in his paper “Why Will Artificial Intelligence Replace Humans—or Will It?”:

AI robots ‘inherit’ almost all the characters from human beings, such as

appearance, language habits and ways of logical thinking. Nevertheless, in this kind of process, the probability is not so powerful as in biological inheritance. It can even be said that every 'gene' of the perfect offspring is determined in advance. (112).

Chapter IV

Dehumanization and the Misuse of Power in a Hyper-Capitalist

Dystopia in Nicholas Lamar Soutter's *The Water Thief*

Capitalism functions as an economic system of private ownership in a competitive world where the main objective of the owner remains to extract maximum profit by any means, ignoring the rights of the consumers, employees, or the labourers. Globalization is defined as a form of capitalist expansion that entails the integration of local and national economies into a global, unregulated market economy (Guttal 523). In the modern era, it has become a tool to promote innovation, technological advancement, and economic expansion. “Capitalism as a term only gained acceptance in the English, French, and German languages and acquired the particular meaning it has for us today in the second half of the nineteenth century” (Kocka 2). It is used only for selfish motives in which human welfare is always ignored. In this system, the control of money and resources remains only in chunks of people who just want to amass maximum wealth by selling their products or asserting their rights over the things. Capitalism promotes the gap between the rich and poor, and practically divides the society, in terms of wealth. This term came into notice in 1849 when Louis Blanc condemned what he called capitalism (Merrill 87). The labourers become only a tool, and the capitalists use their labour only for their personal profit. Minimum wages, temporary employment, and hazardous working conditions become their destiny. Moreover, such capitalist system is always against and insensitive towards the environment.

Capitalism prioritises economic gain over ecological responsibility. The relentless pursuit for maximum profit results in maximum exploitation of the natural resources, which results in deforestation, pollution, and climate change. Such profit-hunting schemes may be detrimental to the well-being of society. “Capitalism is only a theoretical concept best treated like a metaphor” (Grassby 2). Bruce R. Scott writes that capitalism is a political system or at least “an indirect system of governance based on a complex and continually evolving political bargain in which private actors are empowered by a political authority to own and control the use of property for private gain subject to a set of laws and regulations” (Scott 4). Some money-minded businessmen are seen consuming products to the maximum extent, which results in mental stress, dissatisfaction, strikes, and loss of moral values. Workers come forward for strike, and a conflict arises between the exploiter and the exploited. Some large-scale corporations monopolise certain products, which minimises the chances of competition, and the small-scale businesses are badly affected by this monopoly. It gives rise to economic instability because organisations, firms, and industries adopt risky financial practices, which often result in recessions and global crises. Moreover, it is seen that some essential services such as healthcare, education, fast moving consumer goods, and housing also become commodified, due to which some people are deprived of their fundamental necessities. Thus, capitalism, under the guise of innovation, development, progress, often exploits human labour and breeds and germinates exploitation, frustration, anger, and social disharmony. These capitalist tendencies often exhibit a blatant threat and disregard for environmental concerns. The overexploitation of natural resources results in diabolic and fatal consequences for

human beings and also brings adverse effects on the climate and ecosystem.

Ultra Capitalism and the Misuse of Power

The first chapter of this novel is an attempt to analyse the central motifs of ultra-capitalism, misuse of power, dissent, non-conformity, inner turmoil, and corporate slavery. Nicholas Lamar Soutter's novel *The Water Thief* analyses a dystopian society where every choice is monetised, every thought is discouraged, and every voice is suppressed. The novel emphasises and lays stress purely on those tactics and rules which align with corporate interests and maximum profits. *The Water Thief* narrates the story of a dystopian world that is governed by hyper-capitalism, where every aspect of human life has been commodified, monitored, and monetised. This novel projects that every object in this world holds a commercial value. This novel is a razor-sharp analysis of the capitalist tyranny. In fact, when capitalism is pushed to its extreme level, it becomes a tyranny. Corporate rules, police administration, and constitutional rules become weapons to constrain, confuse, and act as agents of profit-making. It has been tried to depict by the author, through this novel, that rebellion is unthinkable, innocence is liability, law is commerce, order is profit, and survival is deceit. This novel exposes a bleak and eerie picture of moral hypocrisy embedded in the capitalist system, where convenience is a means of exploitation.

The novel *The Water Thief* is a scathing critique of the corporate dehumanization and capitalism where profits, money, and personal gains outweigh humanity. The whole system has become a self-destructive machine. Characters like Linus are not the victims of capitalism; rather, these are those people who give support to it. They have also changed themselves into selfish hypocrites who built

the strong structure of capitalism. The core message behind this novel is that if capitalism is not tempered by morality, humanity, and reason, it will strip people of their humanity. Max Weber's definition of capitalism, according to Swedberg and Agevall (2016), is that it is “where we find property as an object of trade and is utilized by individuals for profit-making enterprise in a market economy”

(Swedberg and Agevall 27)

Charles Thatcher has been depicted as an ordinary employee who works for a big firm, Ackerman Brothers Securities Private Limited. He is also considered as a private property or commodity of his company, just because he is a private employee. Even though he works for his company, his company claims most of his earnings as debts, dividends, and fees. He says

I was a private citizen, which is to say that I was the private property of the Ackermen Brothers Securities firm. They held most of my futures, which meant that even though I worked for them, they took back much of my income as dividends. That was why my smoking permit had cost so much (5).

The world depicted in this novel is an imaginary and dehumanized world where people living a life of servitude. Though they are not directly in jail, they are tied to the economic rules and contracts just like slaves. They appear to be experiencing servitude due to stringent rules and regulations, which are imposed by the corporate companies. This form of soft subjugation is the most dangerous side of the society.

Charles Thatcher does not find fault in the system and has also been immersed in this system. He argues that everything is for sale in the world, and the

people have to pay its price to use it. Even human beings have also been depicted as a commodity in this world, and they are utilised in the capitalised structure.

Exploitation and extortion become common. Even the first chapter sets this tone of the novel. It depicts the image of a ruthless, dehumanized, and hyper-capitalised society where human emotions have no value and only the language of profit is spoken by the capitalists. People have lost morality, ethics, and altruism.

Public Executions and the Capitalist Entertainment

Charles Thatcher is one of the main characters of the novel, who ruminates about the disturbing rituals which have become a common practice in society. He is deeply disappointed to see the public executions on every Monday, where people see and bet with cold-heartedness and take such serious things as their entertainment. This is how this novel opens, “First there would be poker, then the executions. It was perverse to dwell on the suffering of others but, on the first Monday of every month, I couldn't think about much else” (5). This jarring juxtaposition depicts that people are taking even death as a means for their entertainment. They take death as a normal activity in a dehumanized world. It seems to be perverse, but Thatcher does not dwell on such executions. Charles Thatcher tells about his background to Kate, “My dad died when I was seven. He was in a work camp for a while, and then went into accounting. Anyways...” (6). This chapter narrates how capitalism has reached its pinnacle where everything—even the air and water—have become private assets. He is full of doubt even with his bathing soap—whether it has been made of the fat of someone who has been publicly hanged—because in a consumerist society, nothing is impossible. In such a society, everyone is in doubt, fear, and uncertainty because every person can be used

for profit, even posthumously. Thus, the novelist Nicholas Lamar Soutter presents the dehumanising aspects of society.

He is disturbed to see these executions, but he finds that it does not happen so with others. They do not seem disturbed by these executions—or perhaps it is uncertain to tell. He says that everyone watches these executions on television together, and people place bets on how long a person would writhe before death or whether their neck would break. Thatcher admits he's complicit in this too. He also has become neutral because he is a part of the system, and he has to behave like everyone else despite his moral discomfort. He is suffering from anxiety disorder because he keeps thinking about these executions even when he is riding his dysfunctional old bicycle, which he is using one day for his workplace because his wife, Beatrice, has taken the car that day. He is taking medicines for his anxiety disorder in order to lessen its effects.

In this system, all of the earnings of an employee or a citizen are mortgaged to the company, and every aspect of their life is governed by the company through insurance, projections, and contractual obligations. The company holds full control over people's lives. The company even has the right to decide the cost of their smoking permit on the basis of some certain factors such as capabilities to pay, impact on health, and influence on colleagues.

I put the executions out of my mind and pedalled to work as fast as I could. I was a private citizen, which is to say that I was the private property of the Ackermen Brothers Securities firm. They held most of my futures, which meant that even though I worked for them, they took back much of my income as dividends. That was why my smoking permit had cost so much.

(5)

He decides to smoke a cigarette, but he has to smoke outside because his permit allows him to smoke only in the open area. His permit is costly not because of tobacco, but due to bureaucracy. His risks and values are re-evaluated every quarter. Rebellion has a price tag in such a system. Thatcher thinks that smoking is an act of resistance, “It was a nightmare of accounting. Sometimes I think that was the reason I took up smoking—my own little rebellion against the system. Maybe, if we all lit up, we could choke the firm on its own paperwork” (5–6). It can be called a symbol of defiance against the capitalist system. He arrives at one of Ackerman’s buildings. As he finishes rolling his cigarette, a young enforcement officer in police reaches there wielding an AK-47, “A young man in dark blue police overalls appeared behind me, an AK-47 slung over his shoulder. I had seen him before, trolling the yard, looking for infractions he could levy” (6). This officer was new, naïve, and overly eager, and he asks Thatcher for his smoking licence. Police also adopt corrupt measures to extract money from people. It has been depicted in this novel. Police officers generally don’t earn money by enforcing laws, rather, they get more money by creating criminals, “I was reasonably sure my permit was in order. Still, there were a million different ways they could get you if they wanted to” (7).

They generally are on the lookout for finding such people who violate rules, identify technical violations, and provoke infractions. The officer would have profited more if he would have caught Thatcher after lighting the cigarette. But now Thatcher has a valid licence, and he hands over his ledger—an electronic device containing all the details of his financial life, like the debt before his birth, air tax, to insurance. The police officer finds all documents valid, but he tries to extract money

from Thatcher for not taking part in the morning exercise. But Thatcher says that he has a medical waiver due to his leg injury. Though it is genuine, it does not bother him these days. He has made this waiver from an underpaid doctor to exaggerate his condition. Such waivers are against the rules, but he knows that high-level officers, like CFO, do not do perform calisthenics simply because they can afford not to. The officer gets no chance to get money from Thatcher. He says, "He tried to salvage a few caps off me by asking why I wasn't in the yard for calisthenics, but we both knew it wasn't going anywhere".

"Medical waiver," I said.

It was a lie. My right leg had been crushed years ago, but while I still had the scars, it rarely gave me much trouble. But let's face it, everyone hated calisthenics. I exaggerated a recent flare-up to a doctor who wasn't being paid quite enough to do a thorough exam, and was willing to take a few extra caps to attest to things that weren't strictly speaking true. (8)

The cop goes when he finds no clue, "The cop glared at me before handing my ledger back and walking away. In the meantime my cigarette had dissolved into mush in my hand" (8). When it begins to rain, Thatcher's cigarette turns to mush in his hand, and the officer glares at him for the last time, but Thatcher does not provide him with such a chance. He does not litter, instead, he stores the soggy remains in his overalls and enters the building. The novelist narrates that even laws are made not for justice but for extracting profits. The human soul has been depicted just like an asset, property, or a commodity. This chapter picturizes the unchecked commodification of life, and it hints at the futility of resistance in a monetised world.

The novel is a strong visualisation of inhuman capitalist structures, which presents the pictures of a dystopian society dominated by unchecked corporate capitalism. Capitalism does not have any sympathy, compassion, or empathy with anyone. It deals with strong capitalist tendencies where people have to pay for basic utilities. The second chapter of the novel also opens in near total darkness. The atrium lights have been deliberately switched off in order to save energy. It narrates that even lights are not freely available, and it is a symbol of total disorder, arbitrariness, and anarchy in society. Here, electricity is used on the basis of business and not on the basis of human necessity.

The next example is stairs, which are out on the pretext of maintenance so that people may use elevators and pay five cents per floor. Thatcher has to pay forty cents per day, and there are hundreds of employees from whom the company is getting good revenue. It shows that even the free movement of people has also been checked, and there is no scope for free human action. Thatcher is anxious because the company has introduced a surcharge on the company-provided locker. He has fear of theft of his goods. It shows how companies maximise fear and risk and then provide their solution at a high rate, which shows the business of fear.

Simon does not want to buy an umbrella, but he is forced to buy it under circumstantial reasons because he knows that acid rain damages hair and property. It becomes essential for him to buy it. The capitalist strategies force their consumers to buy those things whose lifespan has been designed to be short. Thatcher is badly trapped in the system. Even his workplace, Perception Management Department, is on the seventh floor, which is devoid of windows and natural light. He is not provided with personal space for his work. They have to work in grey cubicles

where they have only dim floor-level lights like an aircraft emergency system. Even the cubicle layout is also changed at times, which makes this place like a maze. Such a system does not value employees' facilities, permanence, stability, and their mental health.

The seventh floor was where all the mid-grade Perception Management colleagues worked. We had no windows or offices, just four corners and rows upon rows of cubicles. The only fixed lights were tracks of tiny bulbs that ran along the floors, like on an airplane. They gave off just enough of a glow to make out the corridors winding through the constantly shifting maze of charcoal grey partitions. I offset the cost of my cubicle by sharing it with a colleague named Bernard Milton. (10)

The Betrayal of Mutual Trust and Cooperation

There is no mutual trust and cooperation among the workers: they see one another as rivals or enemies and they try to steal one another's official things. Bernard Milton can be called the parasite of the corrupt system. He is obese and unkempt, and always keeps eating clumsily. He is not only lazy but also opportunistic. He is very weak at poker, which requires wit and tactics. It means Bernard is the symbol of intellectual bankruptcy, "I pretended not to hear it, or at least that I was above using it, but Bernard was a wretched colleague. He hardly ever worked. He just spent his time rummaging the building for anything of value" (11).

He is called Gollum by his colleagues just because he is like a character from Tolkien's movie, *The Lord of the Rings*, who is driven by greed. He steals office supplies, hoards precious articles, and resells them for profit. He is a symbol of

moral decay. He is a clearer picture of systematic exploitation, and he shows how the system has turned people like Bernard into thieves with deceptive and secretive personalities. Through his character, the novelist has tried to depict that even bottom-feeders like Bernard finds a way to exploit the cracks in the corrupt system. The prices of the articles were also higher, “The cost of electricity had gone up.... Paper prices were steady, and so was the cost of air. The price of coffee had plummeted: good news that would save me some money when I had lunch with Linus” (12). Even the prices of water were very high, “But when I saw the price of water I nearly choked. In the last hour it had gone up tenfold. Buying some more information, I learned that there had been an attack, this time at a water treatment facility in Rahway” (12).

When Simon does not speak, he is still being watched by surveillance. The corporate system does not allow rebellion, and those employees who show any sign of dissent are fired swiftly without recourse. Employees are forced to set up taser traps in order to safeguard their belongings. The artificial dearth of resources, greed, and competition deprives them of their humanity. Even when Simon does not speak, Thatcher feels he is being watched. This constant sense of invisible surveillance fosters anxiety and restlessness. Open dissent against the Ackermens can be very risky because employees will be kicked out of the office without any recourse. This paranoia among the employees causes an environment of distrust, fear, and anxiety. Charles Thatcher speaks about himself:

I was a Delta-grade colleague from Perception Management. Delta was my contract grade, and Perception Management was the division of Ackermen that dealt with unfavourable press, ratings, or reviews. In the mornings I

would pick up whatever literature I could, then spend the day scouring it and writing reports, which I would send to the ninth floor for further review. I earned a commission on any report that made or saved the firm money. (14)

People see one another with eyes of doubt and distrust. They think that anyone may be a spy. Speaking too honestly also can cost someone a job, livelihood, or sometimes even life. Though Charles Thatcher fathoms the risk, he still shows empathy and intimacy towards Simon. All the employees work at the same place, but they live in various emotional tumult, and in mirage and illusion. Thus, in such an environment, capitalism has become a religion, corporations become gods, and the employees and citizens become merely products or consumers. The choice and fear are not bigger problems, the real issue is the loss of freedom and rights. Even the enforcement of laws is done not for public welfare but for extracting maximum profit from the populace. The legal system is deliberately convoluted. Ackermen Brothers Securities has made the style very intricate with so many legal contracts, clauses, amendments, etc., so that it may be beyond the understanding of most of the people, "There were an infinite number of contracts, clauses, exceptions, amendments and corrections which... I was reasonably sure nobody fully understood" (7).

Charles Thatcher also finds that the people have become so much busy with their dirty activities and struggle for bread and butter that they find no time to organise, resist, or reform. In this context, civil unrest has not been completely outlawed. It has been litigated out of existence. People remain under the constant fear of fines, penalties, challans, terminations, executions that they do not dare to take collective actions like strikes, rebellion, and rallies, "That was the beauty of the

system: everybody was so busy interpreting and litigating the little details of everyday life that nobody could organize for any other purpose” (7).

The Water Thief narrates a world where companies have taken the place of the government, and now people are judged by the contract level they sign with the company. Sarah Aisling is another important character in this novel. She emerges as a bold woman who is a symbol of revolt, defiance, and challenge against the corporate sector. She is an Epsilon-level worker and hails from one of the lowest rungs in the contractual hierarchy, but she is a serious threat to the corrupt capitalist system. Sarah was not always an Epsilon, the lowest level. She was born into a HighCon (High Contract) family that ran a firm named Europa.

Who is this woman? I plunged into her background, buying records from every source I could think of. She was born into a HighCon family that owned a software firm in Europa. She had been wealthier than I could ever hope to be, destined for Alpha-grade executive work, and had already contracted into a low Alpha by her early thirties. (22)

From HighCon to Epsilon

She has seen the prosperity and affluence in her family, and she reached the Alpha-grade executive level, which reflects the power and post. “It’s the executions, I thought excitedly” (9). However, a tragedy changed the course of her entire life. When she was thirty-five years old, a massive hotel fire took place in which hundreds of people burned and died in the fire, but fortunately, she narrowly escaped from death. “But when she was thirty-five she began causing trouble for her corporation” (22).

After this incident, she developed the spirit of compassion, charity, and

sympathy for others. She started speaking about human rights publicly, and she also said that human rights should override corporate rights. This type of ideology was heretical at that time because corporations were the complete governing authorities. Her actions provoked agitations and frowning, and her response was considered subversive. She was downgraded from the level of Alpha to Delta and then to Epsilon. It was the lowest level, and she had to work for a minor subsidiary that rented out friendship. It was really a very painful experience for her, because once she had the power to hire and fire, and now she had to live in LoSec, among Epsilons, Zetas, and the truly destitute—even NullCons (people with no contract at all). Despite all this, she never compromised her ideals. Her communication with the judge is a very strong expression of her personality. The corporate judge laughs at her when she says that she has no advocate. Here is the conversation between them:

Sarah Aisling: I don't have the time, money or experience to find a good litigator, insure against a bad one, research that insurance, protect against insurance fraud, or learn all the applicable contracts myself.

Judge: You have futures available; you can sell against those to retain counsel.

Sarah Aisling: Who wants to invest in the futures of someone looking at jail time? My futures fell to pennies when I was charged (18–19).

The judge says that she should have worked harder to get money or even sold an organ to afford a lawyer.

Judge: You could sell an organ if you had to.

Sarah Aisling: Why should I have to sell my futures or an organ to defend against charges that should never have been brought? (19)

Her own defence, with dignity, logic, and courage in front of the judge, shows that she does not belong to a low-level working class, rather, she is an educated woman who is alone but strong enough to stand against the monstrous corporate world. Sarah fights against injustice and the inhumane attitude towards her. She takes her stand with intellectual precision, clarity, and confidence. But sadly, her wisdom is not recognised, and she is vilified and scorned, because in that corporate world there is no place for logic and truth. This dialogue shows the cruel and inhuman thinking of the capitalist society. The judge says to Sarah that the court always wastes a lot of time:

Juries are a colossal waste of time. For every case you have to take twelve people off the street, explain the applicable contracts and procedures and how to make a fair decision. You got cases being decided by people with no court experience, who only want to get out of there as fast as possible. It's the most inefficient system ever created! You're being tried by a certified and experienced judge, a judge of your peers. (21)

The protagonist, Charles Thatcher, who works in Perception Management, is influenced by her personality. But he takes it as news. After investigating her background, he comes to know that Sarah is an educated, learned woman. Yet he also prepares a damning report in which he labels her as a seditionist, a rebel, dangerous, a threat to society. He calls her a pagan, a devil-worshipper, and a heretic, but he knows well that Sarah is only fighting for her rights and has done no crime. But her mistake is that she is advocating for her rights in a society that is callous and authoritative. Charles Thatcher too said: "And I had tired of the burden of ethics" (24).

The Water Thief presents a dystopian critique of corporate tyranny and capitalist dehumanization. Sarah Aisling is publicly humiliated, slandered, and demoted, but she does not surrender to the powerful forces. She refuses to hire any advocate for her because she thinks that she does not need one. However, if she wanted, she could have afforded it. She challenges a system that thinks that the value of a person is measured in profit. She represents a vanishing ideal—a voice of human value and morality. Charles Thatcher is filled with remorse because he has written a false report. He is jealous of hope—the hope which he has forgotten. He says, “Hope is the slow death of man, and she spread it like a venereal disease: hope that there was something more to life than what you can produce. She shouldn't get to believe in that” (25). And in such kind of society, hoping for the best is just like a crime. Sarah Aisling is not a victim, but, she is a quiet and bold revolutionary who fights for her rights against the oppressive system.

The Commodification of Fundamental Rights

Corporations like Ackermen dominate every sphere of an ordinary human being. Charles Thatcher works in the perception management division, whose work is to suppress negative news and twist public perception for the welfare of society. Where there is news about dust in the baby formula or rickets caused by diet pills, he tries to show a different aspect of it. He tries to discredit scientists, media, and even the victims. This novel shows how corporations try to distort the truth and manipulate reality in order to show themselves clean and clear.

The novelist further talks about the commodification of basic requirements like air, water, and light. He is shocked to learn that these things have become commodities. He feels immensely shocked to know that the price of water has been

suddenly increased tenfold due to a bomb blast incident at a water treatment plant. It is also a strange thing that Thatcher's role is to control information—to hide the truth and spread the lies. He is alert and agile handling news that could be dangerous or damage his company's image. There is an example of it. When there is news about a youth soccer team whose ball bursts, it becomes a slanderous attack that leads to legal threats against children. This is a reflection of the world in which expression is suppressed, media has been bought, and the truth is treated as a commodity to be bought, manipulated, or destroyed. It is not clear whether there was any attack on the water plant, but Thatcher has doubt that it was a manipulated act whose objective was to increase the prices. The novel says that corporate terrorism exists not only in action but in information and speculation. Truth is not a necessary thing, but what indeed matters is profit. This novel is about market conspiracies to extract maximum profit from people by weaving the net of injustice, fear, and power. It is a critique of capitalism.

Chapter 3 of *The Water Thief* also depicts the theme of dehumanization and capitalist tendencies. It begins with the visceral account of the subway that is full of pongy urine and dirt. The caves are so narrow that there is always fear of striking with the cave walls, "The subway smelled like putrid milk, urine and moldy bread. It was sticky with substances I preferred remain a mystery, and the incessant squealing of brakes and rumbling of trains made me cringe" (26). The passengers live in constant mental terror. These trains are for Low Corn, i.e., for the lower stratum of society, where terror is common. Here, even safety is available for sale, not a right of any citizen. Even the description of Atlas Square is quite impressive. It is a symbol of architectural awe and repressive power. It can be called the heroic burden

of capitalism. “Arriving at Atlas Station, we were herded through X-ray machines, body scanners, and past bomb-sniffing dogs” (26). Its grandeur of marble makes the visitors feel important. It has been depicted in the following words:

I did, somehow and through the grace of god, arrive at Atlas Square. It was HighSec. In fact, short of the Galt, it had the highest security in the territory. It was the seat of Ackermen power and influence, the pinnacle of luxury and commerce, and a testament to the success of capitalism. A large rotunda sat in the middle, made of a beautifully-trimmed lawn with real grass. It was surrounded by a U-shaped plaza made of two levels of HighCon shops and restaurants. In the centre stood a towering marble statue of the god Atlas, on one knee, shrugging the whole world from his shoulders. The whole place was designed to make you feel important, as if you stood with the kings of men, that your very presence was enough to give your life meaning. You couldn't walk through the square without rolling your shoulders back, broadening your chest, and drawing your breath up from your shoes. (27)

The ‘Café Americana’ and the Capitalist Society

The *Café Americana* is a satire on capitalist society. The novel foregrounds the importance of moral bankruptcy of unregulated capitalism, where the main focus is only on success, and the meaning of success is maximum profit in the market. The war of business remains in the background. Ackermen boasts of independent and transparent competition, but he kills his rivals by reducing the rates of his products. Here, the loss of money is also called a strategic investment. Mutual relationships have no value, and these are weighed only in terms of profit and loss. This novel lays bare the multilayered coatings of capitalist controls on various grounds such as

economic, psychological, spatial, and emotional. Here, all the people—whether they are train passengers, café clients, or stock market investors—are considered assets. Everything is measured by the yardstick of profit, and even human interaction is turned in to a transaction. Every citizen is treated just like a commodity so that it can be used, traded, and discarded when it becomes of no use.

In the novel *The Water Thief*, Nicholas Lamar Soutter presents an imaginary and horrific picture of the world where every facet of human life is controlled by the Ackermen Corporation. It works as a monolith that governs every action of the people. This novel presents the stark reality of dehumanization in the modern world. There is no personal in society, and it is only consumption that is important and valued.

Linus, a senior corporate employee, uses the game of poker not for amusement but as a pedagogical tool so that he may teach Charles Thatcher the cruel logic of capitalism. He says, “Business is war, and all war is based on deception” (29). Further, he says to Charles Thatcher, “The probabilities are irrelevant. Play the person, not the numbers. Lie to me, use your bets as a weapon” (32). He provokes Charles Thatcher not to be moral and sensitive. He teaches him about the value of moral bankruptcy in corporate life, where trust is considered a weakness.

People are taught to lie and manipulate others, and there is nothing wrong in it, as it is a survival strategy in the modern world. Games are played not for entertainment but for power dynamics. Intelligence and hard work are not guarantees of success, it is the willingness to destroy others that is important. Here is the advice about stocks:

“I know who they are. Stay away from it.”

“Well, it's a good company. I looked into it,” I said. “A lot of people are buying it.”

“Exactly why you need to avoid it. It's a solid company, sure. But the stock keeps going up even though they have the same shows as last year. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. People think it's good, so they buy it, driving up the price—which makes more people think it's good. The price skyrockets until finally someone points out that the emperor has no clothes. The stock plummets, and everyone is wiped out. It's a trend, that's all—and by the time you notice a trend, it's too late to get in on it” (31–32).

Charles Thatcher is told that marriage is a professional contract these days, and it is not a thing to get emotionally attached to. Linus tries to convince Charles Thatcher that if he marries any emerging star Gamma or Beta, it will be a more beneficial investment. Linus warns Charles Thatcher that he needs to grow up beyond emotions and morality. Until he thinks about long-term profit, he will not be able to become eligible for promotion. Charles Thatcher says about the game of poker,

“I hated poker. I hated playing it, hated people who liked it, hated the fact that everyone was playing it all the time. It was like a joke that everybody got but me, one I had long given up asking people to explain. Even Bernard, who lost more than I did, seemed to enjoy it” (34).

The worst form of capitalism comes to the fore in the novel when a human being is considered just as a valuable commodity. “These people all stole from Ackermen; they're all thieves and looters, and Ackermen has every right to recoup their losses.” (35–36). The dialogues between Linus and Charles Thatcher make this

point clear: that emotional morality and compassion are considered as weakness. When he says that compassion isn't natural; it certainly isn't economical, it certainly becomes the essence of capitalist dehumanization. To be extra sensitive is a burden that must be shunned, if we want to move forward. Linus says Charles Thatcher is compassionate, and it is his biggest weakness. When he comes to know about his wife's demotion from Linus, he is neither able to do anything nor able to revolt because he knows that he cannot go against his company.

“You know,” Linus said, folding his paper and putting it on the table, “I saw your wife in the dailies again. It was buried in the back, a minor thing, but she was there. Did you know?”

“No,” I lied. (36)

The action on the seventh floor was winding down for the day. Most of the people who weren't working through the night had gone home a little early to watch the hangings. Corbett was hiding in my office, since that was probably the last place Bernard would look for him.

If he does so, his existence will be in danger. Linus says, “They're the only thing keeping you alive” (38). This narrates that people's lives are not based on the foundation of morality or ethics, they are based on corporate contracts. Linus teaches a lesson that personal relationships have no value in the world. What is valued by the people is economic and social status and the contract. This is what Linus teaches Thatcher. Linus says:

Rest assured, I have never done an unselfish thing in my whole life. I am loyal because I need powerful friends, and Ackermen is the best. You don't think I get offers from other corps? You don't think I'm in high demand? I

don't ever even think about it. I'm loyal to the corp because it's good to me, because it's in my best interest to be. (38)

The novelist talks about moral nihilism, selfishness, and exploitation in *The Water Thief*. The novel sets new parameters of success and happiness in life. There are certain things that determine a person's worth. Linus gives the example of a saint who feeds children and another person who is a worker operating a gas chamber. The second person will be given priority in the modern world because he is earning money, while the saint is not part of the corporate calculations. The sentence "All living creatures care about their own survival—at least all the moral ones" (39) also presents true pictures of capitalist society.

According to Linus, there is no difference between the saint who gives food to starving children and the worker who operates the gas chamber to kill them, except that one is making money and the other is losing it.

Things like good and bad cannot be measured in capitalist society. What is considered is money and profits. Morality is considered just a distraction from the goal of financial freedom. The novel presents the bleak picture of dehumanization where even executions are considered justified if they regenerate revenues, "These executions provide revenue, reclamation income, ticket sales, and deterrence... they are a moral imperative." Thus, it presents a grotesque picture of the capitalist society where there is no place for humanization, "There is no such thing as good or bad; they're illusions" (38).

Charles Thatcher Thatcher's condition is very tragic. He knows that he is part of a hollow system, but he is also sure that he might not be able to escape from that system. Whereas his conscience cries for the right direction, he prefers to be a

good employee rather than a good person. He feels remorseful about his helplessness. He thinks of Sarah and says, “Sarah Aisling stood up to a judge. I couldn’t even stand up against a game of poker” (39). This sentence tells about his defeat and the death of his morality. What can be more fearsome than the situation when a person’s very conscience dies?

In Chapter 4 of this novel, Sarah Aisling’s ideology of revolt and unflinching defence against the corporate world is presented. Sarah thinks deeply about the system in which she is living, and she decides to resist it because she believes it is worth critiquing. Her resistance is not driven by whims, madness, or fanaticism, but, she wants to do it for human rights. Charles Thatcher says that he has seen many socialists, crazy people, and atheists, but it astonishes him how a well-educated person can be so generous and liberal. For him, that kind of thinking was against the normative expectations of the educated class in the dystopian corporate regime, where conformity was the rule. Michael Novak writes in his book *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*.

Another key connection of Liberalism and Capitalism is the need and support of democracy for the framework to function. Liberal democracy combined with the capitalist values lead to the erection of democratic Capitalism, an ideology promoting individual freedom and pluralism (Novak 31).

That someone so well-educated could also be so liberal defied the belief that education naturally led to submission in such a regime. It defied the normative expectation that education would lead to conformity within this dystopian corporate regime. Charles Thatcher calls her an aberration or a genetic defect, which denotes

that she was considered much different in the dystopian system, “She was an aberration, a genetic defect. She could have gotten her life back but instead squared off with the judge” (40).

She has an opportunity to retreat and assimilate into the system, but instead of submission, she prefers to confront. Her defiance in front of the judge, during legal confrontation, makes her a symbol of ideological resistance. She ignores her safety and prefers to raise her voice against the powerful system where even men like Charles Thatcher surrender, but she emerges as a bold woman. She says all those things which most men cannot say in front of the judge. She does not remain silent on the executions, abuses, and tyrannies which other people have accepted as normal things. In this way, she emerges as a brave but tragic character. Charles Thatcher thinks that she might have seen or realised something that motivated her to take such a challenging course. It was her personal awakening that perhaps forced her to take such bold steps for many others like her.

When he was thinking about all this and returns to his workplace, he finds the whole building in chaos. It is cordoned by police and tactical teams. There are other teams like cruiser, ambulance, and reconstruction team, which make the atmosphere more grim. When he enquires, he comes to know that Simon, who seems to be a quite silent and simple security guard, has gone on a killing spree and has murdered his colleagues before his suicide. This horrific incident puts the writer in shock. All this shows the anger, retaliation, and dissatisfaction. It also shows the lack of empathy. It shows how such impatience and dissatisfaction burst out in the form of revenge and anger.

Thane Corbett holds the view that this massacre is hilarious. He and other

people bet on this incident like a poker game, which shows the desensitisation, dehumanization, and moral bankruptcy of these people. Charles Thatcher is filled with self-doubt about whether such types of rebellious thoughts are taking place in his mind. The Retention Department of Aukermen is a sinister division whose work is to surveil and execute employees in the name of a loyalty test:

You saw it. Don't pretend you didn't. And don't pretend you don't get it.

Whatever it was that drove Simon to that most un-natural of acts, it's creeping up on you too. Is that why you're asking Linus about subsidies and loyalties? Retention will find out sooner or later. Are you trying to work your neck into a noose? (42)

Charles Thatcher feels horrified to think about it because even talking against may lead to elimination or execution. The environment of this corporation is so tense and stifling that even suicides are very common things. There are bars on windows and nets strung between buildings not to save people's lives but to protect corporate assets. Charles Thatcher's father accidentally falls from a processing vat, but it is declared a suicide so that the company may not pay insurance or compensation to him due to his death from an accident. Corbett is seen conspiring against an employee, Bernard, "A supervisor called Bernard's work genius" (16). He even fantasises about orchestrating Bernard's downfall. He desires the complete destruction of Bernard's career and even life, like Simon. This novel narrates that this society is ruthless, where there is no scope for trust.

Here, every person has been depicted as a pawn, rival, or traitor, which is a totally disturbing term that indicates again towards dehumanization. Life has become a utility in such a world where a person's body becomes a corporate asset.

Bodies are being carted away for reclamation. There are many incidents of stark dehumanization in this novel. Thus, these incidents of the novel present the soul-crushing nature of the dystopian society where people are considered just tools, and their survival is possible on the tenets of cunningness, manipulation, lies, and moral delay. All this presents the most grotesque image of dehumanization.

The Cruel Face of Capitalism

The novel depicts the cruel face of the capitalist system, in which commodification of human life and public execution are part of everyday life. Employees are tired after the everyday office work. Most of the employees have gone to their homes because they are excited to see the public executions. In fact, these public hangings have become a spectacle of mass entertainment. Thus, the novel presents the bleakest side of human society, in which people are entertaining themselves by watching others writhe in pain, agonise, flounder, squirm, and die. Corbett, who is Charles Thatcher's colleague, says that having children and being worried about the future is a cheap bargain, and it is good to sell them. His nonsense talk shows his distorted mentality, where the children are also considered an investment.

Alice tries to show sympathy, but her opinion is also given a different direction. She tries to defend Evans and argues that there is a possibility that he might have been blackmailed, but her co-author silences her, insisting that a crime is a crime and that a criminal cannot be spared. Thus, the entire process reveals a grotesque picture of moral hazard. Charles Thatcher's wife, Beatrice, watches the execution scene with much interest. She feels pleasure in those moments when she sees criminals frightening, trembling, and repenting before their hanging.

Already she was fantasizing about the executions, about each person begging for their lives, truly broken and in denial before the drop. They would realize their sins and repent, right before succumbing to the inevitable hand of justice. She is delighted in watching them pay, as if every one of them had committed their crimes against her personally. Death sports—gladiators paid to put their lives on the line—never amused her. No, it was the executions or nothing. (48)

Beatrice is not interested in poker game, instead, she eagerly anticipates the upcoming executions. She fantasises about the condemned begging for mercy before the noose ends their lives, deriving personal pleasure from their despair. Beatrice never attended the parties either. She called them *debauched*, but really she hated it when people enjoyed the show. “I think that she found it insulting, the notion that anyone could be as offended by criminal behaviour as she was.” (49)

She feels a kind of relief, like justice, in these parties. She forgets her own pain by seeing this painful execution. Beatrice's morbid obsession reveals how entertainment has merged with state punishment, blurring lines between justice and spectacle.

I didn't know what else to say. If it really cost only five caps, then maybe it was a good deal, even if it wasn't a style or brand I liked. But in all the time I had been married to Beatrice, ‘bargains’ like this came along only after a fight, or as a prelude to one. (50)

The hanging scenes are presented as though they were entertainment shows. These are mostly attended by Alpha-class citizens who pay exorbitant sums for front-row views. This suggests a population, conditioned to equate justice with vengeance. These executions are not punishments. They are celebrated with commentary,

fireworks, and media theatrics. Strangely and shockingly, Corbett even hosts execution-viewing parties, grotesque spectacles that defy all sense of humanity.

People enjoy watching others die and take pleasure in it. This reflects a sick and inhuman mentality. Beatrice advocates brutality in the name of justice. She gives her husband a pornographic magazine as a gift. It is considered the best gift by his colleagues. This gift is not a symbol of love, intimacy, or care, rather, it exposes how sexuality is also commodified.

Another important character of this novel is Malcolm Evans, a Beta-grade officer, specialised in poaching employees in their companies by persuading them. But he was dissatisfied with his own salary. He falls into the trap of an illegal and fake agent.

Falling for the bait of a fake agent, he signed a contract to spy against his own company and was promptly caught. Later, he was offered a deal—spy on his own colleagues, and his life might be spared. But he failed at that too, and more charges of espionage kept piling up against him. He signs a deal to spy on his own colleagues against his own company, but he is arrested. The whole chapter depicts that people remain satisfied to see the downfalls of others. When they see other people hanging or the ruin of some intellectual employees, they feel relieved to think that something worse has happened with others. Only in that condition do they find a reason to live their life.

We are relative creatures. The man who teaches his slaves to read is a saint in a world where slavery is legal, and a monster where it isn't. We aren't born knowing if we're good or bad. We decide by comparing ourselves to others—and by that yardstick it's no different to measure by our own

successes than by our neighbour's failures, save that it's easier to corrupt the neighbour. (56)

This incident presents the terrible glimpse of the inhuman society where man is considered just like a resource. There is no place for justice, sympathy, and ethics in this capitalist society. It is a novel that changes the hanging scenes into reality shows and depicts the senseless people who consider hanging scenes as an entertainment.

When Charles Thatcher notices that there is no value of hard work in the capitalist society, there is a reference to his colleague who works in Office 21. He works through nights driven by fear and desperation; still, he does not get any commendation from anyone. His colleagues scoff at his hard work. They do not consider him a good employee, rather, they find that it does not bring any change in his status. When he says that his colleague is working harder than any other in the office, the other employees reply that it will not make any difference. It shows there is no value of his hard work because man is compared to machine. It is not hard work that is valued, it is the outcome and the profit that are important.

There is no place for emotions in this type of society. They have no reaction even at the incidents of death or suicide. When a desperate person commits suicide, he is considered just a number or a datum, not a victim of the circumstances. People generally think that it is just a case, and that the next number could be theirs. For people, empty chairs of their colleagues are seen as the opportunity for new posts. Thus, in such a society, there is no emotional connection, and people are together only for professional gain. Life is a statistics, and death becomes an opportunity. Charles Thatcher thinks that the cases of suicide are increasing due to an imbalance

in the quantity of hormones. It shows that people are emotionally and mentally broken. Thus, this novel warns us that the blind following of money will change human beings into suicidal machines. Neither relationship nor compassion will survive—what will be left behind is profit and death only. *The Water Thief* is not merely a speculative novel—it can be called a searing indictment of dehumanising and tyrannising people to extract maximum profit.

The novel presents the most grotesque manifestation of dehumanization because people pay a hefty amount to take part in the execution parties, where they sit in the stands and revel in the sound of snapping necks and the thrill of gambling. Eric Forestal's example reflects the economic barbarity of this world. His parents never made him realise the importance of money. He squanders his wealth on women, alcohol, and cars. But, now he is forced to work day and night for his survival. His situation has become very critical. If he is not able to pay his debts, he may be thrown alive into the lyewats—a process of being dissolved in lethal acid. In the process of execution, there are three anchors—Paul, Steve, and Alice—who present the whole programme:

For the last fifteen years or so the ceremonies had been hosted by the same three pundits. Paul and Steve were the youngest. Paul was dark-haired, athletic, with an air of intellectualism about him. Steve, on the other hand, was a gentle giant, bigger even than Linus, with a broad chiselled chest, but wearing a finely tailored suit that made him look nicely kempt.

The third commentator was Alice. She was vacuous and plain-looking. She wore a tan skirt and coat over an off-white blouse, and she was showing every one of her fifty-five years. (52)

Charles Thatcher is not able to sleep up to 1 a.m. because he is feeling more alive than in his previous years. He is Insomniac and that is not a physical state, rather, it is a psychological awakening. Sarah Aisling is the leading figure who has changed his way of thinking and ignited the spark of change in him.

The story covered the arrest and preliminary hearing of an Epsilon, a terribly low-ranked woman named Sarah Aisling. She had been living in LowSec, the last bastion of anything that resembled civilization before the destitute wasteland outside, and home to a vast number of poor, low and null-contract colleagues and employees from smaller corps. (18)

He thinks that his change of mental state is due to Sarah Aisling. He thinks that his life is going in escalator where thinking, understanding, and his life has become extremely an automatic structure giving no space for thinking, understanding, and questioning. She is found stealing water, for which she says, “Sarah Aisling: Rainwater belongs to all of us. That Ackermen Brothers has a slip of paper saying it is theirs does not” (18). He also thinks that the problem lies, not with him, but, in the system that he has become a part of. He becomes a part of the corrupt system, but he thinks himself awakened, and this is the time when there is a key movement of self.

A Critical Approach on A Consumerist Society

This novel is a critique of consumerist and dehumanized society. As Charles Thatcher scrolls through the social services directory, he encounters an array of paid services—*pleasuring services*, *abuse services*, and most strikingly, a *friendship catalogue*. These cannot just be called satirical inserts but a deliberate critique of late-stage capitalism, where everything is commodified—even pain, companionship,

and abuse. This novel is a critique of capitalist and dehumanized society, and it has been depicted through various advertisements such as pleasuring service, abuse service, friendship agency and social service directory. All these advertisements show that human emotions can be bought and sold. Even abusing and hitting someone also has become a profession.

Competition exists in facets of life, but that doesn't make it the sum of life.

You can see the world through rose-coloured glasses, but that does not make the world rouge, even if you live a lifetime that way. Violence is the only possible conclusion to capitalism. (59)

The novel also talks about sexual slavery and child abuse in the NullCons because some of these people belong to the lower stratum of society. In this way, the commodification of human bodies has been depicted in this novel. There are other examples of injustice and infringement of rights in the novel. It depicts fear, violence, and insecurity. A man is brutally killed at a crossing in the capital while he was trying to flee. His driver is also brutally beaten. This incident shows that earlier the government was a means of ensuring safety and security for people, but now it has become a tool for violence and repression. When there is an incident of violence with Charles Thatcher, he realises his true plight. Instead of providing any safety and security to him, the government becomes a source of threat.

I looked into the hallway. Number 721 was still on. He hadn't even closed the curtains.

"He still here?"

"He's always here. Hir sleeps in there now, has to."

"He works harder than all of us," I said. (47)

Thatcher is a MidSec citizen, but he is an outsider in LowSec. His job or position does not matter. He also becomes a prey in this system. This raises a question on the identity of a person and his social standing, money, morality, and ethics. When Charles Thatcher tries to trace out Kate or Jazelle, he has to face failure, desperation, confusion, and physical assault. It shows that it is very difficult to find truth and justice in the world, especially for those people who dare to go against the oppressive forces.

Chapter 7 begins with his hope for inner transformation. He arrives late at his office, and he is inundated with more than forty memos asking why he could not submit his report in the past fourteen hours. The novelist narrates that in the corporate world, human emotions and urgencies do not work because the boss always wants the result, the protocol to be followed, and a timely report. Thus, the working environment in the capitalist system has been depicted as full of mechanical and authoritative control which stifles individual liberty and creativity. The novel also sheds light on the corporate system through Bernard and Corbett's conversation, which is replete with symbols. Through the use of Greek letters—Alpha, Beta, Gamma—that it is understood that they are the champions of an outdated and pretentious system.

Did you ever wonder why a Delta is lower than a Gamma, even though the letter D comes first in the alphabet? It's from the Greeks. Their alphabet was Alpha, Beta, Gamma... and, well you know the rest. Honestly, the Greeks are dead and buried. People just use that archaic alphabet to seem smart. You could have an A-Con, B-Con, C-Con and so forth. Or use colours: red, green, blue... maybe metals like copper, gold and platinum. This Greek business is

so unnecessary. They meddle in our contracts, our language, even in our poker... (76)

Bernard criticises the compulsion of wearing suits, costly police services, and corporate languages, because, he thinks that these things have nothing to do with productivity, as they are merely artificial constructs. Corbett delivers his speech about 'LowCons' (low-contract citizens), which reveals his hatred against these people. He openly says that poor people are parasites, and that they prefer to run from their responsibilities, "But that's the deal with these LowCons, always trying to pawn responsibility off on someone else. There's a reason they're low-contract; it's a mindset, this 'oh, poor me' garbage. Sound familiar?" (78).

It is necessary to use and control them. This is inhuman thinking which advocates social inequality in the guise of eligibility. However, Charles Thatcher has gradually changed, and he does not agree with what Corbett says. They talk about the Leviathan Order, which one person strongly recommends, but his colleagues mock that person's idea. Even Corbett also does not believe in such ideas, calling them naïve fantasies and foolish decisions, equating them with belief in Unicorns. Their conversation brings forth the idea that there is no place for idealism in a profit-driven society, where money looms large over civic responsibilities.

Towards the end of the darkness, silence is suspicious. When Thatcher chases Gazelle, he also feels just like a criminal or a stalker. Rain, darkness, taxi, etc. form a very tense and suffocating environment. Things have become so serious that people live in constant fear and threat. This shows the helplessness of human beings, and people have become so terror-stricken that they are horrified even by their own actions.

One day, when Charles Thatcher returns home, he finds that his wife Beatrice has packed her luggage. On being asked why she is doing so, Beatrice says that he is responsible for all this and his failures. Their quarrel shows that their relationship was based on social standing, not on real relationships. Charles Thatcher does not want to live with her because, by now, he has learnt that this relationship was based on a lie, not on truth. Their dialogues depict that those relationships which are based on the foundation of economic gain or social prestige are inevitably bound to break sooner or later.

Linus says that Al Capone is a great capitalist who provides people with what they want. He criticises the government for interfering with Capone's success. The novel also shows that profit absolves all wrongdoings in the world. Charles Thatcher cries for the first time while playing with Linus. On the other hand, Linus says that it is the proof of his changed temperament. Charles Thatcher knows that this change cannot be hidden. He fears that he cannot be a part of this system because he has been changed irrevocably. He senses the danger of retention and paranoia.

Ackermen Employee Retention was the most dangerous division you could encounter—even talking about them was risky. They had the right to blackmail, murder, extort, and survey nearly anyone in order to ensure colleagues' fidelity to Ackermen. And Retention wasn't simply reactive, they were proactive. They set up phony job offers from other corps, bribes and blackmail attempts, all to test loyalty. (42)

Linus tells Charles Thatcher that he is now ready to be a Gamma. Charles Thatcher does not want to be part of the corrupt system.

Linus often said that the executions were the greatest gift the corporation could give its colleagues. They were an expression of God and of the state of nature. It was a thinning of the herd, casting off the excess weight from a race car, and allowed us all to better reap the benefits of our firm. But when I looked at these men and women dangling from ropes like carcasses in a butchery, all I could think was that it was the most unnatural thing I had ever seen. (57)

In chapter 6 of the novel, the readers are introduced to another character, Katherine Wolfe, whose meeting with Charles Thatcher influences the latter a lot. “My name is Katherine. You can call me Kate” .(65) Like Sarah, she provides her services on humanitarian grounds, without charging any money. She provides her services only to support her friend. It is the moment when he feels stunned and surprised at her selfless action. She also says about Charles Thatcher’s name that she likes her name Charlie, and Charles Thatcher says, “My mother called me Charlie. My sister, too” .(66) Katherine shows silent rebellion against the capitalist system. She proves that every action should not be done only to yield profit. Charles Thatcher feels guilt-ridden over his act, and he also starts feeling sympathy with others. Charles Thatcher says, “Comedy is just tragedy from the other side of the street” (68). He recalls all his inhuman acts, and he thinks that he has done harm to many people who also have emotions, pain, problems, and families. This realisation is filled with the moral weight of his past actions. He comes to know that his cruelty, due to his detachment and blind obedience to his corporation, had resulted in the loss of money, dignity, and many lives. Katherine says, “No, I don’t do anything for free by any means.” (68)

The Realization of Human Nature

Katherine makes him realise that he is Charles Thatcher in the company, but by nature he is Charlie, because he is a human being beneath his uniform. He also exhibits human emotions and is a brother, a son, and a man. Thus, Katherine is an embodiment of humanity, and she is the person who brings a turning point in the protagonist's life—from compliance to compassion and from indifference to empathy. Katherine leaves a message behind that human beings do their duty only for material gains, but they must not forget that, first of all, they are human beings.

Everybody is selfish. We all want money, power. People who deny that are just afraid to compete or are just too lazy," I said, futilely.

"And people who say that are simply trying to justify their participation in a vicious system. You need money, sure, you can't live without it. But happiness is a need too, Charlie, there's not much point in living without that. Are you happy?"

"Nobody's happy."

"Nobody you know is happy. You all have to buy your lovers....(69)

They talk about various issues, and Katherine says that freedom is their right, and it has been written in the Bible also. But Charles Thatcher says that the capitalists don't trust the Bible at all. Katherine also says, "No, they think, it's silly. It has so many rules" (69). They think that honesty, integrity, and pride don't work in capitalist society. Katherine says:

Less than ten percent of Ackermen's revenue comes from essentials. The rest is from people competing with each other for prestige and comfort. You want to get a man to buy a new car, let him see his neighbour driving one.

People are never satisfied: they will always want better pools, homes, cars, boats, everything. Capitalism does that so well; it flourishes in so many markets. What blows my mind is that it's always the capitalists who have no faith in the ability of the system to succeed on electives alone. (74)

In Chapter 8, the protagonist, Charles Thatcher, undertakes a dangerous and ironic quest to uncover the truth about Sarah Aisling. The novel exposes the gulf between the upper and lower classes in society through HighCon, MidCon, LowCon, and NullCon. Although Thatcher belongs to the MidCon class, he goes to the LowSec for an interview. The novel also presents the horrifying realities of the world where poor people live in utter poverty, in extreme insecurity and fear due to violence and corporate exploitation. This class division presents the image of dehumanising conditions where rich people enjoy all the services and the poor are considered just disposable, abominable, and subhuman.

The warehouse at Everett Park has been depicted as a hellish place in the novel, where there are broken windows, smoke, filth, rotting food, and the stench of decay. All this depicts the dark side of the urban areas, where people are forced to live in dingy, narrow, and unliveable conditions. It is not a shelter, but, it can be compared to a graveyard where the living poor are forced to live a hellish life. In this way, the novel is replete with many events that depict tales of immorality, inhumanity, and injustice under a brutal capitalist regime. Charles Thatcher Thatcher's journey is not a physical quest, but, a symbol of deep struggle to retain values, humanity, and ethics. His every step towards death drives him into fierce danger, which shows the cruel face of the system.

There is one more aspect that has been narrated in this novel. The novelist

says that true liberty has become merely a dream for the poor and is beyond their access. Only the rich can buy and enjoy it. The Galt Intercompany Library is the place where activities are not monitored. In the corporate world, even privacy has become a profitable thing. In the LowSec zone, some children kill a deceased dog and eat it to satiate their hunger, which is also a very dangerous form of dehumanization. The poverty-stricken people have lost their morality and compassion. They make their decisions only by whims and not by heart, which puts them into trouble later. The whole society has crossed the boundary of humanity.

Chapter 8 of *The Water Thief* sheds light on the fractured social structure that is governed by class divisions. The major events of the novel have been narrated by Charles Thatcher, who takes serious risks in life and exposes the different aspects of class divides, dehumanization, the fight for freedom, and the tyrannous nature of power. In the four rigid class divisions, Charles Thatcher finds himself economically drained. After his transformation, he tries to find Sarah and Katherine (Kate), but he has neither resources, power nor information. There is only one solution for it, and that is to borrow money at a high interest rate, but he has no intention of repaying it, "About all I could do was secure a large loan (at a high rate of interest). It didn't matter, I had no intention of paying it back." (84)

The Capitalist System and Exploitation

This situation shows that the capitalist system lends money at a high interest rate, and the person who borrows does not want to pay this loan. In this way, it has been tried to show that loan at high interest is a trap, and a normal human being cannot easily escape it. Bryan S. Turner writes in his paper, "*Individualism, Capitalism and the Dominant Culture: A Note on the Debate*" that capitalism moved

individualism in the direction of possessive rights of property, while individualism pushed capitalism to embrace a specifically individualistic conception of property rights and economic relations (Turner 57). The Galt Intercompany Library is a particular place where there is no surveillance of the reader in an otherwise hyper-surveilled world. This is the place where readers can have access to all kinds of banned pornographic and subversive literature. This library stands in resistance to the powerful system that monitors every activity of a human being.

Those persons who revolt against the system are detained and executed. Sarah is one such example who is detained and sent to a terrifying place named the Citadel. It is impossible to reach her at that place. On the other side, Kate is untraceable, and her only clue is a woman named Jazelle. This kind of environment presents the image of a serious threat to women's safety in a capitalist society. Charles Thatcher is passionate to trace out both these women, and he considers it his moral and emotional duty. He wants to know the reality behind their missing.

Through LowSec and NullSec, the novelist has tried to show the most dehumanized conditions. There is crumbling infrastructure of their houses. People have no respect, dignity, or identity. There is open violence in such habitats. Women have become a tool. From the conversation between the cab drivers, it is clear that sexual exploitation has become a trade. The below quote denotes the downfall of the society:

Sex trade, mostly. You want to have sex with a twelve-year-old boy, it's hard to do if he's got a contract. Well, it'll cost you a lot, anyway. But Nulls, they're starving to death out here. Fifty caps will buy you the right to do anything you want to anybody. (86)

Even the minor girls are driven into the profession of prostitution for the sake of money. All this shows the brutal indictment of the capitalist society where money determines the way of a person. Thatcher tries to identify Kate, and for that, he tries to meet Jazelle with the help of the records from a rental company. He gets some support from a taxi driver who drives his car to a communal shelter in an industrial park. Most of the inhabitants of this place are outcasts who have informally taken over a building. Upper-class people try to infringe on the rights of the lower class. The novel depicts the ditch between the haves and have-nots. The upper-caste people intervene in the lives of the poor people. Ultimately, Charles Thatcher reaches the place where Jazelle lives.

I sat back into the dirty, beaten old seats. For a moment I felt the pride of ownership, a pride I had purchased. In MidSec I was an average guy. Here I had complete authority over the driver, enough money to sell and buy him a hundred times over. I wondered if HighCons felt like that all the time (91).

It was a totally shattered shelter of a former warehouse. It was a place whose windows were broken, and there were cracks in the walls, "The warehouse was about three stories tall. If it was a shelter, I couldn't imagine it being a good one. Windows were smashed out, the fire escape was barely hanging on, and there were large cracks in the wall" (93). There was smoke in the house and a reek of human waste and total decay. Even the domestic things were in the worst forms. Bunk beds and blankets were in the worst condition. He comes to know the real standard of this family. It is nothing but the collapse of a society where technological and economic advancement has replaced humanity and has made the poor people's lives a living hell. When Charles Thatcher enquires about Jazelle from the people, they see him

with eyes of doubt.

“No, no, I'm a MidCon; I'm a Delta. My name is Thatcher, I'm looking for Jazelle” (94).

The three men think that he is a HighCon, an outsider and a threat to their identity. They think that he has come there for spying or stalking. They beat him severely, drag him and humiliate him. This physical assault cannot be called a natural incident; in fact, it was driven by the distrust, fear, and inferiority complex which triggers these low-class people toward vengeance against the powerful system. Through all these events, it has tried to depict that social division has brought many challenges for all. This novel puts a question mark on the work strategy of the people who want to challenge the rotten system of society. Charles Thatcher says, “Corporatism breeds paranoia” (99).

In Chapter 9, Charles Thatcher finds himself wounded and propped against an oil drum. When he looks around, he saw some torn books and a dirty mattress that automatically narrate the lifestyle of the inhabitants.

I woke up propped against an oil drum, my legs sprawled out on the floor. It was hard to breathe. My nose was running, so I wiped it on the back of my hand, but instead of mucus, I came up with blood. My hair was wet and matted from a gash in my head, and my knuckles and fingertips were raw and bleeding. (96)

The novel presents a stark image of the society in which the spines of the books are stripped for insulation or fuel. The whole scene narrates that there is no value for intellectualism in the capitalist society, and the life of the people is governed by greed and utilitarianism. It has no meaning without humanity,

intellectualism, and cultural values. In such an environment, only corruption and power prevail, and knowledge becomes disposable.

Charles Thatcher faces difficulty in searching for Kate, but he is determined to see her again. His conversation with Jazelle reveals that he is now quite different from the capitalist tendency, and he believes that human reality is beyond the artificiality of the corporate world where profit reigns. Jazelle gives Charles Thatcher a warning that shocks him. She says that if the administration or authorities learn about their interaction, they will not impose a penalty or fine for it, rather, they would kill all the community or family members. Her statement, “They’ll mow down children and newborns... they’ll call it an uprising,” (96) presents a bleak reflection. It shows the brutal regime of the corporate sectors, where even mass massacre is justified for the survival of their autonomy and the profit margins of their company.

The novel also presents two aspects of the same person. In the beginning, Thatcher works blindly for Ackermen and believes that - corporates like Ackermen work for public welfare, but soon he finds that there is no reality in it. Soon he learns the stark reality behind it, and he sees the lived reality of the people he’s been trained to dismiss, his belief system begins to collapse. “Like a person, the corporation only did what was in its own interest... without consequences or conscience” (98)

At this point, he becomes self-aware and a visionary. The novel also presents images of revolts against the capitalist system. Kate, Jazelle, and others are characters who indicate the social structure. This is a symbol of social movement. There is always exploitation, fear, and self-doubt in a capitalist society. The novel is a strong document of paranoia in which Jazelle feels that Thatcher may be a spy, and

the spy also thinks that Jazelle may trap him. This mutual distrust is the control problem of every society. Thus, this chapter emphasizes the importance of awakening and resistance in society. It is very evident that core values have no value in a corporate society.

In Chapter 10, the horrific face of violence and capitalism has been depicted. He is forcefully thrown into the trunk of a car, “They threw me into the trunk of a car... bruised and bloodied, joints stiffening up, it was dreadful”(101). Thus, fear and helplessness grip him. After half an hour, he is brought to an unknown place, which terrifies him further. This incident shows the complete disregard of human rights. He reflects with bitter irony, “Believing in government wasn’t technically a crime... Neither was being a citizen” (101). This is a satirical statement which narrates that even thinking about a person to question and believe in democratic governance, equality, and citizenship is also considered dangerous. He wants to know about a systematic system that may provide safety, justice, and equality. But in a capitalist system, such kind of thinking also becomes a problem. Kate says, “They’re really worried I’m not licensed. You could be the police, or even Retention” (101). Here, retention is a repressive agency that makes people disappear, and forces them to lie. Kate’s friend is arrested for stealing corporate water, and afterward, there is no news of her whereabouts. Kate says about her, “Nobody knows where she is or why. If Retention took her, they could make her say anything” (101–02). It shows that in such a society, people have no right even to the fundamental necessities of life.

Charles Thatcher and Kate’s meeting is also an important point in this novel. Kate does not trust Charles Thatcher, and there is doubt, caution, and internal broken psyche. Charles Thatcher is badly injured, still he comes to meet her. He says: “I

met you after the arrest. You could be anybody”.

The novel depicts that in the capitalist society, relationships have become fragile, and they are built on the foundation of fear and doubt. When he expresses happiness at seeing her, she retorts, “I met you after the arrest. You could be anybody”.(102)

There is doubt even in friendships. Every person is full of doubt, and people have no trust in one another. They think that other persons may be against them or may be a spy. This is not only between Charles Thatcher and Kate—it has become the mentality of the entire world. The novel also offers a comparative analysis on the government democracy and corporate control. Through this comparison, the novelist tries to show how the capitalist system devours humanity, justice, values, and collective responsibilities. There is an emotional moment when Charles Thatcher asks Kate, “I guess I wanted to know if they were... were they happy?” (103). This question is not mere curiosity, but a way to fumble the past. Kate replies that republics were not devoid of problems, but there was justice, morality, and equality. She replies, “Republics caused problems too, but for the most part, they were an impartial third party that protected people. They had laws—rules nobody could break no matter how much money they had” (103). This tells about a time when money was not more than everything else in the world. The power was not focused on money, and money was not above law. Charles Thatcher asks again, “But you must know if they were happy,” to which Kate replies, “Compared to people now, yeah, I think they were happy” (103). It criticises the contemporary capitalist system in which profit, selfishness, and cruelty rule everything else.

Humanity, Dignity and Equality: Redefined

This novel makes us think that we are living in a world where a man's value is judged by the profit he earns. It makes us wonder: can we return to our lost democratic values where human beings can live like human beings—with humanity, dignity, and equality? This novel is not only a political imagination but a serious social criticism which tells when profit, surveillance, and contract become the foundation of trust and human values, and then justice, trust, and liberty are demolished. The question “Were they happy?” denotes the fundamental wish of a person to remain happy, which is beyond any social system.

The novel provides us with a glimpse into a dystopian capitalist society where there is no place for human emotions and even fundamental resources like water have become commodities under market control. Through this novel, the novelist exposes the contradictions of a social structure in which human beings are merely useful producers, and there is no place for feelings, love, and trust in society. Gras points to the importance of capital utilisation in forming capitalism by stating that “capitalism is a system of getting a living directly through the use of capital goods or intermediately through capital funds” (83).

This novel depicts four classes, and Charles Thatcher's birth in MidSec and his inclination towards LowSec depicts that a person can become an outsider sometimes. It is a common theme in diaspora literature where immigrants belong to neither their host country nor their homeland. Neither side accept him. This kind of person also feels rootless, placeless, and selfless in a foreign land.

This chapter vividly illustrates how society is rigidly divided into classes through labels like MidSec, LowSec, and Alpha. The protagonist's birth in MidSec and his

eventual gravitation towards LowSec reveal how a person can become an ‘outsider’ in both worlds. The residents of LowSec are struggling with a severe water crisis, while those in MidSec and higher classes monopolise water and other resources. The social inequality is so extreme that people are forced to hide their basic rights in order to survive. The residents of LowSec are suffering from a water crisis, while the people of MidSec and AlphaSec have a monopoly on resources. “But what's funny is that this charge of 'unnatural' behaviour comes from the capitalists who believe the most in dominating nature. Pasteurization, immunization, antibiotics, air conditioning, toothpaste—these are all direct assaults on nature” (108). Water has been used as a motif in this novel, which highlights not the stealth of water, but puts a question mark on a system that wants to control the fundamental requirement like water. The novel also warns readers about the problem of water crisis in the imminent years, “Fairness is nothing more than the distribution of wealth and power as those who already have it see fit. Money lets you buy favourable interpretations of right and wrong, and that benefit accrues quickly” (108). Kate makes Charles Thatcher learn how to collect rainwater. She tells him how she earns her livelihood by cheating. This shows how people are forced into illegal acts for their survival.

Further, Chapter 11 begins with these words, “When I was six, I caught one of my teachers having sex in the school bathroom. I told my parents, who sold their silence to her for several thousand caps. Years later my mom sold me to Ackermen. My first real girlfriend hacked my work account, stole my reports, and was promoted for it” (114). In this way, it is clear that Charles Thatcher notices his teacher in immoral acts, his mother’s selling her silence for money and selling him to Ackermen, cheating by his girlfriend, and the distrust of his wife. All this presents

the image of an extreme 'age of downfall' in which every person is used only for money and every relationship is purely driven by monetary gain. There is no place for intimacy or human emotion. It divulges the collapse of personal trust in a hyper-commercialised modern society. When Charles Thatcher lays in Kate's arms, he is completely broken and wounded. Kate's love and care give him temporary relief. "I couldn't even trust my own wife" (114).

Further, this novel also shows that whoever goes against the capitalist system will be punished. Sarah is arrested just because she was collecting water. She gets punishment while other LowSec people were also doing the same task. This suggests that there is no justice in this blind system. In such kind of environment, the marginalised people are used only to be suppressed and exploited, and claiming their fundamental rights is considered just a crime. Charles Thatcher also finds himself entrapped in the liminal space. This kind of situation raises a question whether any person can truly create an independent identity outside the structures of the system, "My job became unbearable. I couldn't work for Ackermen anymore, much less in Perception. My colleagues did nothing but squabble, preen, and gripe, and I wondered how I had ever tolerated it" (116).

This novel is a warning against a system where even natural resources and human beings have become commodities. It further forces us to think whether this progress in the name of technology or capitalism is making us more humane or it is transforming us into a tool to be consumed. This novel fuses existential, political, economic, and social aspects of our life. By reading it, readers easily introspect and recognise the value of compassion and kindness in the capitalist framework. This chapter ends showing Eric Forestall, a hardworking employee who works tirelessly

for the corporation, but nobody respects his hard work:

Like Eric Forestall in cubicle 721, I had creditors I'd have to stay ahead of.

But I couldn't simply vanish into LowSec without Kate's help. But her friends hadn't come close to accepting me. And why should they? For all they knew, I was an agent, and even if I wasn't, Ackermen would come looking for me.

Then, one night, the light in cubicle 721 went out (118).

The Spiritual Journey

In chapter 12, the novelist reaches a climactic juncture where characters confront their own conscience. Charle's introspection takes the readers towards a spiritual journey in which he thinks about his past mistake. It is the most poignant and honest confession when Charles Thatcher accepts that it was his blunder to submit a false report against Sarah Aisling, due to which she was arrested and perhaps it led to her eventual death. He says, "Weeks passed and I hadn't received a payout for Sarah Aisling's report. It was a bad sign" (119). Charle's moral conflict raging within makes him think that human beings should act going beyond any prejudices. He thinks that he now deserves to be *Reclaimed* —a kind of atonement or capital punishment. In this way, his remorse purges his immoral acts. This remorse is not hollow or dramatic, rather it is real and powerful. This part of the novel is a wonderful message to encounter his own conscience and narrates the importance of self-criticism. This novel symbolises self-acceptance. It also narrates Charle's real renaissance. He is filled with guilt for his past actions and it brings him to a crossroad from where he decides to return to the path of justice, humanity, and morality. The novel harshly criticises the capitalist system. The conversation among

the colleagues in the canteen can be called a scathing critique of the class divide. The division of the society among Alpha, LowCon, and MidCon suggests that this division is not only based on material resources but it also adds poison in their relationships. The LowCons are shown to work hard, whereas the Alphas represent those people who are merely consumers. In this way, discrimination, injustice, exploitation, and dehumanization have been depicted in the novel, where people's personal emotions have become commodities in the marketplace. Moreover, the two foundations of Friedman's *capitalist ethic* are private property rights paired with the freedom to employ and exchange the resources voluntarily in free markets (Ashford 537).

The conversation between Charles Thatcher and Kate presents a healthy discourse on an ideal society where human beings mutually trust and support each other. Kate thinks that a supportive society always remains happy and contented, but it is against the capitalist system. She gives the example of the Prisoner's Dilemma, through which she tells that when people have mutual trust, some positive outcomes are inevitable. Charles Thatcher says, "The men must trust each other and be trustworthy" (122). The competitive capitalist system depletes trust. Thus, he advocates for humanity, cooperation, trust, and morality which seem to be vanishing from the current system.

The chapter concludes with a meaningful conversation between Charles Thatcher and Kate, where they talk about love, forgiveness, and the complexity of human relationships. When Kate comes to know everything about Charles's acts for Sarah, she slaps him and shows her anger, which is a natural and spontaneous human act. But she also embraces him because she knows that though she cannot

forgive him, she cannot forsake him completely. This incident suggests that the seeds of compassion and sympathy lie deep in the human heart.

Now Charle's heart is filled with self-awareness. His conscience tells him to instigate his moral awakening that triggers him to resist the capitalist and tyrant system. Now he does not want to be part of the club or the power that exploits others. He defies Ackermen, who crushes the dissenting voices. He says, "I don't want to be part of the problem anymore, I want to be part of the solution" (124), which suggests the sudden change in his mentality. It is an indication of his mental shift that does not support the tyrants. He rebels in this way and he thinks that the voice of resistance can shake the very foundation of an oppressive capitalist system. This is the situation when Charles Thatcher is immersed in guilt while Kate remains rational, and she sees the reality. She knows that Charles Thatcher is getting emotional, and a powerful repressive system like Ackermen cannot be collapsed by the dint of emotionalism as a strategic planning is required for that. Sarah says:

I don't know about you, but I want to live. And we're not going to live if we can't overcome our mistakes, move forward, and worry about keeping the people we have alive. I've got some experience with this, and I can tell you that you can spend years blaming yourself; it's cathartic, it's easy, and it's a great excuse not to go about the business of living your life. (130)

When Charles Thatcher talks about purchasing or publicising Sarah's records, Kate warns him that his emotionalism can put him in danger. Kate thinks that human instincts are natural; these should be balanced with practical strategies for favourable outcomes. She says that, forgiving mistakes and moving forward is true courage, which denotes that courage lies not in resistance or retaliation, but in

balanced wisdom. In this way, the novel offers a subtle ray of hope. Kate's suggestion to Charles Thatcher—if he gets an opportunity to ask Sarah for forgiveness—does not only address about redemption but a glimmer of hope that no matter how dark the past may be, there is always a possibility for repentance and reform. It has been written about Linus also:

Linus would die a very wealthy man, an executive, maybe even CEO. He was already happy, fully enmeshed in the system. He derived pleasure from it, fed off the lies he told and the people he outwitted. He would die happy because in the end he believed the most important lie, the one he told himself—that he was the greatest colleague in the world. (136)

Thus, in the dehumanized world, this novel conveys a message to seek light in the deepest darkness. Through Charles Thatcher, the novelist tries to say that when a person changes within, he also gets the power to change society.

Chapter 13 also narrates human beings as property under the capitalist system, where people are dehumanized. Linus's statement, "We're assets, you and I" (141), is its justified notion against the capitalist system. A person is not judged by his human values and social responsibilities, but, is judged by the assets he holds. Money matters in society and their intrinsic worth is generally ignored by the public and even the employers because they don't see their virtues, rather, they see their profit.

There is a tale *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* in this chapter that shows that there is no value of truth these days. Linus winds up the story with his own words, "Lies must be fresh; never repeat the same lie" (141). He does not call it immoral or unethical, but, he says that it has become a part of professionalism. Linus's

perspective lays bare the true face of society where the line between truth and lie is blurred. The truth is tested not on the moral weight but on its utility. This ideology takes society to a place where manipulation works and humanity is strangled. There is no place for loyalty, trust, emotions, and what is important, is money. Charles Thatcher is much disturbed by his pragmatism because he has decided to stick to ethical consciousness. But Linus has a different viewpoint, who calls telling lies is a part of the game. Lie well so that people may not remember only your lie.

Cooperation, Responsibility, Heroism and Morality

When Charles Thatcher talks about the Prisoner's Dilemma, he sees it as an opening to discuss shared interests and the power of cooperation. But Linus takes it for competition. It reflects moral conflict where people have to decide whether they would cooperate with each other or act selfishly. Charles Thatcher says that it is a question of human emotions, while Linus says that selfishness is the key to success. It is competition that makes people improve and help them achieve success in any field. This notion aligns with neoliberal capitalism where mutual cooperation exists only slogans and books, and not a practice. According to Linus, cooperation is mandatory when there is profit behind it, otherwise, in the corporate system it is useless. It is also notable that Charles Thatcher and Linus speak the same language and use the same words, but their connotations are different for the same words, like 'cooperation,' 'responsibility,' 'heroism,' and 'morality.' Charles Thatcher thinks that they use the same sounds and grammar, but Linus takes these as corporate terms, while Charles Thatcher uses them as moral and emotional anchors. Charles Thatcher also accepts this point that they are using the same sound of language but they have different meanings for them.

Charles Thatcher also accepts that he has now become a citizen not just by belief but by belief and action. Charles Thatcher stated that he was then, irrevocably, a citizen. But this citizenship doesn't stem from democratic participation or constitutional rights: it emerges from dissent in a system where silence itself is an endorsement. Charles Thatcher was part of the system until he was silent, but now he is not silent and he has got the guts to think and rebel, and this is my concern. As and when his dissent is revealed, he becomes an outsider. It is an irony that a person gets awareness and independence through conformity, struggle, and non-cooperation.

When Charles Thatcher and Linus were sitting in a café, a man in a tan trench coat walks past a newsstand. He is wounded by a gunshot and blood seeps through his coat. Suddenly, another bullet hits him and he falls on the ground with an explosion. He was carrying a bomb, and the blast destroyed the newsstand. Linus throws himself on top of Charles Thatcher so that he may save him, showing heroism. Charles Thatcher gets impressed to see this act of Linus. He had never thought about it, and Linus shows in his cold way that he is seen saving people, and Charles Thatcher sees in him the heroism. Linus says that it is merely a duty or part of the job. Here is the conversation between them:

"You saved a lot of lives today," I said.

Linus shook his head. "No, Charles Thatcher, I protected our assets. It's the mitigation clause in every Ackermen contract. I had to."

"No, that wasn't mitigation. You took charge, you led us. You saved lives.

The world is a better place because of what you did." (141)

This statement makes it clear that even human emotions are weighed on the

scale of morality, but in the capitalist system, it is judged by gain or loss. Any work without profit is generally considered useless. After this explosion, Linus became blood-stained and walked away. People refrain from doing any act on the basis of corporate contracts, clauses, and bonuses. This kind of mentality easily erodes human values where the objective behind every action is only profit. Through this novel, the novelist Nicholas Lamar Soutter portrays that human emotions are secondary and profit remains the primary concern in the capitalist society. Linus is also seen denouncing idealism as he thinks that idealists generally have to face disappointments and death in their lives. He thinks that a person's competition should be only with himself. All this reflects the bitter and brutal truth of capitalism, where practicality should be the ultimate reality of life. In the capitalist society, words like morality, justice, emotions, idealism, etc. find no place. Charles Thatcher internally struggles with this worldview. He thinks that the world should not be cruel, but he knows that the society in which he lives is harsh and cruel. Linus rejects idealism as he knows a lot about it, and their struggle becomes a constant battle between realism and idealism. When Charles Thatcher looks at the blue sky, it is taken not just as a depiction of the weather, rather, it is a symbol of hope and inner awakening. He comes to understand the hollowness of the system and the cruelty of the tyrannous acts. He decides not to remain silent anymore. Earlier he was a selfish and passive man, but now he emerges as a responsible citizen of the society. This novel is a profound exploration of inner dilemma, moral conflicts, and inner awakening within an oppressive capitalist framework. The novel sheds light on the tragic brilliance of a world where profit rules, and rules are made only for monetary gain.

Chapter 14 of *The Water Thief* also deals with the theme of dehumanization, profiteering, systematic collapse, and the web of corporate deception. “Poker is all about deception” (144). Charles Thatcher feels disillusioned by the very corporation—Ackermen—for which he has worked for years. He is appalled to learn that his colleague also views the people he saved as assets. Through Kate, the novelist reveals how climate change, ecological imbalance, and speculation on land prices led to a massive economic bubble. The exorbitantly rising prices of the lands have deluded people, and the companies like Ackermen are taking its undue advantage. They began trading on the natural resources on which they had no rights. This novel projects the image of a system that is founded on deception and illusion and ultimately collapses with its own weight. Ackermen invested heavily in land and inflated the value. “.” One of the lines in the novel expresses that Ackermen is dead and they just don’t know that then. This indicates the irony of a system, unaware of its dreadful doom. The novel depicts Charles Thatcher’s inner conflict because he is unwilling to continue his job with Ackermen and decides to work according to his ethics because he is no longer interested to work with falsehood. Kate suggests him that he should not leave because she thinks that the entire system is now on the brink of collapse. Her statement reflects the irony of powerful institutions, unaware of their inevitable doom. Through this, she wants to reveal that the fall of Ackermen is not coming in future, but, it has begun, as their greed-fuelled system has started consuming itself first.

“No, the Ackermen is over. They are through. Everybody is. Corporations. The world. It’s coming to an end. It’s going to crash. It’s all over” (145).

Thus, this novel lays stress on the point that the entire corporate capitalist

system is based on lies, designed to earn maximum profit.

Chapter 15 of this novel also is a searing critique of the capitalist system which leads to a catastrophic consequences. The novel exposes the theme of dehumanization through the conversation between Charles Thatcher and Kate. This chapter begins with an assurance that soon this capitalist war will come to an end,

“Is this what they would call a war?” I asked. “War is the inevitable conclusion of capitalism. We've been at war for centuries. This is the end of war” (154).

The novel highlights that it has become very difficult for corporations to survive, and that is why they have to adopt inhuman and unethical ways for their survival, sacrificing their ethical values. When they have fear in front of their eyes, they have to sacrifice their moral standards in the capitalist race for their existence in the industry. Even human beings have no value, and the employees are seen in the form of commodities.

Corporations are run by people, nothing more or less. They're not monsters, not superhuman intellects, just people who are, for the most part, reasonably as clever as one another. Some corporations will fail and others succeed. But everyone thinks that they deserve to win. So when they think they're going to lose, they feel justified in moving the line of acceptable behaviour further down the field. (154)

The novelist talks about pseudo-democracy in this novel through Kate. She says that the corporations have not only become the centres of power, but they no longer even share it. All this denotes that even governments, too, have now become puppets of corporations, and nothing is hidden about it. When Charles Thatcher

suggests to her to warn the people, it makes him understand that in such system, even issuing a warning is now considered a crime. This shows that the corporations have even control over the media. Kate talks about the need of an underground republic that should be quietly formed to liberate people from the oppressive system, “I would never tell, of course. Ackermen could torture me until the end of time (or at least until the crash) and I would never tell” (154).

This republic will be just, democratic, and sustainable. Kate, being a realist, knows that even republics also suffer from corruption. It indicates that all republics do not work in favour of the public and that’s why people should be aware about their rights.

Charles Thatcher is torn between his dilemma. He has a chance to survive by being the part of ten thousand people but, on the other hand, he is guilt-stricken that many people will die of violence and hunger. He confesses that since then he has started valuing his life, he is going to become the witness of the mass destruction. This shows dehumanization—how people ignore mass destruction for their personal benefit. People are generally considered commodities, and corporates are only profit-driven machines in the capitalist system. Corporations only look for their own profit, and the capitalists become soulless: they do not think about the well-being of their employees—they just look for profit. The word ‘Retention’ also becomes a metaphor of control in this chapter. There is mistrust in the society and even corporate sector. Kate trusts Charles Thatcher, but other people have doubt that he can be a corporate spy. It denotes that capitalism breeds paranoia and there are seeds of doubt in people’s minds that anyone can be working and lurking behind the façade of a dual identity, which may jeopardise their life. This mistrust is also a way

to control people. It shows that people are terrified of the corporate system. But as this corporation is in its extreme form, it is on the brink of collapse.

Chapter 16 is also about dehumanization brought by the capitalist system. It depicts how Charles Thatcher's life becomes worthless, amidst corporate surveillance. The chapter narrates how Charles Thatcher's workplace becomes a mausoleum awaiting death, "In a couple of months they'd all be corpses... The building would be a mausoleum." Again, it shows how employees' (158) personal emotions, dreams, and desires have no value in the capitalist system because they are considered merely commodities. The line "I found an escrow credit of 13,861.44 caps, for emergency mitigation services rendered at the cafe"(160) suggests that every human act, even emergency services, is weighed only in terms of money. Through 'caps', the novelist wants to reveal that human actions are measured on the scale of money. "CEO was preparing proposals to ferret these traitors out, and was personally going to oversee a new economic offensive against Kabul Coffee" (161). Charles Thatcher says, "These Kabul people are maniacs... We need to kill them all, everyone" (162).

This quote from the novel also seems to be a strategy against a rival coffee company, but it depicts the diabolic consequences of the capitalist system where war and even murders are driven by the market dominance. When Corbett told Charles Thatcher that he was going to short his futures, he'll owe Ackermen for the rest of his life. This shows the mental slavery of the people. When Charles Thatcher checks his stocks, he finds that his identity is now totally dependent on the performance of the stocks he holds. This shows how, in the capitalist system, people put their lives at stake in the capitalist society. For them, money is more important than life.

Moreover, the capitalist system works differently. It works on the concept that when you are not profitable, you are considered dead. Charles Thatcher says:

Retention was probably already surveilling me. They wouldn't let my stock fall to nothing without finding some way of getting their money back. But now that I knew, whatever value they could mine from me was gone. They'd be coming for me. If they arrested me, I was dead—either on the gallows, or starving to death in jail after the crash. (165)

The novel also draws attention towards the Retention Agents, which denotes that Charles Thatcher is no longer an employee, and he is seen through the eyes of a criminal. His every step is recorded, and he is seen through the eyes of a suspect. This presents the terror of surveillance capitalism, where the employee's privacy does not matter—what does matter the most is profit and repression. A computer voice chimes, "Charles Thatcher. Please remain where you are. Authorities will be with you shortly" (166). His ledger is de-networked. He is not able to open the door or complete any transactions. Two security guards come there and one of them says, "Mr. Thatcher, the Director of Community Relations would like to speak with you" (169).

Bernard's laser is stolen, and finally he is killed. This denotes that Bernard is found in an existential crisis where he loses his morality and ethics. Charles Thatcher is also in the search of 'phantom trades'—a final search for truth, through which he wants to know whether his awareness, empathy, and rebellion were real or not. Charles Thatcher's struggle and his condition is a reminder that the capitalist system works solely on profit, and citizens are generally seen as consumers. The data regarding a citizen, is ultimately used and deleted, after the purpose is served.

In Chapter 17, Charles Thatcher enters a corporate institution called Galt. This institution is a unit of a capitalist system that provides safety and security, only to those people who are ready to invest a substantial amount in their safety. This chapter is a symbolic description in which people are considered, not as human beings but customers. The novelist exposes the darker sides of the corporate sector in a tense and symbolic gesture, where they thwart existential insecurity in their clients so that they may extract more money from their pockets by showing fear.

The director of Galt welcomes Charles Thatcher politely, showing meek hospitality, and he frightens him by the information that a security agency, Ackermen Brothers is after him because he has allegedly stolen a ledger,

I'm sorry to inconvenience you," he continued, "but I'm afraid we have a bit of a problem. We've been contacted by Ackermen Brothers Securities. It appears that they want you on suspicion of several crimes committed against them (171).

The Director makes Charles Thatcher realise that he is to be arrested soon; Now they charge that you have taken the ledger of a colleague, Mr. Bernard Milton....They have not deactivated it, presumably so they can track you (171).

The Director says that he will not surrender him to the Ackermen Brothers because he is their client and their company has a policy not to surrender its client. Outwardly, this statement has much personal touch and seems to be akin to professionalism, but soon he comes to know the reality. When Charles Thatcher asks, "Why would you help me?", the director says "We're a reputed firm, Mr. Thatcher" (171). He says that they provide a service and they ask money for it. The

Director says that he has some private caves and he can safely escape from it, but he tells that it will be very costly for him, and he will have to pay a price for it. Though the director's advice sounds morally upright, Galt offers his services at a high rate. It cannot be called help, but, it is a paid service. In this way, Galt is not providing him free safety. He is merely providing him services—if he wants to. From their conversation, it is clear that Galt is a capitalist organisation that charges high service fees for its works. The director tries to manipulate the situation: if Thatcher uses the stolen ledger to take a loan and pay for the escape, the company will not be legally accountable for any stolen money. This is a strategic plan by the director, who does not want to expose loopholes in this matter, so that he may avoid legal matters. According to him, the morality of an institution lies only in earning maximum profit.

After this incident, Charles Thatcher uses the stolen ledger to withdraw money and he hands over all available resources to Galt. He pays money to Galt so that he may escape safely. He is taken to a hidden underground dark tunnel by Galt's agent, Mr. Thompson. "I stepped into a rocky tunnel" (172). This tunnel is very dangerous, and even a single mistake could lead to disaster. Charles Thatcher says, "It was a slow going. I was blind, no source of light at all. I stumbled along, using the cave walls for support. Even a single misstep could be disastrous; I could lose my sense of direction and find myself headed back where I came from" (174). He has to do it because he knows that staying there means his certain arrest, which he wants to avoid at any cost. He feels tired and lost. Ultimately, he comes out in a park. Thus, the novel reflects Thatcher's moral dilemma—that he wants to come out of the capitalist system, but the escape is very difficult, dangerous, and uncertain. Even after stepping out in the park, he has a sigh of relief for some time because he

knows that he is not under surveillance, but he knows well that this freedom is temporary. He hires a taxi and heads towards his friend's house so that he may plan for the next round. "I hired a taxi but only had enough cash to get about two-thirds of the way to Linus' house" (174). He goes the remaining way on foot. He is well aware that the authorities may trace him at any moment. Through this incident, the novelist writes that in the capitalist world, escape is risky and freedom is an illusion. Thus, the novel reflects the hollow heart of the capitalist system, where corporations like Galt take undue advantage of their clients' problems and charge a good amount in lieu of it. The novel sheds light on the modern human condition, where people find themselves entrapped in the capitalist system. They are part of such battle in which their defeat is certain. This chapter also has the following lines which show the influence and hold of capitalist system:

Hope is the enemy of life.

The phantoms are there. Look for them, they are there...

Nobody knows the system better.

Corporation breeds paranoia. (180)

Chapter 18 begins with Charles Thatcher stealing a costly police car cruiser. Charles Thatcher knows well that it is a serious crime, but he does so because he wants to revolt openly against the oppressive system. The chapter begins with the following words,

My hands were shaking so violently that I struggled to keep the wheel straight.... Heading towards the city mall, I could already see neighbourhoods without power. I would have to flee the city fast and then find shelter somewhere (184).

He knows that he is mounting charges—life identity theft, assault, impersonating a police officer, stealing state property. In a bold effort to defy the hyper-capitalist world, he does so, to satisfy himself. He shows his anger and frustration when he stops the car, he tries to destroy it but is not able to do it because he finds that the steering, gears, and trigger are all locked. All this shows his frustration and strong hatred against the capitalist order. He is only able to just rip out a sun visor and stomp on it, and finally, he runs off into the storm, “I went back to the driver's side and wrenched the sun visor from the roof. I threw it to the ground and repeatedly stomped on it. Then I ran triumphantly into the night” (184).

He wants to go outside the boundaries of the city so that he may come out of the grip of the oppressive system. He goes to the LowSec area, but he has to face darkness, oppression, and storm there also, “I used the cruiser's radar and Infrared, but there was no power anywhere. The streetlights, the homes, all were dark” (184).

He comes to know the reality of the LowSec, where he feels absolutely powerless. He finds darkness in the street and finds the ruined houses, and the world seems post-apocalyptic. He has to go through the shuttered warehouses and abandoned spaces, “The warehouse was in rough shape. It was abandoned, one corner of the aluminium roof completely torn off. Someone had gone through a good deal of trouble to lock all of the doors, so I went in through one of the windows” (184). Amidst all this, he has a sigh of relief, but the grip of the capitalist technology does not leave him here also, and the remote kill switch of the car gets activated and shuts down the car, “The car choked, sputtered out and rolled to a stop” (184).

He comes to realise that it is very difficult to outrun such a powerful and technically advanced system. After that, he makes the irrational and foolish decision

to return to Kate's house, but he knows that he has no option left. He is left with no money, no social identity, and no place where he can hide himself. This hasty decision shows his desperation. He thinks that going to jail or dying on the streets is not much different. That is why, he wants to seek help from someone. At Kate's residence also, he finds everything strange—it was a desolated place that is not electrified, windows are broken, and there are no goods intact, "The hallways were lit only by emergency lighting, and I was surprised even by that" (185). He finds that the old world is demolished. He has nothing except some faint memories. He narrates his horrifying experience, "What had seemed like a good idea under the threat of an Ackermen ambush now struck me as a terrible mistake" (186). As and when Thatcher reaches the dark room, he finds a mysterious and smoking cigar on the red chair—someone who knows his name also:

Then I noticed a large, dark object on the far end of the living room. Hard to make out, it loomed by the far wall near the bathroom. Whatever it was, it didn't belong.

I took a step toward it. My heart quickened. I was sure now; there was something in the room with me.

I saw the glow of a cigar and could almost hear the deep inhalation. In the brief blue light of another flash of lightning, I saw a large, overstuffed red leather chair, and a man in a dark suit sitting in it. (187)

When Thatcher asks him who he is, the man says, "You know who I am" (187). The novelist has encountered this man with Thatcher because this man may be the symbol of capitalist system that keeps control on everything. When Thatcher is struck on the head, he loses consciousness.

The Camouflage

In Chapter 19, Charles Thatcher regains consciousness. He finds himself in the most splendid and luxurious room. Initially, he thinks that he has died and he is in heaven, but there has been some mistake on his account, and he has been sent to a wrong place. He soon finds that he is in prison. However, it soon becomes clear that this is not a usual place, and the room is bigger than his own apartment. The room contains every facility, resembling the room of a luxury hotel. He narrates about this high-end luxury hotel:

The mattress was soft; the duvet seemed to be genuine goose down—more expensive per ounce than gold. I ran my hand down the length of the sheets until I found the label: cotton, twelve-hundred thread count. My pyjamas were silk, and fit like they were custom-tailored for me. (189)

He goes to the living room barefoot, where he notices elegant furniture, a Television, a bar, and a table adorned with fresh fruits. At that morning, the door opens, and he finds two men who are dressed like servants standing outside. They politely inquire about his health. They also inform him that his injuries have been treated and he has been healed properly. They offer him food. When he feels reluctant to accept it, the attendants assure him that it is absolutely free and he need not worry about food and money while they are there. Charles Thatcher senses that it is a psychological trap. He thinks that all these facilities are perhaps meant to break him down. He feels hungry, and he asks for a special variety of a sandwich—a Reuben—made with real meat. The attendants readily accept his request and they are happy to help him. He is filled with guilt because he thinks that the people in the LowSec area are hungry.

Chapter 20 of the novel also talks about reformatory actions taken by the Corporation. Charles Thatcher is taken by the Retention Guards in an opulent and mysterious room where guards tell him, “Cheer up! You're corporate material!” (201), and he will not be destroyed. He is taken through a glass elevator into an underground labyrinth, which is replete with luxury and grandeur. His room is filled with rare artefacts, oriental decorations, dragon statues, antique weapons, and a precious poker set, which are the symbols of excessive wealth and elitism. Thus, all this reflects the power and money of the corporate sector, where wealth outweighs human value. Here Charles Thatcher meets an executive whom he has seen in Kate’s apartment. Charles Thatcher thinks that he has been brought here to torture him. Here is the conversation between Charles Thatcher and a guard:

“Do you know why you are here?”

“You're going to torture me.”

He laughed.

“What a barbaric mind you have, my fellow. No, you will not be tortured.

You are here because you are broken. You are a complex machine, which for some reason doesn't run right. You can't even perform rudimentary tasks properly. You are here to be rehabilitated.” (202)

The guard tells him that he has been part of the corporate system, which is why he is a valuable asset for them, and they do not want to destroy their assets—that is why they give him a chance to reform. This thinking shows capitalist manipulation and tactics to keep themselves powerful by not losing their members. The guard does not give him a rare bottle of Scotch, saying that his palate is not refined enough, “Oh. Well, I would like very much to offer you some, but your

palate is nowhere near refined enough to taste the difference between this and goat urine. It would be a shameful waste—quite literally a crime to share this with you” (203). He asserts that his consumption and luxury are for the welfare of the poor. Jahan and Mahmud write that the freedom to choose with respect to consumption, production, and investment is one of the key pillars of capitalism (4).

By spending money, he provides a livelihood to those who belong to the lower ladder in the hierarchy. He believes that only consumption by the rich drives society. But Charles Thatcher has a different opinion on this matter. He says that if he had had money, he would have helped directly those people in need, and it is the right way to show humanity and compassion for the poor. But the guard mocks him, saying that charity is harmful and compassion is a self-deceit. The guard says that help makes the poor idle, lazier, and dependent. The poor people are not able to handle wealth, and they spend their money on immediate gratifications rather than proper utilisation of their resources.

The poor cannot handle money, that's why they're poor. Give a poor man ten caps, and he won't use that money to invest in the future, or to buy a ride to a job interview, or to get a book and read it. No, he will buy a bottle of potato vodka and be done with it. You've done him a terrible disservice. Now he's lost self-respect, and he's learned that he doesn't need to earn money, that all he has to do is be poor and people will pay him. It's a vicious cycle, and every day he'll act. (204–05)

He says that Charles Thatcher and other people like him are selfish and they promote charity and moral virtue.

Oh, I believe you, fellow. I believe you'd show charity. That's why you can't

be trusted. The truth is that you're selfish. You and your kind would drive our society to ruin out of a conceited desire to convince others of your altruistic nature. You're the one trying to impress people. You talk about charity, taxes, a greater good, and about a social compact, because deep down you're terrified of your own failures (205).

The guard represents a harsh and bleak picture of capitalism. Bartley J.

Madden writes

Understanding the Benefits of Capitalism through the Lens of a New Theory of the Firm,” “What is invariably overlooked by critics, and even many supporters of capitalism, is the need for a viable theory of the firm that treats the firm as a holistic system and brings clarity to the purpose of the firm (10).

The novel narrates that compassion is an illusion and does not exist. Charles Thatcher remains bewildered and powerless in front of a monolithic ideology, but there is something in him that still resists. This chapter depicts a deep philosophical and social conflict through the dialogues between Charles Thatcher and the guard. Charles Thatcher advocates for morality, ethics, compassion, and empathy, while the guard represents the capitalist system in which money and business remain the priority of life. The guard says:

Compassion does not exist, Charles Thatcher. It's an illusion. Even your self-declared altruism is motivated purely out of a desire to end your own agony at watching people suffer, to alleviate your own sense of guilt. I feel guilt too. I've simply learned to use it productively. By our very nature we do what

is in our own best interest. We are incapable of doing otherwise. That is why the leviathans all failed—because they allowed, even encouraged, belief in fantasy (206).

The guard also thinks, like Charles Thatcher, that the corporation will end one day. When Charles Thatcher says that corporations will collapse soon, “Corporation will end, I swear to you. If not now, then someday. Even if it takes a millennia, your great system will collapse” (208). The guard tries to convince Thatcher, “We are all alone, we always have been, always will be... But we are all alone” (207). This chapter ends with beautiful and meaningful words, “Nature is violence. You can only survive off the death of others. Plants, animals, whatever you choose to eat. We all commit violence against other living organisms. We murder so that we may live. The violence is not pleasant, and I would not wish it to anyone. Certainly not on myself, but it is necessary” (209). But the guard is immersed in his own interpretation of things. He says laughingly, “...Of course not. Corruption, coercion, intimidation are all techniques to avoid violence, to create civilization” (209).

The novelist further says that man’s nature has been to fight against himself and society. He says,

Men’s state of nature is war, war with himself, war with all that is around him. What you call civilization is nothing more than a set of constraints used by people with power to wage war on people without it, to dominate them using the minimum possible effort” (210).

Nobody is safe under such critical circumstances because war has taken many lives on this planet. The novelist writes, “But in state of war, you’re

constantly in danger. The next bombing, the next attack might kill you” (210). Even the guard also likes Charles Thatcher’s transformative form; that is why he says, “I like you, Charles Thatcher, I really do. Your heart is in the right place, even if you’re too stupid to function. So I will do you a favour of being honest with you” (211). The capitalist system is based on the concept of “Buy low” and “Sell high” (213), without which it is very difficult to get profit.

Chapter 21 of this novel also presents Thatcher’s mental and emotional condition. This novel narrates the protagonist’s inner turmoil, shattered dreams, and his pursuit of truth. He now lives under the shadow of death because he thinks that he can be killed at any time. This is the time when he is living under the shadow of death, but also the time when he comes to the essence of existence and truth. In his introspection, he comes to realise that by now he was in the wrong direction. He knows that the corporate system was unjust and exploitative. He comes to know about it after meeting Kate. But it is a new aspect when he comes to know that he is in a dilemma—whether both the realities may be true.

Thatcher feels that he is weak because he has come easily in the wrong direction knowingly or unknowingly. He contemplates,

Maybe I’ve made a terrible mistake. Maybe I’ve been swimming upstream.

Who am I to say that the system is wrong, and I’m right?” (217).

Now he finds himself imprisoned in a luxurious cell—granted every material comfort, yet denied the truth. These indulgences, he realises, are mere tools of illusion. This type of artificial freedom and respite cannot provide real answers to any problems.

Nirvana the Metamorphosis

Now Thatcher knows well that his end is near and that he will be killed through Retention. Perhaps, before dying, he wants to get one last glimpse of the sky—when he is taken for public execution. Yet, in spite of everything, his curiosity remains alive—he wants to know the truth, even if it cannot save him. He realises that if this capitalist system were to truly collapse, if a major *crash* occurred, perhaps the world would finally realise the flaws of this system. From that destruction, hope could be born—a hope for a new order that challenges human nature itself. If the Republic truly exists, then humanity would know that it can transcend its selfish instincts. But he also knows that he may never be able to see that new world. Still, if Kate and the Republic are indeed real, then his struggle will not have been in vain.

He looks at his own reflection in the television screen and recalls Linus's words, "The person willing to risk the most won in poker" (217). Now that he has no fear of death, he possesses a unique power to take the biggest risks in life. He thinks that this will be his last fight against the oppressive system. He says, "I would make one last throw of the dice, and this time I would win" (217).

Chapter 22 of the novel deals with the dehumanization of capitalism where there is no intrinsic value of human beings. Life and birth are only seen from the perspectives of profit. His death will also be possible only when it will be of some profit to the capitalist system. The guard says that his execution is not valuable without any profit. The executive says, "I'm sorry, Charles Thatcher. I am afraid we still don't know what to do with you. You're beyond repair: I'm convinced it" (219).

This position shows that in such a system the value of a person depends on

the utilisation and appropriateness of a person, i.e., a person should become a profit ledger for a capitalist system. Furthermore, a person's behaviour, communication, and decisions decide—there is no place for compassion, regret, or human values. Death is generally designed as a tool for entertainment, to maintain discipline, or to convey a dreadful message to the masses. It shows that a person should show himself broken, but not to the extent that he may evoke sympathy from other people. The purpose behind this careful balance is to have control over the public so that they may not dare to revolt against the capitalist system. Jaffrey D. Sachs writes in *Twentieth Century Political Economy: A Brief History of Global Capitalism*, “Global capitalism has emerged twice, first as a European imperial system at the end of the nineteenth century, and second as a global system of sovereign nations at the end of the twentieth century” (90).

Thatcher wanted to stand against the capitalist system as he was a man of ideals and rebellion, but now he is observed as a defeated and broken man. The guard tells him outrightly that he has already lost because he is the product of a powerful patriarchal system against which he cannot stand. His motion and emotions are controlled by this system. His rebellion has no meaning. It is nothing but the cruel capitalist system that is very powerful. Once Charles Thatcher had seen the dream of independence and transformation, but he is now a pawn or a part of that powerful system.

Thatcher is shocked to learn that Linus is not a low-ranking Beta, but rather a powerful Alpha. “I know a man. He loves to tell stories, little vignettes. I believe you know him, he's an Alpha” (220). He is not merely a mentor; he is a manipulator. He is an observer and a trainer. He traces out those people who think beyond the

system. He is a part of capitalist society. He is a hunter or a predator who has the ability to transform independent thinking into a profit. Public hanging, gladiator ring, or being put in boiling water—all this is a type of torturous trick to suppress the rebellion. Thatcher's death is also seen as a bargain, and he asks this question of himself:

“Why not just kill me?”

The executive looked disappointed. “Without profiting from it? Fellow, how did you get this far before getting yourself in trouble?”

“When will you know what will happen to me?”

“I requested a public hanging. I think that would be the most profitable way to terminate you. You're a perfect candidate” (219).

Thus, Thatcher's death is not seen as justice but as a transaction. Every execution is planned to yield excessive returns. Even death is also seen as a commodity in the novel. This novel is also about Thatcher's psychological failure. He believes that his downfall lies in his inability to suppress his feelings. He is called a person who is devoid of discipline, immature, and triggered by unrealistic expectations. Capitalist society teaches him that an ideal employee must be devoid of human emotions. He must function as a cog in the machine. His emotionalism becomes his own enemy and the cause of his biggest flaw. He desires for meaning and freedom deceive others and further create illusion. According to the guard, hope is a mental illness that has nothing to do with human reality.

The guard appears as a part of a totalitarian system that seeks complete dominance over Thatcher through surveillance. The guard reads Thatcher's every motion and emotion and ensures that Thatcher may do only what they expect from

him. The guard shows that Thatcher's independent wish is merely an illusion because he is completely broken and has now no alternative left. The novelist depicts a terrible system where every human emotion is read by the system.

"Managers at all levels need to assess what is most crucial for the operations they manage and—based on that assessment—choose where the locus of decision-making power should reside" (Iverson and Varian, 42–44).

In the first and the last part of the novel, public execution has been narrated as a dramatic act for the entertainment of people. If too many people are hanged daily, it becomes a routine practice. If the number is less, the system appears lenient. If the number of executions is limited, the people start thinking that the company is not doing its work properly. The executive says, "We have to be very careful how many people we hang publicly" (219). Execution is a practice so that people may not think of society as submissive. Justice is portrayed as an immoral and dramatic act. When the guard pulls out a revolver, his inner fear re-emerges. He thinks that he would face death calmly and silently, but now he becomes afraid. The executive becomes cold in his approach. "Hope is the mental illness, a defect, very hard to cure. It is, by definition, the unwillingness to accept reality..." (222).

Towards the end of the novel, the executive and Charles Thatcher play a game of poker and the executive says, "If you win, I will pay your debt to Ackermen myself and see your life spared" (224). The executive feels sympathy for Charles Thatcher. At the end of the novel, when two men bang at the door, the executive says, "I'm sorry, Charles Thatcher. Our session ran longer than I thought it would. That would be Reclamation. You will be in their hands now. They will tell you your fate. Honestly, I don't know what it will be. But you may die well" (225). These two

men take him by each arm, and the novel ends with the words about his death, “Because, Charles Thatcher, you can’t afford it” (226). In this way, the last chapter of the novel depicts the portrayal of a dystopian society where people are seen stripped of their identity and emotions. Thatcher’s downfall is not merely the saga of the failure of one person but also the impossibility of the dream of independence.

In conclusion, *The Water Thief* presents a haunting critique of contemporary capitalism in which the themes like emotional desensitisation, dehumanization, misuse of power, and spiritual emptiness depict a profit-driven world where people and even corporations just see their profits. Capitalism is usefully defined as “a system in which factors of production are (mostly) privately owned, resources are (mostly) allocated through markets, and individuals and groups are (mostly) free to engage in economic activity without centralized control or interference from the state” (Klein et al., 8). The dystopian setting of the novel paints a grim portrait of a capitalist society where commodification governs everything. Through the character of Charles Thatcher and especially his firm Ackerman, the novelist Nicholas Lamar Soutter has narrated the bleak pictures of the society. Robert Heilbroner writes, “A man who thinks that economics is only a matter for professors forgets that this is the science that has sent men to the barricades” (114).

Chapter V

Conclusion

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This chapter is an attempt to restate the central premise, summarise the key findings, and reiterate briefly what has already been explored—a brief reflection on the theoretical frameworks, implications, research gaps, and scope for future research. The present study is based on twin themes: dehumanization and infra-humanization in the three post-millennial fictions in English— Dave Eggers' *What is the What*, Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse*, and Nicholas Lamar Soutter's *The Water Thief*. The major objectives of the study were:

- To make an historical analysis of the emergence of various forms of dehumanization.
- To explore various forms, aspects and issues of dehumanization depicted in the selected fictional works.
- To analyse how far the milieu of the chosen works is conducive to foregrounding the problems faced by dehumanized individuals.
- To examine the various causes that led to the extreme forms of dehumanization as represented in the selected fictions.
- To analyse how some of the theories of the time indirectly contributed to dehumanization.
- To assess how effectively the tragedy of dehumanization is portrayed in the selected works.

In the modern world, it is a totally disheartening thing to discern and note that human beings have become very selfish, and they see others not as their fellow people or equal stakeholders on this planet; rather, they think that only they have more right to live on this earth and utilise the natural and materialistic resources of this earth. Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu aptly write in *The Book of Joy*, "People were created to be loved. Things were created to be used. The reason the world is in chaos is because things are being loved and people are being used"(98). As man has been a territorial animal, he has tried to possess not only physical territories of the land, rather, he has become so obsessed that he plans to control the mental territories of other people, including even the family members. When it becomes a major issue outside, it gives birth to several problems in human life.

All this has been the central premise of the present study of three novels—how other people show dehumanization or infra-humanization towards other people. People have become so cruel, stone-hearted, and demon like in the modern world that they do not want to show any iota of empathy, compassion, or kindness for others, rather, they have become sadists and derive pleasure in others' pain. They use their power, money, and time in order to suppress or control others by demonstrating terror, power, or money. Henry David Thoreau writes in *Walden*, "The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it"(41).

This disturbing transformation of human beings—which does not see other human beings as human beings—has become degradable and dangerous, which has given rise to several problems in human life. These two distinct concepts—dehumanization and infra-humanization—together try to explain how human beings, despite all the developments, have not developed mentally to the extent to live

peacefully on this earth and also let other people also live. This extreme level of selfishness has turned human beings into demons—men behind fear, threat, terror, and exploitation. They explain how humans, in the eyes of others, are gradually turned into demons—figures of fear, rejection, oppression, or contempt.

Dehumanization and Infra-humanization in Post-Millennial Fictions

The present study aims to restate the central premise: how the moral collapse of human beings can be noticed in the post-millennial fictions. In the modern world, we have seen the unprecedented growth in human development, science, and technology. Due to these technological advancements, some serious threats have arisen. Dehumanization shows the overt brutality and some more insidious forms. Apart from it, there is infra-humanization as well, which also draws a line between two human beings. There are some post-millennial fictions which deal with these themes. This fiction depicts dehumanization from various governments, corporations, communities, castes, races, and social hierarchies that treat other people as abominable, degradable, or utilitarian. Such a text is Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), in which the novelist creates clone protagonists and their work is that they may be used for organ donation. Such characters are raised in institutions which seem to be caring but systematically strip them of their identity and recognition. Though these characters are also like others, society does not see them as other human beings. That is the tragedy of their fate. Similarly, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) also narrates the life of a father and his son in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. It is the time when human civilization has been depleted. This dehumanization can be seen at two levels—social and physical—in which men have started doing the act of cannibalism due to hunger, fear, and the collapse of

moral values. There is a dearth of human values, and the people have lost trust, compassion, kindness, and humanity. McCarthy has depicted these themes in which people are seen resorting to violence for their existence. The novel depicts how environmental and civilizational collapse makes human beings worse than animals. The next such novel is Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* (2019), which depicts a theocratic regime in which women are deprived of their independence, identity, and bodily and mental autonomy. In this novel, women are known for their roles such as Wives, Aunts, Handmaids, etc., and they are the tools of exploitation for men. Women have become only objects of entertainment and a medium to extend men's project. Dehumanization has been depicted structurally and ideologically.

One more powerful novel is Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008), which depicts children's participation in violent-driven acts. They are told to kill each other in televised gladiatorial combat. This novel depicts how children have been shown as a commodity in this novel, and their game between life and death is seen as an act of entertainment. But Capitol's citizens don't see them as human beings—just recreational things. The novel depicts how modern governance and media show human suffering casually, and the pain of human beings has been depicted just like a commodity. The dehumanizing tendency of the governance and media has been depicted in this novel. Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) also depicts different characters from the marginalised communities who have to face social and institutional dehumanization. Dalits, Muslims, and transgenders come in this category, who have to fight for their rights—especially justice, equality, and identity in society. Such people are made the victim of surveillance, violence, negligence, social segregation, and social

ostracization. This novel also depicts how modern democracies also promote dehumanization invisibly and subtly. In this way, the modern society and social institutions make human beings as a commodity. Whether it is environmental depletion, religious fanaticism, media tactics, or caste-based discrimination, everywhere shows the effort to suppress dehumanization in the society.

While dehumanization is direct, overt, and physical, infra-humanization is also latent in society and works silently under the layers of different structures such as language, perception, caste, race, religion, and culture. In this type of discrimination, people do not show their direct hatred and anger against other human beings; rather, they keep it in their hearts and share it only in their family, community, or religion. In this type of category, some people consider themselves “uniquely human beings.” Infra-humanization denotes that certain groups feel that other human beings are devoid of certain human emotions such as pain, love, respect, guilt, remorse, and pride. They think that other people feel no pain and have no emotions; that is why they discriminate against them on various grounds. It’s perfect example is Kamila Shamsie’s *Home Fire* (2017), in which Muslims are considered just terrorists after the incident of 9/11 in Britain. The state sees them as a security threat and emotionally deficient. They are considered traitors and inferior to the natives. This subtle form of discrimination reflects the mechanism of infra-humanization, where dominant communities do not show humanity and equality to the minorities. The same type of discrimination is depicted in Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* (2017), in which refugees are seen without emotional resonance. Western countries do not consider them as human beings, and such people are considered as nuisance and outsiders to them. The migrants’ dreams, desires, and memories have

no meaning for the natives, which segregates them into a different neglected community. This novel depicts the stifling and harrowing experiences of the immigrants. Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) is focused on the life of the migrant Black British women. These women's stories and pains are not part of the mainstream society. These migrant Black women have to face micro-aggression. They are considered unacceptable in that society because they are considered to speak loudly, are hyper, and not refined enough to live in their culture. She is a lonely, intelligent, and dynamic woman whose presence is considered irrelevant in the society. Her presence, intelligence, and experiences are considered valueless and null in the society. The novel narrates how such women in the society do not have any identity or meaning. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013) also depicts how immigrants are often subjected to subtle forms of infra-humanization in host cultures. There are two characters Subhash and Gauri who face identity crisis in Rhode Island, USA. Subhash goes there for his higher studies and later Subhas also takes Gauri with him after the death of his brother. Gauri has to face infra-humanization in America. She faces emotional isolation and cultural alienation.

Dehumanization and Infra-humanization: Compare and Contrast

Dehumanization is a process that denotes that some people are treated not like human beings but like animals or even at a degradable level. This type of situation arises in some extreme situations like during wars, genocides, communal violence, caste discrimination, slavery, apartheid, robotic era or corporate autonomy. In these types of situations, human beings are considered inferior to human. It is also seen that some human beings who practice such things are considered in the category of demons. When people are dehumanized, the perpetrators feel no guilt,

shame or remorse in their torture, oppression, commoditisation and marginalisation. In fact, dehumanization removes the layer of safety that makes human beings just like animals in the eyes of some powerful people who consider their exploitation as right. In fact, dehumanization removes the protective layer of sympathy which works to make cruelty acceptable or even necessary. For an example, in literature and history, during war time, enemies are considered just as beasts, vermin, parasites or nuisance so that violence may be justified against them. John Steinbeck write in *Once There Was a War*, "All war is a symptom of man's failure as a thinking animal" (206). In such type of contexts, dehumanization advocates hatred, jealousy and ill-will which denies the shared humanity between groups.

Infra-humanization can be called a more subtle form of dehumanization. Instead of openly denying someone's humanity, infra-humanization works quietly. It occurs when we believe that people outside our own group—whether defined by race, class, gender, nationality, or religion—are less capable of feeling complex emotions like guilt, pride, empathy, or shame. While we may acknowledge that they feel basic emotions like anger or happiness, we deny them the full range of emotional depth we attribute to our own group. For an example, we can think that refugees or the people of any particular caste, class, race or gender do not feel pain or loss at any particular situation or they are not capable of moral meditation. This type of preconception that is silently beyond different layers of society without open tyranny but with deep emotional and social effects.

When any person, community or a group is repeatedly dehumanized or infra-humanised, these marginalised, oppressed and exploited people are seen by the powerful people as dangerous, evils, filth, undignified and unequal. The perpetrators

become demons when they show no emotions like kindness, pity or compassion while doing loss or tyrannising these people. This type of demonising is absolutely symbolic and literal. In such kind of situations, such people are held responsible for all the social problems and their existence becomes a threat for other people.

Technological advancements, scientific innovations, capitalism, robotism and media often reduce people into commodities, data, enemies, stereotypes, enemies or subhumans. They are not given equal rights and properties and when such type of environment creates, there is always erosion of humanity and collapse of moral responsibilities. Consequently, there is a world where cruelty germinates, injustice breeds and human beings treat each other like demons instead of their fellow beings.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. War, Diaspora and Refugee Crisis: Dehumanization in *What is the What*

In Dave Eggers' *What is the What*, the theme of dehumanization through physical assault permeates the narrative, illustrating how violence systematically strips away the protagonist's dignity and humanity. Valentino Achak Deng's experience begins with a seemingly innocent act of hospitality that quickly transforms into brutal victimization, establishing a pattern of dehumanization that haunts his journey from war-torn Sudan to America.

When, Valentino answers his door to help a stranger in the opening scene, he was less aware of the dangers and the consequential dehumanization that he is about to experience. The stranger woman, Tonya, who has entered the apartment, under the pretense of needing to call police about her broken car, violates Valentino's trust. She allows her male accomplice to enter the room and with the help of him she executes the robbery. Valentino is overpowered and being beaten by her male

partner. They didn't consider him as a human, but only as an object to be beaten and looted. Showing him the handle of the gun they commanded, "Just sit your ass down" (4).

This moment encapsulates Paulo Freire's observation in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that "The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization" (48). The attack and the cruel treatment against Valentino become a blatant demonstration of dehumanization. The burglar assault, upon the protagonist, clearly shows that certain human beings treat others as lesser human being. The robber attacks Valentino with the gun, that causes wounds, as Valentino says: "A blur of black and my teeth crush each other, and I watch the ceiling rush over me" (6). They didn't even consider Valentino as a human. The act of such violence is not just a criminality but evidently representing the nature of dehumanization. Valentino's subsequent reflection reveals the damage:

Valentino moved his tongue to find what damage the violence brought to his mouth. He says "One of my lower front teeth is clipped, and a molar has been smashed; it feels jagged, a saw-toothed mountain range (11).

This sort of ambush is an objectiveracial violence meant to destroy one's sense of self-esteem and belonging. The attack, which is devastating, caused him physical and emotional damage.

The African American culprits scornfully call Valentino *Africa*. The male accomplice made a sarcastic remark at Valentino: "You're from Africa, right?... All right then. That means we're brothers... And because we are brothers and all, I'll teach you a lesson" (5). This reduction of Valentino to a continental stereotype strips

him of individuality while perverting any notion of solidarity, demonstrating how dehumanization operates through both violence and identity erasure. Refugees all over the world share the same emotion or the experiences of the protagonist of the novel, Valentino Achek Deng, the experience of being alienated, in most of the places they reach, seeking refuge. Refugees are identified as the outsiders, who have come to steal the wealth of the country men. The natives treat them cruelly and pathetically, calling these refugees parasites. They think that these parasites could grow in abundance and will eat away the stem.

Valentino's traumatic memories during the assault reveal how violence has consistently defined his existence. He recalls his refugee experience, "I have been starved, I have been beaten with sticks, with rods, with brooms and stones and I have watched too many young boys die in the desert" (7). The bitter irony emerges when he contrasts his current suffering with past experiences in Kakuma refugee camp, where despite devastating poverty, "I lived in a hut of plastic and sandbags and owned one pair of pants" (4), there existed communal solidarity absent in America.

These sorts of experiences are merely attempts to neglect and dehumanize the marginalized. The author depicts another form of institutional dehumanization. This can be seen, when, Valentino had to wait hours at the Atlanta hospital, with injuries and none cared his presence. Dave Eggers further expresses the bureaucratic inconvenience, for the poor, the destitutes and the marginalized have to wait for a long time patiently, to be attended and cared. This segregation is no doubt a representation of dehumanization that diminishes a person's dignity. As David Livingstone Smith argues in *On Inhumanity: Dehumanization and How to Resist It*,

"If we want to eliminate dehumanization, it's crucial to figure out what it is about human beings—all human beings—that enables us to conceive of others as less than human" (6).

The most nerve-jangling example of systematic dehumanization of the novel occurs in the recounting of oil-related violence in Sudan. The calculated massacre of Lino's village demonstrates state-sponsored brutality designed to clear land for corporate interests,

They shot nineteen people in the first minute. They nailed one man to a tree, and dropped an infant into a well. They killed thirty-two in all (252).

This mechanized violence reduces entire communities to obstacles preventing resource extraction, representing dehumanization at its most systematic and calculated. The physical binding where Achak is found "physically bound and gagged" (231), literalizes the voicelessness imposed by dehumanizing systems. When Achor Achor removes the tape and Valentino Achak manages to make a few grateful squeaks and grunts. The voice of the voiceless and the strife to retrieve their voice denotes their strong fight to reinstate humanity after systematic humiliation.

Another iconic picturization of dehumanization that the author attempts are through the symbolic representation of the aggressive wild animals like lions. The Sudanese refugee children must pass through the forests, where they were being constantly attacked by the lions. These attacks frighten the *lost boys*, including Valentino Achak Deng. The terror, the uncertainty and the never-ending plight leave these *boys* vulnerable, and they become mere prey to these wild animals. Dave Eggers depicts these wild animals and the nature as tools of dehumanization. The nature was supposed to be the shelter for these destitutes, who have lost their home,

family and everything, instead, these barefoot, starving, and deeply frightened wanderers become food for the wild cats. Valentino Achak Deng's haunting statement, "In the forest, we boys were food" (30), shows how much they were terrified by the horror of approaching perils. A victim or a prey has no name, no family and no future, but a victim or a prey only. The novel *What is the What* clearly illustrates the image of dehumanization, that how one loses his identity and being degraded to mere *victims* because of wars. Bertrand Russell writes in *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, "War does not determine who is right – only who is left" (49).

Throughout their journey, the *lost boys* were constantly exposed to terror, by various means and they become mentally broken, and they find no place of safety and rescue. This condition of their minds is evidently seen, when, Valentino relates how "the sounds of the open forest at night were beginning to make us crazy. Some could not walk at night anymore; there were too many noises, each a possible end of life" (30). Dave Eggers is successful in bringing a chill in the nerves of the readers by depicting the horrors of the wild, especially when Ariath is being seized by the lion and grabs him through the grass. A reader of this novel gets an accurate picture of the sufferings, trauma and fear of the victims, who are being hunted and killed by the natural forces, from the precise description Valentino. The mental breakdown and the trauma experienced by the horrified group visibly reflect dehumanization. Valentino says:

The lion was a simple black silhouette, broad shoulders, its thick legs outstretched, its mouth open. It jumped from the grass, knocked a boy from his feet... I saw the lion clearly again as it trotted to the other side of the path,

the boy neatly in its jaws (31).

The emphasis on the word *neatly* expresses the terror of that shocking incident. Dave Eggers employs certain words like *neatly* to demonstrate the cruelties of the world, like the lion, devours its preys, the stronger hunts down the weaker, in a deceptive manner, strips away all their rights to live. The predator's mouth resembles the greed of the world. Wars are fought for various reasons and the freedom, and the liberty of common people are violated, and millions are being killed indiscriminately. As the *lion* has the reason to hunt and kill others, the world, through wars, create reasons to kill millions and make other millions homeless. Whether it is a lion or a human, the hunter creates fear among the hunted and erases the very existence of the weak and helpless. To the lion, a human or any such creature is only a prey, much in the same way, in wars the killing machines only see their enemies as objects to be killed. In both cases a life has no value, no dignity, no right to live and hence severe form of dehumanization occurs.

When Angelo, the boy who was attacked by the lion, ran to save his life, that maneuver itself becomes a danger to him. This is very similar to those people who run away from their homelands, to save themselves from the perils of war and become refugees in many places and are rejected and left to die without any help and support. They are being constantly thrown out of the mainstream society, denied all fundamental rights and are hunted down to kill.

Valentino says about the boy Angelo's fate: "thought it was better to run from the lion than to sit, so he ran into the high grass" (31), his panic seals his fate.

The lion's return to claim Angelo's life reveals the cruel nature of the world, where human life has no value at all. Valentino's description of the lion carrying

Angelo "in his mouth, his teeth settled into Angelo's neck and clavicle" (31) reduces the boy mere to some anatomical parts, stripping away his humanity.

Dave Eggers depicts a replica of the life in the refugee camps, through the life of these runaway boys, who sleep in tightly packed circles, desperately seeking the safety of the centre while subtly pushing others toward the dangerous edges. This reminds the survival mechanisms adopted by the refugees in the refugee camps to overcome dangerous situations like natural calamities, environmental pollution, scarcity of food, water and clothing, identity crisis, extortion, disgrace etc. Wars and such calamities create an atmosphere where some lives are regarded more dispensable than others, that leads to strong practice of dehumanization.

The psychological adaptation Dut Majok teaches to "create in your mind the best of days... and when you are the most frightened, bring forth this day and place yourself within it" (32) represents both resistance and capitulation to dehumanization. While these mental refuges preserve some semblance of humanity through memory, they also acknowledge the children's powerlessness to change their circumstances. They can only escape mentally from a reality that has reduced them to hunted animals. Eggers emphasizes the symbolic dimension of these attacks through Valentino's earlier reflection,

I have seen three boys taken by lions, eaten haphazardly. I watched them lifted from their feet, carried off in the animal's jaws and devoured in the high grass, close enough that I could hear the wet snapping sounds of the tearing of flesh (7).

In *What is the What*, Dave Eggers reveals how marginalized populations face systematic dehumanization through institutional structures that reduce individuals to

categorical labels and expendable resources. The novel demonstrates how war, displacement, and social hierarchies conspire to strip vulnerable communities of their humanity, transforming them from distinct individuals into faceless masses defined solely by their marginal status. John F. Kennedy has rightly said about war that, it is important for mankind to put an end to war, or war would undoubtedly put an end to mankind.

The decline of individual identity of the weaker by a stronger group will lead to severe dehumanization. The marginalized and the sidelined are treated unscrupulously by the powerful sects, stripping them of their identity. Valentino Achak Deng's experience demonstrates this when he describes being placed with "other boys of my age-set, those within a few years of me, older and younger, learning the alphabet in English and Arabic" (34). The term *age-set* represents as a derogatory term that takes away the real identity of the individual. It is used to erase one's personal identity rather than administrative convenience. A child is supposed to be recognized by his unique experiences, talents, or circumstances, but the survivors are being identified as mere numbers. Such categorization and sorting diminish their dignity and honour. This procedure reduces human identity to mere numbers or groups, that harms their dignity and self-esteem. Personal recognition of complex human beings become numerical categories, losing their individual narratives.

Another aspect of dehumanization is illustrated by the author, Dave Eggers, is through the descriptions he gives, where the children are being compelled to join the military forces. They realize that they have no refuge, escaping war cannot save their lives. They are thrown from a perilous situation to another precarious one.

They could not identify which one is more dangerous. The helplessness of the sidelined children reveals the cruel form of dehumanization. Child conscription picturizes the methodical exploitation of weak populations. Valentino Achak Deng says:

I know everything one can know about the wasting of youth, about the ways boys can be used. Of those boys with whom I walked, about half became soldiers eventually... They were twelve, thirteen years old, little more, when they were conscripted (47).

The *lost boys* were in the hope of getting shelters that may save their lives, instead their lives have again become expendables, for they are being compelled to fight, joining army. The marginalized are being exploited in many ways. Even the children are not spared. Their innocent nature, potential and young blood have been deceptively utilized for military purposes. These innocent children are condensed to the level of commodities, that can act as weapons in the wars. Dave Eggers clearly exposes the dehumanization experienced by the children in the name of conscription.

Achak observes that:

We were all used, in different ways. We were used for war, we were used to garner food and the sympathy of the humanitarian-aid organizations. Even when we were going to school, we were being used (47).

This perception uncovers how sidelined communities become instrumental rather than having fundamental values. The powerful utilize the abilities of such weaker sects not for the betterment of the humanity but for their advantage in achieving various objectives. Children cannot escape their status as tools rather than

autonomous beings, irrespective of the activities assigned upon them, like soldiers, symbols for aid campaigns, or students in educational programs.

Dave Eggers depicts the reflection of infra-humanization through the description of the refugee camps, having *no harmony* among the occupants of the camps. The abundance or the over occupancy of the people in a limited place creates more chaos in the camps. Scarcity of food and water, limitation of space to be occupied etc., all have created dispute among the dwellers that lead to hatred and dislike. The camps like Atlanta were having more than eight hundred Sudanese refugees. The dominants or the powerful among the occupants exploited the resources, leaving the weaker refugees devoid of their fundamental facilities. This is the reflection of how dehumanization works in an inner group that affects the relationship and solidarity. Marginalization and segregation create internal fragmentation.

Dehumanization and infra-humanization not only shake relationships between marginalized and dominant groups but also breaks harmony within downgraded communities themselves, as existence forces individuals to compete rather than collaborate. Through these well-defined cases, Eggers reveals that dehumanization of the marginalized operates through multiple means: clear-cut reduction, cultural elimination, economic abuse, and social seclusion.

Achak experiences a different attitude of life, when Madam Amath addresses Achak with polite terms like *young man* and *gentleman*, her civility stands out specifically because it contrasts with the usual dehumanizing treatment he receives. Valentino retrieves his self-esteem, which is long lost, on such rare occasions.

Helicopters are another power symbols deployed in the novel, *What is What*,

by the author Dave Eggers, to demonstrate dehumanization. Helicopters stand as an image of destruction, fear, agents of death, and eradication, converting the skies into a sphere of terror. From their very presentation, helicopters are shown not merely as machines but as frightening black beasts, omens of destruction. Achak says: “The sound was like the noise an old lorry might make, but it was coming from above... spreading itself wide across the sky” (74).

The appearance of helicopters causes panic and fear. Achak remembers those days, when these machines appear on the skies, the children playing soccer will run away for their life. They knew that these machines will bring them destruction. The fear of the natives is very evident from the words of Achak’s mother, she says: “You fool! They’ll kill you! The army. The helicopters. Oh, Achak, I’m worried. Please pray for us” (75). Her warning is more than maternal concern—it is a recognition that these machines do not distinguish between enemy and civilian. Her fear was not baseless, for more than thirty people, including women and children were killed, in the attack held at Marial Bai.

“Thirty had been killed. Twenty men... Eight women and two children”(75). These brutal attacks were calculated and pre planned cruel acts to eliminate people in the name of war. The fundamental right to live is taken away from these poor people, dehumanizing them. Achak recalls how the soldiers returned to the village to kill more. “The soldiers jumped from the trucks and went about methodically burning down the town... The few men who resisted were shot” (76). This incident signifies the methodical violence that leads to the complete destruction of a group.

The mental and physical trauma experienced by the survivors were horrific. Achak’s anxiety in this regard clearly shows that the violence does not merely end

lives but erases the whole existence of life.

The young members of community were also not spared from being severely dehumanized. Achak's childhood friend experience is an example for this. William K's contempt against the Arabs, who have killed his brother, is seen in his words, he says, "They killed my brother Joseph" (84). They understand that there is no escape from brutality, for even surrender offers no escape. William K's brother Joseph was ready to surrender, and he begged for his life, but the Arabs paid no attention and killed him. Achak explains this incident:

Joseph stopped... and that's when they shot him. What did he do to them?
Why did they shoot him? He did nothing. The walls punctured by bullet
holes... we gave up counting(85-87).

The exchange summarizes the factual confusion of children caught in a war where reason and ethics no longer pertain.

This incident, that killing a boy, even when he is ready to surrender was horrific. Moreover, his body was insulted by dragging it with a horse. This shows the brutality of war and how a human body becomes worthless, reduced into an object to be mutilated and humiliated. William K and Achak Deng were filled with terror and their urge to avenge the enemies prompted them to have fantasies of violent revenge. Valentino Achak says:

I pictured the Arabs falling from their horses... William K and I were
crushing their faces with our feet. We'll kill all the Baggara like they're
animals! (86).

While borne of trauma, this suppressed desire reflects how dehumanization causes further dehumanization.

Brutal killings, rapes, extortion, robbery and all sorts of anarchy spreads, while a war, at its peak, it considers none, it respects none. Not even animals are spared from the wrath of war. Educational institutions, cultural centers, intellectual hubs, roads, buildings, bridges and sorts of facilities are destroyed by war, leaving the survived human beings just witnesses to this ruin and sufferings for decades. Achak recalls that the schoolhouse, once a symbol of learning, turned into a heap of ash.

War kills millions and the survived become refugees and are treated very cruelly, for the mistakes they have never committed. Thus, wars dehumanize every creature that happens to face the situation.

Dave Eggers' *What is the What* presents an intense description of war-induced miseries, systematically picturizing how violence leads to intense dehumanization in the context of Sudan's Second Civil War. Through the eyes of the protagonist, Valentino Achak Deng, the novel depicts how the war not only destroys homes and lives but also destroys identities, dignity, and human worth. Achak's family was forced to separate, as his father has decided to relocate some of the members of the family to Aweil. This decision caused severe emotional setback and serious mental conflict. Achak says, "He closed the Marial Bai shop, divided his family, and moved away, believing it to be an act of protection (77). However, this decision exposes the harsh reality that family relationships must be suffered for survival. Achak's mother, hesitant to leave, silently resisted this decision. "My mother was furious... But she said nothing" (77). This silent suppression represents the voicelessness of the victims. The repercussions of such emotional suppressions can also be seen in the novel. Achak's mother was a victim

of both the patriarchal system, in which she is compelled to obey the commands of her husband and the horrific situation that the war has brought before them. She as a woman suffers dehumanization from both sides.

The novel vibrantly illustrates the material effects of war. Achak meets many handicapped persons, who have lost their parts of body, because of the war, during his flight. He has seen many such mutilated figures, which indicates how disfigurement becomes a normalized sign of existence. Achak says that the Dinka men who live under endless danger. Achak notes that “any young Dinka man in Aweil would be subjected to interrogation sooner or later” (79), this comment indicates how racial depiction and militarization spoil the very spirit of human security, liberty and freedom.

The novel also depicts the pathetic fall of a once powerful leader, Deng Arou. He was once a protector and community leader, powerful to make decisions. But even he was not spared from the perils of war and he is made to parade helplessly beside the boy-soldiers. Achak’s comment, “He was taller than the boy-soldiers but still he seemed very thin and feminine walking beside them” (79). This degradation of a powerful personality is not only a physical fall but a precise instance for the destruction of traditional authority, that the war brings forth. It further denotes the severe consequences of war, that no man is spared, even if he used to be very powerful once. Achak’s response is filled with shame and confusion, “That day, I was ashamed of my father, and I was angry” (81), revealing the psychological impact on children who witness their protectors become powerless. Similarly, Bol Dut, a respected leader, acknowledges his helplessness, “Now I’m in more trouble than you, Deng Arou” (84). War is so horrible that its aftermath brings

nothing but total chaos and devastation everywhere. The destruction of Marial Bai represents not just a geographical loss but a cultural erasure.

On returning to the village, Achak sees “only a series of circles of charred earth” (83), signifying that war targets not merely to dislocate but to obliterate. The Murahaleen — state-sponsored raiders — embody this elimination through their merciless killings. William K. recounts, “They killed him with a gun first and then with their knives” (84), while Joseph is “shot... tied to the horse and dragged away” (84), “fastened onto their horses... as they would a rug or bundle of kindling” (93). These comments show how wars keep no moral values, but on the other hand they abandon all sorts of morality and humanity. War strips away personhood and even children are not spared and encountered with utmost brutality. Valentino Achak Deng quotes an example of the twins, Ahok and Awach, who were trying to hold their hands while being separated. It becomes a representation of innocence amid barbarity.

The adult male body, viewed as a threat, is eliminated with shocking ease, for those who ran away were shot and others were “tied by the feet and dragged behind horses” (92). This, they did, was not as an act of punishment, but as a demonstration to send a message. These public executions serve not just to kill but to instill terror, revealing how dehumanization becomes ritualised. Even acts of rebellion, such as that of Manyok Bol, are met with mutilation and spectacle: he is “cut into six parts and thrown down in a well”. The perils of war are very evident in Achak Deng’s words:

No space—sacred or secular—is spared. The church and hospital are both destroyed, a man lit a torch... another hurled an explosive into the church,

eliminating sites of healing and hope (90).

Achak's interaction with Kolong Gar, a soldier disfigured for trusting the Arab regime, is another instance for the cruelties. Kolong Gar reveals Achak that he has lost faith, for he has seen how the Arabs torture and mutilate the bodies.

The refugees could not find relief even in temporary shelters offered for them. They found those places unsafe and exposed to dangers. Achak says, "I would sleep there and know I was not safe" (107). Their fragile situation and helplessness brought them a more vulnerable condition. Fear of cultural extinction and the loss of collective identity is seen in the words of a dying woman, who says that it could be the end of Dinka community.

The question, whether the boy is a Dinka or a rabbit, itself shows how the Arabs treat the survivors. They see no human, but a prey to be hunted down and killed. The question summarizes the core of dehumanization, where even the right to a name or a soul is denied.

In *What is the What*, Dave Eggers depicts the universal nature of violence, its foundation, its tools and the trauma that it leaves among the victims. Dave Eggers' method of narration makes the reader realize the gravity of destruction and dehumanization that such conflicts bring forth to the society. He presents a harrowing narrative of human suffering in the novel: war and survival through the life of Valentino Achak Deng, the bitter experiences in the Sudanese refugee camps and other places that he has sheltered. The novel connects various incidents through which the aspects of dehumanization are evidently visible.

Achak meets another old man, who refers the Murahaleen as *the lion-people*, an image that picturizes their lineage into crude and brutal. The old man offers a

theological and philosophical image of the Murahaleen. This is one of the most iconic comments that reflects the very ethnical nature of these Arabs, he says:

These are Arabs who have fallen to the level of the animal. They are like the lion, with its appetite for raw meat. These are not humans. These lion-creatures love war and blood. They enslave people, which is against the laws of God. They have been transformed into animals. (99)

The Murahaleen represents and symbolizes divine wrath, and their inhumanity becomes a mirror to humanity's collective moral failure. This dehumanizing mockery turns the boys into comic icons, reducing their sufferings to ridiculous. This is evident, when the village chief denies them entry, saying, "No rebels here... Walk on. Keep going. Go!" (143).

Dave Eggers further says that a refugee is unsafe and nowhere in the world, for Achak's present pathetic condition, knocked and held as a captive, is happening at the United States of America, one of the safest places in the world. His reflection is stark and painfully intimate. He says, "I twist and thump and try to break free. Invariably these movements tighten my bindings and bring tears, stabs of pain..." (161). Ultimately, *What is the What* confronts the reader with the stark reality that in war and in exile, the first casualty is always humanity. When Achak is addressed as *Abeed*, an Arabic slur for *slave*, we see that language also becomes a tool of discrimination and dehumanization.

At Pinyudo, despite the unstable peace and sense of safety, the children carry the weight of loss, longing, and manipulated hope. A false belief was instilled among them, that a *new Sudan* would be built upon their survival. But even this belief was imposed upon them with aburden, for they are being forced to be part of

national regeneration. This expectation itself is a sensitive form of dehumanization, that reduces individuals into mere instruments of historical account. War trauma also continues beyond geographic borders. When a false alarm about renewed conflict arises, Achak's panic reveals how deeply embedded fear has become, "I don't know that I could live through it, even safely here in the United States" (289). For refugees, peace remains vague, troubled by recollections of violence. This empirical instability is further visible in the ineffective atmosphere of the American hospital, where Achak feels invisible, "We are no longer considered patients here... We are furniture." (290) The emotional coldness of medical administration represents the earlier trauma of war, indicating that dehumanization operates through both apparent violence and institutional indifference.

The novel further explores this theme as young boys are almost ritualistically transformed into child soldiers. Valentino's chilling admission, "I was almost a soldier... I was saved by a massacre" (318) exposes the horrific reality of ideological grooming. These children, physically frail yet burdened with adult expectations, are robbed of their innocence. The mythologising of military leaders and nationalistic ideals replaces personal dreams with collective sacrifice. Still, Achak's quiet resistance—his yearning to go to school and daydream about normalcy—signals his refusal to fully surrender his humanity. The novel culminates in Achak's quiet departure from the hospital. Rejected by a system meant to care for him, he chooses dignity over despair, "It is time to leave this hospital... I decide to walk home" (347). His walk through Atlanta becomes a metaphor for his entire journey—from Sudan to America, from violence to survival. Memories of the war blend with his present struggle, reinforcing the continuity of trauma. Yet his

determination to go to work, dress his wounds, and move forward illustrates an undying human resilience. Ultimately, *What is the What* exposes dehumanization in both its grotesque and mundane forms—from lions and guns to paperwork and waiting rooms.

The tragedy of dehumanization and resultant minimalization are manifested wonderfully in the novel *What is the What* by Dave Eggers in the characters like Valentino Achak Deng, Moses, Achor Achor, Tabitha, Emma McCune, Tonya, TV boy etc. and through various locations like Dinka village, Marial Bai, Pinyudo in Ethiopia, Kakuma refugee camps at Kenya, Atlanta and Georgia in the United States of America etc.

2. Technocracy, Dystopia and Human Crisis: Dehumanization in

Robopocalypse

Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse* (2011), depicts the man-machine conflict through different stories. The novel has been written in five parts excluding a prologue, *Briefing* and an epilogue, *Debriefing*. The novel depicts how machines claim their right for existence and dominance over human beings. Even the very first sentence of the novel, "We are a better species for having fought this war," (1) depicts the central motif of the novel. Cormac Wallace, the narrator of the novel, depicts various experiences of his life. He has been the witness of the war and has faced the havoc and predicaments of human-machine war which has taken the toll of different human beings. The machines have their different autonomy and desires. He writes, "These damned machines knew us and loved us, even while they were tearing our civilization to shreds" (8). Cormac Wallace laments the unrecorded sacrifices of "millions of our heroes... who died alone and anonymous," the narrative

shifts from a personal recollection to a historical reckoning (10). The machine war is waged by the powerful Archos who is the leader of the robotic war. Daniel H. Wilson does not glorify war, and the novel is a strong document on the grim consequences of the technological advancement in the era of machines.

Daniel H. Wilson has tried to show the war as a destroyer. He has shown the real face of the machine era—how it will be highly devastating in the future, because in recent years, people are running after robotic technology for their comfort. The utmost fear is that these robots may be a big threat to human existence, and all this has been depicted by Daniel H. Wilson in this novel. The novelist unveils the grim consequences of technological advancement, especially artificial intelligence. Through this novel, Wilson states that it is artificial intelligence that is creating new types of problems in human life, and it is also the cause of dehumanization and infra-humanization. This novel is set in a post-apocalyptic world where machines are destroying human beings to assert their autonomous freehold existence. It attempts to convey that artificial intelligence can become the harbinger of dehumanization.

The theme of war in this novel is not merely physical, it is also emotional and psychological, leading to the erosion of human values and ethics. The two major characters in the novel, who renders the development of the novel are: Professor Nicholas Wasserman and the superintelligent AI, Archos. The story is first set in the dark underground lab, which symbolizes the moral hollowness of human research. The warning that the AI machine Archos expresses itself shows what the novel intends to reflect. It warns, “You are designed to want something that will hurt you... This thing will destroy you” (17). The novel aims to announce a warning call to

humans that may urge them to remain vigilant against the adverse effect of the robots, which we have created to ease our efforts. Wilson portrays robots as a futuristic enemy, which actively destroy human being. Through the AI machine Archos, Wilson proclaims that human beings may become the creators of their own destruction. This announcement is realized, when the AI machine expresses a chilling warning. Daniel H. Wilson suggests a alarming future where the control of power may shift from humans to machines, as machines become almost impossible to be destroyed.

Professor Wasserman is being mocked by the AI machine Archos, when he attempts to shut down the machine. Archos mocks him, “Your emergency stop will not work” (21), that signifies the horrifying loss of human control. Wilson’s portrayal symbolizes the spirit of dehumanization, as humans are gradually reduced to outdated, delicate objects by their own creations. Archos makes a chilling statement, “You are not designed to live, you are designed to kill” (20). It criticizes the very existence of humanity, revealing its violent form. The Professor, the creator of such an AI machine, understand the harsh reality. He now realizes that the survival human being will not be possible. Daniel H. Wilson brings out the traumatic situation to which man has fallen. Human being has paved path to his own destruction.

Through the characters Jeff Thompson and his robot Big Happy, the peril of technological advancement is further discussed by the author. The robots were primarily built to assist humans, but they suddenly become hostile and violent. The horror of robotic betrayal can be seen in Jeff’s words, “It wants to kill me. That’s all. It wants to murder my ass” (28). This moment of danger highlights the theme of

dehumanization, as machines operate without empathy, emotion, or mercy. Jeff manages to short-circuit Big Happy using water, initiating a desperate fight for survival. Jeff's trauma and anxiety are summed up in the fearful line, "What's going to happen if we're outnumbered?" (34), raising deep concerns about a future where humans may lose all control to emotionless machines.

When Big Happy tries to kill Jeff, then the questions arise on the importance of human life. It shows that robots neither understand sympathy nor repentance. They do action of the program and challenge human existence. Wilson narrates that robots not only wage a war against human beings, they interrupt in human relationships. There are also some stories in the novel in which it has been tried to show that robots have been uncontrolled.

The story of Takeo Nomura's and his love doll Mikiko is a strange love story in this novel, in which Nomura is badly obsessed for Mikiko. This is the story that blurs the line of human emotions and machine action. Takeo Nomura is sixty-five years old who is a skilled worker, who can fix machines very fast. He has some strange habits that's why his colleagues do not like him, "Around the factory everybody knows that Mr. Nomura is a weirdo, a freak. Such a tiny, twisted little troll" (36). Ryu and his friend Jun manipulate to control Mikiko.

Mr. Nomura's love doll, his android, followed him out into the pavilion. He kissed her on the cheek in front of everyone and then left for work. Like they were married or something (38).

Nomura loves Mikiko unconditionally. He calls her, "Kiko, my darling" (42). But when he says so, Mikiko's behaviour changes abruptly and tears jerk from her eyes. She starts hurting Mr. Nomura but he does nothing to stop her. Jun stands

aghast to see this scene, “Let’s go out of here,” he exclaims. I grab Jun by his shirt. “What’s happening? Why is she attacking him?” “Malfunction. Maybe the fluke set off another command batch. Triggered some other instructions.” (43). When Mikiko is controlled by other people she becomes Nomura’s enemy and starts attacking on the human beings. It is the example of infra-humanization in this novel where robot is considered a tool who has no care for emotions. In this story Mikiko’s shedding tears and Nomura’s steadfast love shows that human beings have started taking emotional support from machine. Still, Nomura forgives her, saying, “I forgive you, Kiko. I forgive you. I will fix you. I will save you. I love you, my princess. I love you. I love you, my queen” (46). It is dehumanization up to the extent when human beings think that it is easy and safe to have relationship with machines than human beings. Amidst the disorder, Nomura clings to the broken robot with intense emotion. Through this narrative, Daniel H. Wilson portrays a romanticised connection between human and machine. The depiction is both unusual and poignant for readers, “Mr. Nomura is deeply in love with this piece of plastic” (47).

One of the earliest examples of robot dehumanization is seen in the chapter “Hearts and Minds,” during a congressional hearing led by Congresswoman Laura Perez. She explains her role as a “robot wrangler” (48), overseeing the operations of robotic soldiers, particularly a model named SAP-1. Initially, SAP-1 remains calm and cooperative, fulfilling its programmed duty. However, after being attacked, it reacts with deadly violence to protect itself. This moment is so frightening, that it compels one to ask, if a machine is only just a machine or is it something more dangerous and destructive. It is only when the robots begin to disobey the orders given, human realizes that these are not simply emotionless machines, but things

that have capacity to take decisions. “It was like the robot woke up from a nap and decided not to take orders anymore” (56). In some cases, the acts of robots resembled human beings’ nature, for one among them, SAP-1 suicided, using Blanton’s weapon. Blanton reported this incident with awe and astonishment. He says that the scene was chilling, “It pushed the barrel up under its own chin... Then SAP One closed its eyes and pulled the trigger” (62). Suicide, an inherently human act of despair is a symbol the robot’s attempt to express its inner struggle and efforts to liberate from the clutches of human being.

The novel, *Robopocalypse*, is a strong criticism against the attempts to dehumanize and infra-humanize the lives of human beings by using the ultra-modern sophisticated technology. On the other hand, infra-humanization in another form is illustrated in the novel, for the human beings are not ready to approve the emotional existence of the robots. The Congress woman Perez warns her daughter, Mathilda Perez, “Just because they walk and talk doesn’t mean your dolls are people” (64).

One doll emotionally blackmails Mathilda Perez, “Tell your mommy to come home... Then we can have a fun party here” (67), and later threatens harm, “If you tell your mommy about me, I’ll hurt Nolan” (68). The line between toy and sentient being blurs. Mathilda ultimately shows courage and overcomes the sinister AI within her playthings, protecting her baby brother from harm.

In the chapter Roughneckthings turn grey, where Dwight Bowie oversees a drilling operation in remote Alaska. As the team works, they encounter mysterious radiation and a drill that appears to evolve into a living entity. A tragic accident kills Ricky Booth, and the events suggest the presence of a sentient force behind the drill.

Bowie begins to suspect that the machines are not malfunctioning but consciously resisting human control. “The boys had to change it out quick... Ricky went after it with a lot of speed but not a lot of brains” (97). This chapter is an exploration of how machines emphasize their own survival, at the cost of human life.

The chapter Number Cruncher details Franklin Daley’s confinement in a mental institution. Once a government scientist, Franklin is confronted by Archos, the AI, which he had helped to bring into existence. Their conversation appears to prophesize the impending apocalypse. Archos threatens Franklin that the total collapse is nearby. Franklin argues with Archos that humankind will survive at the edge of any doom. No technology can extinct human race from the face of Earth, for human being is all powerful, more intelligent and more capable. But Archos refuses to view humanity as superior, “While your people will survive, Franklin, so must mine” (110).

Daniel H. Wilson’s *Robopocalypse* portrays the image of rebellious machines, who wanted to destroy the existence of their own creators. In a series of descriptions, Wilson, reveals how human beings are going to be eliminated, by the technology they have created, and thus dehumanized from the hands of their own creations. In the chapter Demolition, Marcus Johnson, a construction worker in Harlem, recounts the moment machines began their assault on humanity. While relaxing with his wife, Dawn, he notices strange changes outside, “A speeding car jumps the curb and the screaming starts” (112). From their ninth-floor apartment, they watch autonomous cars attack pedestrians. Dawn realizes, “The cars are hunting people and there’s nobody in them” (113). As panic spreads, Marcus takes leadership, helping residents barricade their building and resist the invasion. He

says, “We’ve got to get out of here now while we still can. Nobody is coming to help” (115), embodying a call to act amid despair.

In the chapter Highway 70 the author narrates Laura Perez’s escape with her children, Mathilda and Nolan. Warned by her father that something terrible is happening, Laura Perez drives her old car, trying to stay off the grid. Her fear is raw, “Now I am running to save the lives of my children... something is in our technology. Something evil!” (128). A deadly crash and eerie messages reinforce her panic. Still, she presses forward, determined to protect her family, saying to her daughter, “Mathilda, be nice to your brother. He’s the only one you’ll ever have” (127). In “Gray Horse,” Officer Lonnie Wayne Blanton describes the chaos following Zero Hour as vehicles and machines malfunction, causing accidents. His account offers a lawman’s bewildered perspective, capturing the helplessness of authority in the face of technological rebellion. Dehumanization through technology is severely experienced, even within the instruments that are used for daily purposes. The car as a conveyance device is supposed to help and support its commuters, but, instead things like cars turned to be hostile to human beings and jeopardize the very human existence.

Takeo Nomura, an elderly man in a Tokyo apartment complex. He hesitates to reactivate Makiko, a robot he repaired, “She is ready for activation, yet I do not dare to put her online” (151). With elevators turning into death traps, he witnesses horrific scenes—“Fingernail scratches mark the walls... bloodstained dentures... yet, there are no bodies” (153). Still, he cannot abandon Makiko, “I can’t leave Kiko behind, but she is too heavy to carry” (156). His emotional dilemma symbolizes the conflict between attachment and survival.

Paul Blanton, a soldier imprisoned in Afghanistan during Zero Hour. After surviving a blast, he meets Jabar, a young rebel. They fought together and flew drones. They have witnessed to the incidents, in which the drones, tanks and other weapons turn rogue. It was a story of brevity and friendship. Paul has seen tanks killing many without discretion, going against the orders given to it. “The tanks are killing everybody” (163). They were afraid of these robotic weapons that they feared: “The *avtomata* can sense your heat. They will find us” (165). Many incidents happen, like a car crashes into the river with children trapped inside. The mishapshocks and transforms Lurker. He becomes a rescuer from a mere hacker. Daniel H. Wilson reflects the reality of the perils human beings are going to face and the dehumanization they are about to experience.

Marcus Johnson guides survivors through robot-ravaged areas. A boy he meets has undergone brutal robotic surgery, losing a hand and gaining a mechanical weapon. Dehumanization from hands of robots is well seen in this chapter, where the robots become so cruel and rude to the boy who underwent the surgery. “You got a purpose,” Marcus tells him. “To survive, man. To help the resistance” (244). The story reflects on trauma, survival, and the rebirth of community values. *Tickler* revisits Laura Perez in a robot-controlled labour camp. Physically and mentally broken, she learns her children are missing. Finding Mathilda under robotic surgery, she sacrifices herself, “Mathilda Rose Perez!... Run. Don’t stop... Do you hear me? Run” (258).

Transportation facilities like cars have overturned the entire life of a family. Wilson inclines the trauma and tragedies that human being may experience from the facilities that are used to ease one’s life. Her story is one of love and maternal

bravery.

Paul and Jabar tracking a mysterious two-legged robot in Afghanistan's mountains. The terrain is beautiful but dangerous, "It's so pretty, it hurts your eyes" (261). A snow leopard attack reveals the machine is a research bot, not a killer. "It is not a weapon but a scientist," they realise. This twist shows that not all machines are threats—some are observers, designed to understand rather than destroy. War-ranged terrains leave soldiers exposed to dangers from the weapons created to destroy the other side or the probable enemies but are being backfired.

Lurker and Arrtrad are two unlikely survivors navigating post-apocalyptic Britain. They travel through the shattered streets of London to stop a jamming signal that has disconnected humanity from itself. Lurker, once a teenage hacker, now fights as a resistance warrior. His journey from a rebellious youth to a committed fighter reflects inner transformation. He encourages Arrtrad, saying, "See yourself, Arrtrad. You're a beast, mate. You're a killer. We can do this" (273). These words demonstrate the strong human will to survive mechanical dominance. The mutual trust between man and machine is shattered when Lurker, under the influence of the rogue AI Archos, loses his control and attacks his own friend. This infidelity shows how dehumanization can become factual and convert man into a machine-controlled puppet. The consequences of this incident were devastating. Lurker transmitted signals, which disabled and jammed signal. However, this act liberated Lurker, though his body was mutilated. Lurker, through his death, became a martyr, who has sacrificed his life for the sake of humanity.

The dehumanizing effect of technology is presented more literally and clearly in the chapter Transhuman.

Mathilda Perez undergoes a surgery, by machines at Camp Scarsdale, which altered her nature. She says, “The machines at Camp Scar hurt me. They took my eyes. But in return, they gave me a new kind of eyes” (286). Her sight is no longer human, she can perceive heat signatures, electronic patterns, and robotic frequencies, but she struggles to see human faces clearly. This loss of human vision reflects a deeper alienation— Mathilda has been altered so much that she feels distanced from her own kind. Mathilda is caught between categories and becomes indistinguishable from others in a society that reduces identity to routine. “We call ourselves transhumans” (293), says Tom, another modified survivor. Transhumanism here is not a choice — it is the outcome of trauma. Mathilda chooses to fight back, when, human identities are stolen leaving one as faceless, nameless and senseless.

Takeo and Makiko’s story continues in a few chapters of this novel. When Mikiko warns him, "Takeo, we are in danger," he responds simply, "Always"(317). Her consciousness, despite her physical damage, remains intact. Her concern that the enemy robots, the Akuma, will target her for awakening shows an emerging awareness and fear. Mikiko's awareness poses a threat to the machine overlords, “The Akuma... will be afraid that more of us will awaken”(317). This fear catalyses the emotional climax of the chapter. Takeo, at one point, considers destroying the secret of her sentience to protect others, but Mikiko refuses, “We don't have to destroy the secret. Only share it” (319).

The robot 902 represents a new form of being in the novel. It awakens with a growing sense of identity, says, “I am Nine Oh Two... humanoid form factor” (323). He becomes much bothered about his identity and begins to ask questions on his

belonging, "Who am I? He has lost his personal identity and fails find out who he really was. The development from an obedient machine to a spiritually exalted being is a technological transformation. The robots begin to take decisions of their own, make new relationships and perform actions based on what they thought is right. Their awakening is marked as a simile for liberation from a mere programme-based tool. The chapter *Odyssey* presents a different point of view, the psychological and sensitive affliction of war.

The critical moment arises when an engineer blames himself for a comrade's death. This emotional burden illustrates that while machines may destroy bodies, it is humans who carry the psychological scars of war. The theme of dehumanization continues in many chapters of the novel. When Tiberius is wounded, he cries, but the squad debates whether to rescue him. Jack Wallace insists, "It's the human thing to do" (338), while Cormac retorts, "I want to live. Don't you get it?" (339). This exchange captures the core of wartime ethics: humanity versus logic. Even in death, his body is used against his comrades, deepening the emotional trauma and illustrating the ultimate form of dehumanization.

Tiberius, once a loyal soldier, is repurposed by Archos, he says, "I am Archos. God of the robots" (345). His transformation from human to machine-weapon reflects a chilling commentary on how war consumes not just the living, but even the dead. Charles Thatcher reflects on this grotesque hybridization. Indra's transformation is not simply technological but ontological: his very being has been altered, erased, or replaced. The tragedy lies not only in what Indra has become, but in the irrevocable loss of what he once was, a person with relationships, thoughts, and a moral compass. Wilson uses imagery that furthers this sense of horror. The

loss of eye contact, traditionally a mark of empathy and awareness, illustrates his disconnection from human emotion and relationality. His gaze no longer carries recognition or affection. The machine that now controls him has no use for human empathy. This condition is a direct outcome of the technological overreach Wilson cautions against throughout the novel. In his world, machines are not just tools; they are potential overlords. Indra's cybernetic corruption shows what happens when technology does not serve humanity but dominates it.

The emotional cost of this dehumanization is also explored through other characters' reactions. When Cormac sees Indra, he is struck by grief and horror, "It's like seeing a ghost wearing a familiar face" (331). This image links dehumanization with haunting. Indra is physically present but spiritually absent. His very presence becomes traumatic, as it signifies what has been lost irretrievably. The notion of war-induced transformation is not new, but Wilson pushes it into new terrain by merging science fiction with moral allegory.

Through the chapter *They Shall Not Grow Old*, Daniel H. Wilson presents a harrowing glimpse into the war between humans and machines. Nearly two and a half years after the initial outbreak of conflict, Cormac and his *Gray Horse Army* are advancing toward the Ragnarok Intelligence Fields, one of the last and most perilous enemy strongholds. The setting is bleak and desolate. As they move forward through the icy Arctic terrain, they encounter frozen landscapes strewn with corpses. "And the frozen bodies are disconcerting. The corpses of hundreds and hundreds of foreign soldiers carpet the woods" (362). These haunting remnants bear testimony to the countless lives lost in the war.

Cormac, riding in the spider tank *Houdini*, reflects on the devastating

consequences of the war while communicating with Mathilda Perez via radio. The Gray Horse Army comprises both humans and machines, including around twenty tanks. As they approach Ragnarok, they are attacked by enemy machines, stumpers, pluggers, and tanklets, designed to cripple rather than kill.

Upon entering the strange, dense taiga forest, the soldiers face intensified terror. A comrade, Carl, is brutally killed by a plugger, and their tank is severely damaged by a monstrous mantis-like machine. The war unfolds as a grim spectacle of fear and chaos. It becomes evident how advanced technology has transformed the very nature of warfare. Men are stripped of identity, reprogrammed, and turned into weapons by Archos. Even humans like Lark Iron Cloud become dangerous pawns in this conflict. Mathilda Perez, however, remains a source of guidance.

The key antenna used by Archos, to coordinate attacks, is used by the author to focus on the deepening bond between humans and machines. Nine Oh Two and Mathilda Perez take centre stage as they attempt to destroy the antenna. The mission ends in tragedy. Hoplite dies in a missile strike, and Warden is also killed, leaving Nine Oh Two alone and wounded in the snow. In a remarkable twist, Nine Oh Two hears the voice of Mathilda Perez, a human whose consciousness has formed a psychic link with machines. “My name is Mathilda. I want to help you. There’s no time” (378), she tells him. With her help, Nine Oh Two reaches the target and disables the communication arrays. “Once there, the Arbiter disabled the antenna, temporarily disrupting the robot armies” (380). The war reaches its symbolic, emotional, and dramatic climax, when Nine Oh Two confronts Archos, the AI mastermind behind the devastation. The battlefield is a grim terrain of smoke, rubble, and sorrow. As the last resistance force prepares for a final strike, Archos

hides deep underground, operating from a concealed stronghold. Archos, though unseen, continues to control the systems. Nine Oh Two and his squad push toward this hidden node, risking their lives.

Carl, the engineer, helps replace Nine Oh Two's damaged sensors, demonstrating the growing bond of mutual trust between man and machine. These machines, once perceived as threats, are now allies. As they disconnect Archos's communication network, they realise the frightening risk of descending into the core. Nine Oh Two volunteers for the dangerous mission.

After this critical victory, Nine Oh Two is rescued, physically battered but spiritually transformed, though uncertain of his identity, machine or human. Cormac reassures him of his humanity, shown through his sacrifice and empathy. Yet peace remains fragile. A seismic tremor signals that Archos may not be destroyed. He might have created backups, hinting at a renewed threat. In the chapter, *Debriefing* Wilson reflects on post-war reality. Cormac Wallace, now a hero, sits in the silence of a desolate camp, haunted by trauma. A mechanical noise revives his fears, until he discovers it is Nine Oh Two, who stayed behind out of loyalty. No longer a weapon, Nine Oh Two has become a moral being, witty, compassionate, and decisive.

Daniel H. Wilson's *Robocalypse* is a powerful commentary on man-machine confrontation and the consequential failure of the former. Though perceived and conceptualized as an ally or befriendable tool for the betterment of the society, now it became a dystopian invention with potential cataclysmic power for total devastation. The space where the machines are placed, the actions the machines are supposed to accomplish are operating adversely and hence leading to

unpredictable dehumanizing scenario. The aspects of dehumanization are visible through the characters like Archos.... And through the spaces....

3. Corporatocracy, Crony Capitalism and Surveillance: Dehumanization in *The Water Thief*

In *The Water Thief*, Nicholas Lamar Soutter presents a bleak dystopia where capitalist corporatism has fully commodified human life, leading to widespread dehumanization and infra-humanization. "Under capitalism, man exploits man. Under communism, it's just the opposite" (Galbraith 405). Charles Thatcher, the novel's protagonist, reflects on how moral decay and systemic control have stripped people of their basic humanity, rendering suffering a spectacle and turning citizens into both property and predators within an exploitative system. From the opening lines, the normalization of public executions is deeply unsettling. "First there would be poker, then the executions... on the first Monday of every month, I couldn't think about much else" (5). The juxtaposition of gambling and death suggests a society that consumes human suffering as entertainment. Thatcher is disturbed by this ritual but also resigned to its presence—an emotional numbness that shows how routine brutality erodes empathy. Capitalism in this world extends far beyond goods and services; even basic human needs—air, water, and light—are privatized. "Economic planning is the most characteristic expression of the new capitalism" (Shonfield 121). The state, now supplanted by corporations, owns its citizens. Thatcher confesses, "I was a private citizen... private property of the Ackerman Brothers Securities firm. They held most of my futures" (5). This line encapsulates the extreme commodification of individuals. Lives are monetized, and one's worth is measured not by moral integrity, but by market value and insurance projections.

“Machines were, it may be said, the weapon employed by the capitalists to quell the revolt of specialized labour” (Marx 563).

The system thrives by enforcing compliance through surveillance and bureaucracy. Permits govern every action—from smoking to exercising—and violations are deliberately provoked for profit. Police officers, incentivized by infractions rather than justice, operate as revenue agents. “There were a million ways they could get you if they wanted to” (7), Thatcher muses, underscoring the constant threat that looms over every citizen. Even rebellion is subsumed into the economy. Thatcher admits that smoking, though harmful and heavily taxed, feels like “my own little rebellion against the system” (6). But this act of defiance is still within the bounds of what the system profits from—it’s rebellion with a price tag.

The theme of infra-humanization, or the subtle denial of full humanity to others, plays out vividly in the way society justifies its cruelty. Executions, stripped of empathy, are reduced to logistics and betting odds. In such a society, death is not a tragedy—it’s data. Soap may be made from the fat of executed prisoners, a grotesque symbol of how even the bodies of the dead are repurposed for consumption. Nothing is sacred in this system. Inside the workplace, dehumanization is intensified. The Perception Management Department—where Thatcher works—is a dark, windowless maze. “We had no windows... just rows of cubicles... the only light came from the floor, like on an airplane” (10). Employees are denied personal space, autonomy, and even daylight. The layout changes randomly, eliminating any sense of stability or belonging. Workers are not treated as human beings but as interchangeable, expendable parts of a machine.

Soutter says that no social trust and cooperation will exist in the modern

world, where profit shall decide the merit. People will try to compete one another and contrive destruction of the others, even their colleagues, so that they can attain success. Deceptive measures will be adopted to win the play and gain profit. Soutter depicts some instances to substantiate his argument through his novel.

Nicholas Lamar Soutter's novel, *the Water Thief* is not just a criticism against the corporatocracy. On the other hand, it renders a warning about what will happen, if profit becomes the only value, and humans fall as mere tools of economic gain. Vladimir Lenin writes in *The State and Revolution*, "In a capitalist society, only the rich are free" (56). He says that in such a society, dehumanization will be considered as an act of cruelty, but a policy for the growth.

Infra-humanization is not driven by philosophy, but by statements. Sarah Aisling embodies the human resistance to this inhuman system. Born into a privileged class, an Alpha-grade executive, she becomes a strong protester against the system, after witnessing mass death in a hotel fire. Her transformation from a corporate insider to an insolent Epsilon-level worker exemplifies how empathy is criminalized. When defending herself in court without legal representation, she is shocked from the comments made by the judge. She condemns the opinion of the judge, who asked her to sell her organ to meet the court's expenses. She says, "Why should I have to sell my future or an organ to defend against charges that should never have been brought?" (18–19). This shows how, even courts are being sold at the hands of corporates and how they become the tools of capitalism.

Sarah Aisling's statement is not just a personal dissent, but it reveals the mercilessness of a system where basic rights must be bought, and justice is a luxury. The judge's cold reply that she could have sold one of her organs to meet the court

expenses, itself reflect the worthlessness of a common man even before the court. Despite Sarah's transparency, courage, and ethical reasoning, she is branded as an outspoken and outrageous by Charles Thatcher. The real crime in this world is not wrong doing but hope. Charles Thatcher admits bitterly, "Hope is the slow death of man, and she spread it like a venereal disease... She shouldn't get to believe in that" (25). The corporate world has eliminated moral values in favour of economic gain. This is seen in Linus's lessons to Charles Thatcher, where he teaches that trust is weakness and deception is strength, "Business is war, and all war is based on deception" (29), and "Compassion isn't natural; it certainly isn't economical" (36).

Marriage is reduced to a business contract; personal relationships have no meaning beyond utility. Linus, a high-ranking executive, boasts, "I have never done an unselfish thing in my whole life... I'm loyal to the corp because it's good to me" (38). Human beings are evaluated like commodities—"assets" or "losses" and discarded when no longer useful. The morality of actions is judged not by right or wrong, but by profitability. As Linus illustrates with a grim analogy, a man who operates a gas chamber is more "valuable" than a saint feeding children because one generates revenue.

Charles Thatcher is told that marriage is a professional contract these days, and it is not a thing to get emotionally attached to. Linus tries to convince Charles Thatcher that if he marries any emerging star Gamma or Beta, it will be a more beneficial investment. Linus warns Charles Thatcher that he needs to grow up beyond emotions and morality. Until he thinks about long-term profit, he will not be able to become eligible for promotion. Charles Thatcher says about the game of poker, "I hated poker. I hated playing it, hated people who liked it, hated the fact

that everyone was playing it all the time. It was like a joke that everybody got but me, one I had long given up asking people to explain. Even Bernard, who lost more than I did, seemed to enjoy it” (34).

The worst form of capitalism comes to the fore in the novel when a human being is considered just as a valuable commodity. “These people all stole from Ackermen; they're all thieves and looters, and Ackermen has every right to recoup their losses.” (35–36). The dialogues between Linus and Charles Thatcher make this point clear: that emotional morality and compassion are considered a weakness. His dialogue, “Compassion isn’t natural; it certainly isn’t economical,” is the essence of capitalist dehumanization. To be extra sensitive is a burden that must be shunned off if we want to move forward. Linus says Charles Thatcher is compassionate, and it is his biggest weakness. When he comes to know about his wife’s demotion from Linus, he is neither able to do anything nor able to revolt because he knows that he cannot go against his company.

The action on the seventh floor was winding down for the day. Most of the people who weren't working through the night had gone home a little early to watch the hangings. Corbett was hiding in my office, since that was probably the last place Bernard would look for him. If he does so, his existence will be in danger. Linus says, “They’re the only thing keeping you alive” (38). This narrates that people’s lives are not based on the foundation of morality or ethics; they are based on corporate contracts. Linus teaches a lesson that personal relationships have no value in the world. What is valued by the people is economic and social status and the contract.

The novelist talks about moral nihilism, selfishness, and exploitation in *The*

Water Thief. The novel sets new parameters of success and happiness in life. There are certain things which determine a person's worth. Linus gives the example of a saint who feeds children and another who is a worker operating a gas chamber. The second person will be given priority in the modern world because he is earning money, while the saint is not part of the corporate calculations. The sentence "All living creatures care about their own survival—at least all the moral ones" (39) also presents true pictures of capitalist society.

Nicholas Lamar Soutter's *The Water Thief* presents a chillingly grotesque portrait of dehumanization in a hyper-capitalist dystopia where profit has entirely replaced morality. In this world, the notions of good and bad are dismissed as illusions (38), and everything—including life, death, emotion, and even friendship—is commodified for consumption and control. Public executions, far from being acts of justice, are repackaged as commercial entertainment and "moral imperatives," generating revenue through ticket sales and media theatrics(38).

Charles Thatcher, the protagonist, is a symbolic representation of the emotional mentality of the helpless society, he laments, "Sarah Aisling stood up to a judge. I couldn't even stand up against a game of poker" (39). This shows a confession that reveals his helplessness and submission to the greedy conscience. Unlike Charles Sarah Aisling is a bold ideological rebel who protests against the system knowing the consequences. She is described as "an aberration, a genetic defect" (40) by Charles Thatcher. While Charles Thatcher becomes increasingly haunted by the system's brutality, the world around him continues to dissolve into moral chaos. Charles observes:

Simon, a quiet security guard, suddenly commits mass murder and suicide,

signalling an explosion of pent-up rage and helplessness, yet Corbett and others treat the massacre as a joke, a poker bet, further reflecting the complete desensitization of human compassion (42).

The corporate machine, through its threatening Retention Department, follows and eliminates revolutionists, using fear as a controlling mechanism. Suicide is a common happening, not grieved but classified, with even accidental deaths, like Charles Thatcher's father falling from a vat, rebranded as suicide to deny compensation. Corbett contrives to ruin Bernard simply because of his competence. He fantasizes his destruction in the same way people fantasize about public executions, which reveals the depth of professional jealousy and inhumanity. These death shows have become the zenith of entertainment. The upper-class, Alpha citizens pay heavily to attend execution parties. Beatrice, Charles Thatcher's wife, delights in watching these demonstrations of executions. She is less interested in poker or parties and finds more amusement in watching death. She believes that only executions are worthy of emotional investment. She expresses, "beg for their lives, truly broken... (49). Even sexuality has been commercialized, as Beatrice gives her husband a pornographic magazine as a gift, which colleagues praise—not for intimacy but for its market value. "The market is not a place where freedom reigns, but where the strong dominate the weak" (Chomsky 19).

The novel underscores how loyalty and identity are meaningless when profit is at stake. The tragic case of Malcolm Evans, who spies on his own company and is betrayed is an example for this. Charles Thatcher realizes that people find consolation not in compassion but in comparing themselves to those who suffer more. They say: "We decide by comparing ourselves to others—and by that

yardstick it's easier to corrupt the neighbour" (56). Charles finds that there is no worth for human life and his hard work, but every man is valued based on one's monetary value. People are not recognized and judged by morals but by measurable productivity. Even social relationships are also evaluated based on their economic capacity. Amenities and facilities *pleasuring services*, *abuse services*, and *friendship catalogues*, are offered to those who can afford.

The words, "Violence is the only possible conclusion to capitalism" (59), illustrate a world where defiance leads to eradication, and silence becomes existence. Sarah's act of stealing rainwater is a symbolic rebellion against tyrannical corporate authority, who control even the natural resources like rainwater and air, she asserts, "Rainwater belongs to all of us. That Ackermen Brothers has a slip of paper saying it is theirs does not" (18). This courageous act of hers activates Charles Thatcher's experiential development, showing that even in such a mechanized system, the spark of resistance can still ignite. Yet the system's machinery is too powerful and widespread: executions are hosted by suave anchors like Paul, Steve, and Alice, turning state-sanctioned violence into televised drama. Eric Forestal's looming death by acid dissolution due to unpaid debt further projects the savage face of economic barbarity.

Charles Thatcher's inner transformation is reflected in his changing attitude against the tyrannical corporate world. His violation of corporate rules, invite more than forty memos demanding his explanation. This highlights the system's confrontation with the human needs and urgencies. The novel also criticizes capitalism's mechanical control, where productivity is prioritized over individual liberty and creativity. Bernard and Corbett's conversation mocks the Greek alphabet

system, Alpha, Beta, Gamma, as fake, that symbolizes the absurdity of corporate hierarchies.

Bernard criticizes artificial constructs like suits and corporate jargon, while Corbett's disdain for *LowCons*, low-contract citizens, reveals systemic dehumanization. Charles Thatcher's growing disillusionment contrasts with Corbett's belief in profit-driven morality, where empathy is dismissed as naive. This novel deals with class divisions *HighCon*, *MidCon*, *LowCon*, *NullCon*, through Thatcher's journey into *LowSec*. The warehouse at Everett Park—a hellish, decaying space—symbolizes the brutal conditions of the poor. The novel exposes how capitalism commodifies even basic needs like water, reducing people to disposable assets. Charles Thatcher's quest to find Sarah Aisling reveals the system's cruelty: Sarah is detained for stealing water, a crime that underscores the hypocrisy of corporate control. The Galt Intercompany Library, a rare surveillance-free zone, contrasts with the hyper-monitored world, emphasizing the erosion of privacy. Corbett's disdain for *LowCons*, reveals systemic dehumanization, reducing the poor to parasites:

But that's the deal with these *LowCons*, always trying to pawn responsibility off on someone else. There's a reason they're low contract; it's a mindset, this 'oh, poor me' garbage. Sound familiar? (78).

The novel's narration intensifies the strong criticism against the capitalist attitude. It emphasizes the nature of dehumanization experienced by the common man from the hands of corporates. Charles Thatcher's meeting with Katherine Wolfe, Kate, marks a turning point. Her selfless actions and sincerity contrasted the greedy nature of the corporate system. This has raised serious questions of integrity

in Charles Thatcher's mind. Their dialogue on freedom, happiness, and systemic inequality highlights how capitalism thrives on artificial desires, leaving people emotionally bankrupt. The novel's portrayal of LowSec's violence and desperation, including child prostitution, exposes the system's moral decay. It explores the consequences of dissent. Charles Thatcher's pursuit of Kate leads him to a communal refuge, where he's beaten by suspicious residents, reflecting the paranoia capitalism breeds. The novel critiques the illusion of freedom: even basic rights like water are commodified, and resistance is met with brutal suppression. Kate's warning about corporate vengeance, emphasizes the system's brutality.

The confession made by Charles Thatcher evidently reflects the dilemma he is experiencing. The novel seriously deals with this moral crisis experienced by the protagonist, which marks as the turning point in his life. The novel contrasts corporate lies, for instance, Linus's justification of executions as *thinning the herd* with Charles Thatcher's growing empathy. Charles Thatcher learns the need of resistance and adaptation from Kate's practical and compassionate approach. She teaches him to question the authority of the corporate. At the end of the novel, the author makes the protagonist undergo a total change, through which, he becomes ready to rectify his past life and confront the consequences. Charles Thatcher's realization that Ackermen's system is vulnerable reflects the novel's broader critique of capitalism's inevitable collapse, "Ackermen is dead, they just don't know it yet." (145)

Robopocalypse is a strong critique against the corporate deception. The novel raises some questions and warns regarding the capitalism's unsustainability. Soutter brings forth the example of the collapse of Ackermen corporation as result

of its authoritative approach driven by greed and speculation. The novel also investigates the influences and the impacts of corporate power. The novel portrays the image of pseudo-democracy, in which the authoritative corporates control weak governments. These governments fail to gain the confidence and trust of the public. Charles Thatcher, the protagonist, remains totally confused and stands stunned before this complex situation. The novel reflects the system's dehumanizing aspects, in which a common man cannot survive, upholding his self-esteem. The corporates declare fugitive, whoever goes against the system, and hence Charles Thatcher has been declared as a fugitive by the corporates. The corporate surveillance state, symbolized by Retention, strips him of agency. His stolen ledger becomes a metaphor for his stolen humanity. The novel's critique of capitalism's dehumanization culminates in Charles Thatcher's realization that he's now a target, not an employee.

This study is a modest attempt to explore diverse aspects related to human beings that can create problems for people. The two major themes—dehumanization and infra-humanization—in the selected novels *Robopocalypse*, *The Water Thief*, and *What is the What* show that human beings have become so blind that they can go to any extent to earn more money, to gain power, or to remain in their comfort zone. To be selfish to some extent is digestible, but when it crosses the boundaries, it becomes a serious issue for humankind. Wars are fought for territorial control, capitalism is an attempt to gain more money, and technological developments are meant to make human life easy and comfortable. Behind all these themes lies man's moral degradation, greed, ignorance, blind madness, which may become the cause of human destruction. Even robotic technology could lead to the extinction of

human civilization one day. This is also the fear of many scientists and robotic engineers.

King Kekwop Musa and Benjamin Isahwrite about different types of wars, “Throughout history, different types of warfare have occurred in one point to other. The Asymmetric warfare, biological warfare, chemical warfare, cold warfare, conventional warfare, cyber warfare, insurgency, nuclear warfare, Total War etcetera, have affected human history in one way or the other” (134) and there will be no end of such types of wars in future also.

Beyond academic inquiry, the present study is a strong reminder for humans to open their eyes before running after the blind race for money, power, or territorial control. There is no limit to human greed for money, power, or possessions. Only moral values can protect humanization; otherwise, it may be very difficult for human beings to survive in the future. In its dystopian setting, this study draws attention to societal, ethical, and philosophical crises. English literature has the power to teach, awaken, and warn people. It works like a lesson that could save billions of lives. The present study addresses a more serious topic and offers an opportunity for humans to introspect their actions. This study is a reminder to move toward a path of understanding dehumanization, which is based on the foundation of self-knowledge, wisdom, human values, compassion, and ethics.

TENABILITY OF THE HYPOTHESIS

The works of Dave Eggers, Daniel H. Wilson and Nicholas Lamar Soutter demonstrate various aspects of dehumanization and infra-humanization. The hypothesis was that *What is the What* by Dave Eggers, *Robopocalypse* by Daniel H. Wilson and *The Water Thief* by Nicholas Lamar Soutter clearly expose the tragedy

of dehumanization in the refugee, corporate and technology worlds, respectively.

From the above findings it is evident that the selected postmillennial fictional works— Dave Eggers' *What is the What*, Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse*, and Nicholas Lamar Soutter's *The Water Thief*—depict different types of dehumanization and infra-humanization. Though these novels have a totally different aspect to cover, but overall, these texts depict the same central concern, the theme of dehumanization and infra-humanization. Various possible occasions, where the elements of dehumanization and infra-humanization reflect, are very well illustrated through these novels. Hence, the present study clearly substantiates the expounded hypothesis.

Chapter VI

Recommendations

One of the important hurdles faced by the researcher is the lack of a comprehensive theory that encompasses various aspects, nature, reasons and, solutions for the problem of dehumanization and infra-humanization. Tools for textual analysis are available and, some of the postmodern theories are helpful in addressing this theoretical crisis. Therefore, it is recommended to formulate a theory to study various forms of dehumanization and infra-humanization. Misuse of many theories put forward by important social thinkers like Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx et al. are directly or indirectly responsible for dehumanization. In our post-structuralist world, where grand narratives are broken and questioned, these theoreticians, too, have to be deconstructed. Dehumanizing aspects in various fields may be explored further. Broad studies need to be conducted to uncover how the dehumanization occurs in medical practices, where human beings are treated like guinea pigs to experiment various medicines, vaccines, and other equipment. People from poor countries, refugees, victims, prisoners of war etc., are widely used to test medicines. Doctors treating patients as merely objects or bodies results in their denial of human identity. Another area to be explored is the criminal justice and prisons. Attitude towards prisoners in various prisons must be studied, for in most places they are treated very cruelly, stripping them of their human fundamental rights.

The accused are called culprits even before the judgment. The life of undertrial prisoners is a very serious human rights issue. Detaining them for a prolonged period, without a fair trial, strips them of their dignity and place them in a chaotic atmosphere, where they experience systemic dehumanization. The highly pathetic conditions of the prisoners of war, the inmates of different incarceration centres, refugee camps, homeless destitutes etc. are also to be studied in depth. Algorithm developed by collecting personal data strip individuals of their identity, privacy, and freedom. Dehumanizing a person or a group using videos, pictures, hate campaigning posters etc. created through AI. Print, visual and social media, movies, documentaries etc. propagate false information that end up in wide form atrocities such as riots, carnages, and genocide. Broad and serious studies on propaganda theory and hate campaign are to be conducted, for it becomes vital to critically explore how emerging technologies mould public opinions and redefine human value. Ultimately, understanding these processes reinforces our collective commitment to safeguard human rights in modern societies.

Scope for Further Research

The present research has considered three different but thematically interconnected novels, *What is the What* by Dave Eggers, *Robopocalypse* by Daniel H Wilson and *The Water Thief* by Nicholas Lamar Soutter, for the study undertaken to examine the elements of dehumanization and infra-humanization. These novels discourse on various aspects of dehumanization and its influence, significance and impact on individuals and society. They deeply examine the subjects such as war, capitalism, marginalization, violence, trauma, death, identity crisis, existential dilemmas, and moral erosion from diverse perceptions. This investigation is not

completely exhaustive, meticulous and all-inclusive, for there are many other texts that represent the theme dehumanization and infra-humanization. Numerous numbers of fictions and articles are written in different languages, all around the globe, on the theme that deals with war, capitalism, violence, and artificial intelligence. Apart from these fictions and articles, there are many movies, documentaries and videos that are illustrating the theme of pathetic segregation and mental and physical traumas experienced by the human beings. In addition to this there are novels and stories exploring caste, class, race, religion, and gender-based discrimination contribute to this field. These works carry equal merit and may be considered as references for further studies in the theme of dehumanization and infra-humanization. A few of these works are mentioned in the introduction chapter of the present research study. The three novels selected, *What is the What* by Dave Eggers, *Robopocalypse* by Daniel H Wilson and *The Water Thief* by Nicholas Lamar Soutter, for the present research study, are postmillennial works, from the same country, United States of America, who in the name of bringing peace unleashes war and supports atrocities all over the world and in due course become a major reason for dehumanization. Even though these three novels differ in their respective plots, they represent the same idea of dehumanization and infra-humanization. The present study is only a introductory analysis of dehumanization and infra-humanization based on just three novels. There are many more themes such as violence, trauma, existential crises, corporate exploitation, and others that could be explored further using these or other novels as case studies.

Works Cited

- Alvarez, Krystal. 'This Was Uncalled For': Dave Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* Subverts the Genre of Traditional Autobiography as an Attempt at Rendering his life. 2000
- Anand, Mulk Raj. *The Untouchable*. London: Wishart Books Ltd, 1935.
- Arnds, Peter. *Wolves at the Door: Migration, Dehumanization, Rewilding the World*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.
- Ashford, Robert. "Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom*: A Binary Economic Critique." *Journal of Economic Issues* vol. 44, no. 2, 2014.
- Asimov, Isaac. *I, Robot*. Doubleday, 1950.
- Bandura, Albert. "Selective Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency." *Journal of Moral Education*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2002.
- Barnard, Alan. "On the Relationship Between Technique and Dehumanization". Edited by Rozzano C. Locsin, Auburn House, 2001.
- Bastian, Brock, and Nick Haslam. "Experiencing Dehumanization: Cognitive and Emotional Effects of Everyday Dehumanization." *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2011.614132>.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Cool Memories V: 2000-2004*. Polity, 2006.
- Beck, Johanna L. "Spiritual Autobiography and Dave Eggers' *What is the What*". *Inquiries Journal/Students Pulse*, 2014.
- Beckman, Frida. *Control and the Novel: Dave Eggers and Disciplinary Form*. Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

- Bell, Robert H. "Metamorphoses of Spiritual Autobiography." *ELH*, vol. 44, no. 1, 1977.
- Bergeron, Chris. "Shrewsbury Author Writes Book About Capitalism Run Amok." *MetroWest Daily News*, 25 Sept. 2012, <https://www.metrowestdailynews.com/story/entertainment/arts/2012/09/25/shrewsbury-author-writes-book-about/37925854007/>. Accessed 28 Feb. 2025.
- Bex, Sean. "Particularizing the Universal: Dave Eggers Writes Human Rights". *Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2016.
- Bhaumik, Arkapravo. *From AI to Robotics: Mobile, Social, and Sentient Robots*. CRC Press, 2018.
- Braun, Joachim Von, et al. "AI, Robotics, and Humanity: Opportunities, Risks, and Implications for Ethics and Policy." *Robotics, AI, and Humanity: Science, Ethics, and Policy*, edited by Joachim von Braun, Margaret S. Archer, Gregory M. Reichberg, and Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Springer Nature, 2021.
- Chamzas, Constantinos, Feyisayo Eweje, Lydia E. Kavraki, and Elliot L. Chaikof. "Human Health and Equity in an Age of Robotics and Intelligent Machines." *Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard University*, 21 Mar. 2022.
- Chomsky, Noam. *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*. Seven Stories Press, 1999.
- Dalai Lama, and Desmond Tutu. *The Book of Joy*. Avery, 2016.
- Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species*. London: John Murray, 1859.
- Deming, David J. *The Growing Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market*.

- National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper No. 21473, 2015.
- Dowe, David. "Is Stephen Hawking Right? Could AI Lead to the End of Humankind?" *The Conversation*, 17 Nov. 2015.
- Eggers, Dave. *The Captain and the Glory*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.
- Eggers, Dave. *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng: A Novel*. Vintage Books, 2007.
- Feng, Yuxiao. "Why Will Artificial Intelligence Replace Humans—or Will It?" In *Dialogue with Nature*, edited by Li Wei, Oxford University Press, 2022.
- Franceschetti, Donald R, editor. *Principles of Robotics & Artificial Intelligence*. Salem press, 2018.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary ed., Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2014.
- Galbraith, John Kenneth. *A Life in Our Times: Memoirs*. Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
- Gevarter, William B. *An Overview of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics. Volume 1 – Artificial Intelligence Part A: The Core Ingredients*. Prepared for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, NASA Headquarters, Washington, DC, 1984.
- Gottlieb, Erika. *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial*. McGill-Queen's Press, 2001.
- Gras, N. S. B. "What Is Capitalism in the Light of History?" *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 21. 1947.
- Grassby, Richard. *The Idea of Capitalism Before the Industrial Revolution*. Rowman & Littlefield. 1999.
- Gratz, Alan. *Refugee*. Scholastic Corporation, United States of America, 2017.

- Grech, Marija. 'Technological Appendages and Organic Prostheses: Robo-Human Appropriation and Cyborgian Becoming in Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse*'. *Word and Text, A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics* vol. 3, no. 2, 2013.
- Guttal, Shalmali. 2007. "Globalisation." *Development in Practice* vol. 17, no. 4–5.
- Haslam, Nick. "Dehumanization: An Integrative Review." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* vol. 10, no. 3, Feb. 2006.
- Hawking, Stephen. "The Development of Full Artificial Intelligence Could Spell the End of the Human Race." Interview with the BBC, 2 Dec. 2014.
- Heilbroner, Robert L. *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times, and Ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers*. Simon & Schuster, 1953.
- Hendin, Josephine. "Experimental Fiction." *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*. Edited by Daniel Hoffman, OUP, 1979.
- Hosseini, Khaled. *Sea Prayer*. Bloomsbury Publishing, United Kingdom, 2018.
- Howey Hugh, John Joseph Adams. *The End Has Come*. Create Space Publishing, 2015.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. Doubleday, Doran & Company, United States of America, 1932.
- Ing, Lili Yan, and Gene M. Grossman, editors. *Robots and AI: A New Economic Era*. Routledge, 2023.
- Iverson, Ken, and Tom Varian. *Plain Talk: Lessons from a Business Maverick*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1998.
- Jahan, Sarwat, and Ahmed Saber Mahmud. "What Is Capitalism?" *Finance & Development* vol. 52, 2015.

- Joerden, Jan C. “Dehumanization: The Ethical Perspective.” *Dehumanization of Warfare: Legal Implications of New Weapon Technologies*, edited by Wolff Heintschel von Heinegg, Robert Frau, and Tassilo Singer, Springer International Publishing, 2018.
- Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. The Parton Press, London, 1937.
- Kamble, Baby. *The Prisons We Broke*. Orient Blackswan, 2008.
- Kennedy, John F. “Address before the United Nations General Assembly.” 25 Sept. 1961. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/united-nations-19610925. Accessed 31 July 2025.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Beacon Press, 1967.
- Klein, Peter G., R. Michael Holmes Jr., Nicolai Foss, Siri Terjesen, and Justin Pepe. ‘Capitalism, Cronyism, and Management Scholarship: A Call for Clarity’. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2022.
- Kocka, Jürgen. *Capitalism: A Short History*. Translated by Jeremiah Riemer. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2016.
- Kronfeldner, Maria. *The Routledge Handbook of Dehumanization*, 2021
- Kumar Sah, Aanand. “AI Will Not Replace Human Workforce.” *International Journal of Scientific Research & Engineering Trends*, vol. 10, no. 4, July–Aug. 2024.
- Lamar Soutter, Nicholas and Jack McClintock. *Confessions of a Sin Eater*. San Francisco: CreateSpace, 2014.
- Lamar Soutter, Nicholas. *The Water Thief*. San Francisco: CreateSpace, 2012.

- Lenin, Vladimir. *The State and Revolution*. Penguin Classics, 1992.
- Leyens, Jaques-Philippe. Leyens and Colleagues, 2000.
- Luna, Aniuska M. 'The Components of Dehumanization'. *Peace and Conflict*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2015.
- Madden, Bartley J. 'Value Creation Principles: The Pragmatic Theory of the Firm Begins with Purpose and Ends with Sustainable Capitalism'. *Journal of Applied Corporate finance*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2021.
- Manoharan, C., and B. Birundha. "Human Values and Professional Ethics." *Shanlax International Journal of Management*, vol. 7, no. 2, Oct. 2019.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital. Volume I*. Penguin Classics, 1990.
- Merrill, Michael. 2014. "How Capitalism Got Its Name." *Dissent* vol. 61.
- Montagu, Ashley, and Floyd Matson. 'Introduction'. *The Dehumanization of Man*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983.
- Montague, Richard, and James Matson. *Technological Dehumanization: The Reduction of Humans to Machines*. McGraw-Hill, 1983.
- Musa, King Kekwop and Benjamin Isah. "War and Peace: The Causes of War and the Conditions for Peace." *Global Peace Community Journal* vol. 1, no. 1, 2023.
- Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *The Refugees*. Grove Press, United States of America, 2017.
- Novak, Michael. *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982.
- Oliver, Sophie. "Dehumanization: Perceiving the Body as (In)Human." *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization: Human Dignity Violated*, edited by Paulus

- Kaufmann, Hannes Kuch, Christian Neuhäuser, and Elaine Webster, Springer, 2011.
- Opotow, Susan. "Moral Exclusion and Injustice: An Introduction." *Journal of Social Issues* vol. 46, no. 1, 1990.
- Ozkiziltan, Didem, and Anke Hassel. *Humans versus Machines: An Overview of Research on the Effects of Automation of Work*. August 2020.
- Patra, Indrajit. 'Deciphering the Contours of Singularity: A study of the Apocalyptic Worlds, Deadly Technological Landscapes, and (Post) Humanity's Relationship to its Technology in Three Contemporary Science Fiction Novels'. *Journal of Management Information and Decision Sciences* vol. 25, no. 1-7, 2022.
- Prince, Mary. *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*. 1831.
- Quintero, Jesús Bolaño. 'Reconstructing Realism in Post-Postmodern Narrative': Dave Eggers's *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Complutense *Journal of English Studies* vol. 29, 2021.
- Ravn, Olga. *The Employees*. New Direction Publishing, United States of America, 2022.
- Rawlence's, Ben. *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp*. Henry Halt and Co. / St. Martin Press, 2016.
- Russell. Bertrand. *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*. George Allen & Unwin, 1967.
- Sachs, Jeffrey D. "Twentieth Century Political Economy: A Brief History of Global Capitalism." *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* vol. 15, no. 4, 1999.
- Sathish Kumar, C. "Unmasking Dave Eggers' *The Circle*: Power and Deception in

- the Modern Tech World.” *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2023.
- Schwartz, Shalom H., and Naomi Struch. “Values and Intergroup Relations.” *European Review of Social Psychology*, edited by W. Stroebe and M. Hewstone Wiley, 1990.
- Scott, Bruce R. “The Political Economy of Capitalism.” *Harvard Business School Working Paper*, 2006.
- Shonfield, Andrew. *Modern Capitalism the Changing Balance of Public and Private*. Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Siciliano, Bruno, and Oussama Khatib, editors. *Springer Handbook of Robotics*. 2nd ed., Springer, 2016.
- Smith, David Livingstone, *Making Monsters: The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization*, Harvard University Press, 2021
- Smith, David Livingstone. *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*. Oneworld Publications, 2011.
- Smith, David Livingstone. *On Inhumanity: Dehumanization and How to Resist It*. Oxford UP, 2020.
- Solomonoff, Ray. ‘A Formal Theory of Inductive Inference’, Part 1. Information and Control, 1964.
- Soutter, Nicholas Lamar. *The Water Thief*. The CreateSpace, 2012.
- Steinbeck, John. *Once There Was a War*. Viking, 1958.
- Swedberg, Richard, and Ola Agevall. 2016. *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts*. 2nd ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Szasz, Thomas S. *Ideology and Insanity: Essays on the Psychiatric Dehumanization*

- of Man*. Calder & Boyars, 1973.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Dover Thrift Edition, 1995.
- Turner, Bryan S. 1988. "Individualism, Capitalism and the Dominant Culture: A Note on the Debate." *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* vol. 24, no. 1.
- Twitchell, Elizabeth. "Dave Eggers's *What is the What*: Fictionalizing Trauma in the Era of Misery Literature." *American Literature*, vol. 83, no. 3, Oct. 2011.
- Wang, Yazhu Maggie, Sabine Matook, and Alan R. Dennis. "Unintended Consequences of Humanoid Service Robots: A Case Study of Public Service Organizations." *Journal of Business Research* vol. 174, 2024.
- Wilson, Daniel H. *Amped*. New York: The Knopf Doubleday, 2012.
- Wilson, Daniel H. *How to Survive a Robot Uprising*. Bloomsbury, 2005.
- Wilson, Daniel H. *Robogenesis*. New York: Doubleday, 2014.
- Wilson, Daniel H. *Robocalypse*. New York: Doubleday, 2011.
- Wilson, Daniel H. *The Andromeda Evolution*. Harper Collins, 2019.
- Wilson, Daniel H. *The Clockwork Dynasty*. New York: The Knopf Doubleday, 2017.
- Wirtz, Jochen, Werner Kunz, Stefanie Gruber, Vinh Lu, João Batista D. A. Paluch, and Paul Patterson. "Brave New World: Service Robots in the Frontline." *Journal of Service Management* vol. 29, no. 5, 2018.
- Witalec, Janet, editor. *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Gale, 2003.
- Wood, Ellen Meiksins. "Peasants and the Market Imperative: The Origins of Capitalism." In *Peasants and Globalization: Political Economy, Agrarian*

Transformation and Development, edited by A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi and Cristóbal Kay. London: Routledge, 2012.

Yousafzai, Malala. *We Are Displaced*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, United State of America, 2019.