Contesting Western Cyberfeminism: The Agency of Postcolonial Women and Utopian Hope in *The City Inside, Machinehood* and *Clone*

Thesis

In partial fulfillment of Master's Degree Program for Department of English for Languages and Literature

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M.S. English Literature

661/FLL/MSENG/F21

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD

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Registration No: **661-FLL/MSENG/F21**

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Abstract

Via the analysis of three Indian Anglophone dystopian novels *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside*, my thesis intervenes in postcolonial posthuman debates by postulating that the female protagonists in the selected works of fiction challenge the reductive approach of western cyberfeminism as it equates machine production with female emancipation. In so doing, it contests the idea proposed by Western cyberfeminism that technology is inherently emancipatory for all women. It also explores how these novels envision alternative realties that do not mirror their colonial past and neo-colonial present. It thus foregrounds the idea that the selected Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction not only challenges the exclusionary approach adopted by western cyberfeminists as they endorse techno-utopian hope without taking into consideration the lived realities of women from the Global South. Additionally, these works decentralize the Euro-centric idea of what constitutes the science fiction genre. My dissertation takes theoretical support from the works of Radhika Gajjala, Jasbir Puar, Judy Wajcman and Syed Mustafa Ali as I challenge the techno-utopian and reductive cyberfeminist ideas proposed by Donna J. Haraway and Sadie Plant. It also integrates the works of Suparno Banerjee to explore the ways in which Indian science fiction envisions alternative decolonial futures. Through a textual analysis of the selected fiction my thesis concludes that the postcolonial female protagonists do not seek emancipation or a denial of their biological sex through cyborgian enhancements, unlike the claim made by western cyberfeminism; instead they embrace their woman-ness and postcolonial identity to assert agency and challenge authoritarian structures as they envision alternative hopeful futures.

Key Terms: Western Cyberfeminism, Postcolonial Female Agency, Indian dystopian fiction, Alternative Futures, Utopian Hope

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I am grateful for the strength and guidance that Allah granted me so that I could complete this academic journey.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Asma Mansoor. Without her consistent support and guidance, I would not have been able to complete my dissertation. The detailed feedbacks, messages and voice notes helped me immensely to not only write more effectively but she practically guided me as how one conducts research. Ma'am, thankyou; you are literally the best and it has been an honor to be supervised by you.

Lastly, I am also extremely grateful to my friends because it was their company and support which kept me going during moments of doubt and despair.

Disclaimer

My thesis is not predicated on an outright rejection of cyberfeminism; rather, it seeks to challenge the exclusionary practices of Western cyberfeminism, particularly its tendency to equate technological advancement with female emancipation without taking into consideration the lived experiences of women in the Global South.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Imagine a world at the end of the twenty first century or a couple of centuries later in the twenty fourth century. In this world, the human race has not only made machines and robots but has also produced biologically modified clones that obey its orders. This massive technological advancement would perhaps mean the emancipation of man for he has successfully created a workforce for himself that can fulfill almost all his commands. But the question to ask is would this technological advancement emancipate all, irrespective of gender? To address this question, I turn to western cyberfeminists like Donna J. Haraway and Sadie Plant, according to whom, advancement in technology *is* in fact equal to female emancipation since it *can* enable women to overcome structural oppression in a patriarchal world. Both theorists contend that if women are introduced to technology and their lives are digitalized, it would grant them liberation and they would be able to compete with their male counterparts (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 151; Plant 46). However, I argue that when western cyberfeminism equates machine production with female emancipation, it does not take into consideration the lived realities of marginalized women or women belonging to the developing countries. While dealing with this problem, my study dives into postcolonial-posthuman scholarship as it explores how Indian dystopian fiction portrays postcolonial dystopian futuristic societies as feminist. In these futuristic settings, it is the postcolonial women who work against authoritarian regimes in order to bring peace to their societies.

Cyberfeminism, according to Jenny Sunden, can be defined as a critical analysis of cyberculture in relation to feminist thought (217). It thus evolved to become a critical position for interrogating

the gendered use of technology and its emancipatory uses for women. In this regard, Haraway published her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" in 1985 which introduced the concept of cyborg feminism—an idea that helped women learn how new technologies can help fight patriarchy. She established the fact that women need to become more proficient in technology usage in order to challenge the male-centric systems of domination ("A Cyborg Manifesto" 150). Although Haraway believes that technology is a product of capitalism, she also argued that it is simultaneously an asset for emancipating women. For her, a cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world (151) where it transcends the boundaries between nature and culture, thus rejecting the patriarchal ideas based on such differences. Thus, Haraway argues that technology is inherently liberatory and claimed that technological advancement can lead to female emancipation.

Extending Haraway's concept of female emancipation, another western cyberfeminist Plant coined the term "cyberfeminism" and contended that machine production is primarily synonymous with female emancipation (325). According to her, the miniaturization of computers and other media devices has paved ways for women to gain easy access to interlinked communication. She argues that modern feminism is marked by the emergence of networks and contacts where no centralized organization is required (328). She also postulated that via the internet, women can join different women-centered digital spaces which can result in providing an interlinked connection to women around the world. Plant has repeatedly argued that technology can be used by women for their emancipation; cyberspace is thus a familiar venue that can set women free as they challenge male supremacy by advancing themselves in technology. She believes that once women join digital spaces by using home computers, they become a productive part of the society by deploying technological devices for their emancipation (325-336). The works of both Haraway and Plant primarily regard advancement in technology as an emancipatory power for women and believe

that machines and technology can set women free from patriarchal constraints such as inaccessibility to financial freedom and learning opportunities. However, what I find problematic with their optimism is that instead of taking into consideration the complexities of the lived situation of women outside the West, both Haraway and Plant adopt a reductive approach. They do so by ignoring the nuanced positionality of these postcolonial women. By flagging the nuanced positionality of postcolonial women, what I draw attention to are the ways in which the socio-historical baggage and economic status of these women continue to be influenced by their past.

In order to contest both Haraway's and Plant's notions of inclusive cyberfeminism, my research takes recourse to Gajjala's arguments which talk about marginalized South Asian women and their relationship with technology. In my dissertation, I have contested the idea of inclusive cyberfeminism, as proposed by Haraway and Plant, which fails to talk about the ground issues that the women from the Global South need emancipation from. This idea of western cyberfeminism as a reductive approach has also been discussed by Vandana Shiva in her book *Close to Home: Women Reconnect Ecology, Health and Development*. Shiva contends that western cyberfeminists should not propose technological and managerial fixes for the empowerment of South Asian women while ignoring their basic problems (170). What she means is that the postcolonial woman does not need reforms in terms of technology while the issues of her situatedness and economic instability remain completely ignored. Likewise, Gajjala argues that the cyberfeminist ideology proposed by liberal feminists has indeed put women from the non-western world in cyberspace but all the while completely ignoring the issues related to their socio-cultural and economically situated identities ("South Asian Digital Diasporas" 42). What she means is that most South Asian women share a colonial history of oppression. Even today, the postcolonial woman lives in neo-colonial society and has limited resources due to economic constraints. Thus for the postcolonial

woman, cyberspace does not act as a medium of emancipation. That is why the western woman's narrative of emancipation via technology that ignores the situatedness of these women re-echoes colonial discourses where it is the white woman who is trying to emancipate the brown woman ("South Asian Digital Diasporas" 43-44). Gajjala believes that since the world has become a global village, therefore the women from the South need to be facilitated with technological advancement, but she simultaneously emphasizes that for the women of the formerly colonized countries, mere advancement in technology is not enough for their emancipation as their situatedness is completely different from that of women in the West. The status of a postcolonial woman is not shaped by her present only, rather it is influenced by her colonial past that witnessed the political and economic exploitation of her land. Many western cyberfeminists believe that they can help women in the South by providing them with easy access to the digital world via technology (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto 32; Plant 328). Conversely, according to Gajjala, without considering their lived situations, it is quite problematic to place the non-western and indigenous populations on the global cyber-spatial map for their economic freedom ("Third World Perspective on Cyberfeminism" 618). She further argues that for a third world woman situated in a rural village in India it is the failure of technology which provides her with a better day, "as for her in a land of faulty cables and unpredictable electrical supply, her children drink milk on the days that the bus does not run, because on those days the milk cannot be taken to the city and is not worth money" ("South Asian Digital Diasporas" 41). The complete disregard for this lived situation of the woman from the South recalls the savior complex which was prevalent in the colonial times when the colonial mission was to civilize the colonized through homogenization of knowledge underlined by a complete disregard for the local culture and knowledge.

Western cyberfeminists attempt to include non-western women into cyberspace on their own

terms. Gajjala argues that if the cyberfeminist agenda is to produce countercultures in order to subvert the existing technological environment that can empower women, it is important to study individuals within their respective complex global and local contexts. Therefore, in my research, with the help of selected Indian dystopian fiction, I explore how Indian Anglophone authors have introduced female protagonists who try to subvert such modes of technological advancements which do not contribute to their emancipation. With the help of the above mentioned theorists, my research contends that the western cyberfeminist idea of female emancipation cannot be applied uniformly to the postcolonial society for it does not take into consideration the socio-economic and class related issues of the third world woman. Western cyberfeminist discourse ignores both their situatedness and the hierarchies resulting from the unequal distribution of technology. That is why while western cyberspace does provide an interconnected network to the postcolonial woman but its complete disregard for her socio-economic and class related issues makes it discriminatory, a dynamic which negates its emancipatory potential.

In my research, I also argue that the protagonists have to struggle constantly in order to establish a peaceful world where everyone can co-exist in harmony. The female characters in the selected novels subvert the negative tilt of dystopian fiction as they hope to create a utopian world. Therefore, further drawing upon work of Suparno Banerjee, I have argued that utopian hope is introduced in the dystopian world via the female characters of the selected Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction. By subverting embedded dystopias and introducing agentic postcolonial female protagonists, the selected works of speculative fiction aim to decolonize the Western science fiction genre. I will expand on this argument by engaging with Syed Mustafa Ali's work, which emphasizes the need to resist the West's technological hegemony through decolonial means. I draw upon both postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, as each theoretical domain addresses a

different dimension of my dissertation. Through the postcolonial lens, I problematize how the colonial past continues to shape the neocolonial present and future of the protagonists in the selected novels. However, I do not restrict my analysis to postcolonial critique alone, since it often remains bound within the East/West binary. To move beyond these limitations, I also draw upon the decolonial framework, which substantiates my argument that for postcolonial female protagonists to resist technological hegemony, it is imperative to delink from Eurocentric epistemologies. In the selected texts, the female characters resist neocolonial domination not only by reclaiming agency but also by imagining alternative onto-epistemological realities and futures outside the straightjacket of Western paradigms. Employing both postcolonial and decolonial perspectives strengthens my argument that biotechnological exploitation of female protagonists cannot be resisted through critique alone; rather, it is imperative to envision new ways of being and knowing made possible through decoloniality.

Bringing together all the ideas, my study contributes to postcolonial-posthuman scholarship by exploring how Indian speculative fiction portrays postcolonial dystopian futuristic societies as feminist. Previously, through feminist science fiction the role of female resilience in a dystopian world has been explored. For instance, feminist utopian theorists like Sally Miller Gearhart, Joanna Russ and Ursula Le Guin explore the reversal of dominant male power with female power via dystopian writings focusing on the idea of separatist utopias (Marcellino 204). However, what makes my research relevant is its exploration of the postcolonial Indian woman's intervention in the western cyberfeminist space as she exerts her own agency while navigating the legacy of her long-lasting colonial history. Moreover, I have also explored how Indian Anglophone speculative fiction has subverted the despair embedded in dystopian fiction as the characters manifest utopian hope amidst dystopian anxiety. The ensuing discussion unravels these ideas step by step.

1.1. Rethinking Western Cyberfeminism and the Agentic Postcolonial Woman

According to Gajjala, western cyberfeminists like Haraway and Plant analyze the situation of South Asian women according to their own idea of what constitutes female emancipation where they believe that "more women on the internet assures a more egalitarian world" ("Third World Perspective on Cyberfeminism" 618). However, in the selected Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction, that is, *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside*, the female protagonists who are situated in different parts of a futuristic India are not seen as emancipated via technological advancement as has been proposed by Haraway and Plant. Rather, the protagonists are seen to be resisting the monopoly of technology and Bots, that is, robots, in order to retrieve their human supremacy over machines. Therefore, in this research, I have argued that the female protagonists of *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside* are challenging the western notion of cyberfeminism as they fight against technological advancement which is complicit with their marginalization. The selected Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction provides a viable site of analysis as in Divya's *Machinehood,* the protagonist Welga Ramirez, who is an executive bodyguard, tries to save humanity from a terrorist organization called the Machinehood. The story takes place in Chennai, India in the year 2095. Since each and every act is recorded through microdrones, hence people do not indulge in any extreme act of violence even if they record protests (24). However, during a conference, one of Welga's clients, who is a funder for pills that can enhance human productivity, is attacked by Bots who are associated with the Machinehood. The terrorist organization, Machinehood, demands from the funders to stop the production and supply of the pills. However, it is impossible to give up the pills as it is the only way that humans can keep up with machines and their productivity in 2095. Gradually, people find themselves losing their jobs as they are replaced by Bots in every sphere of life. After taking a certain type of pill, Welga's body shows

signs of spasms (22); but as she cannot risk losing her productivity for she has to stay vigilant all the time while providing security to her high profile clients, she continues taking her pills.

In Chabria's *Clone,* the protagonist, Aa-Aa Clone 14/54/G, is a mutant in a hierarchized twenty fourth century India. The mutants are clones made from the DNA of humans—who are known as Originals in this world—often combined with genetic material derived from animals. Chabria draws the world of clones alongside the world of humans which she has referred to as a "Global Community" (22). This Global Community primarily comprises humans only, while the clones which are made from the DNA of both humans and animals are divided into hierarchical categories where they are required to fulfill the commands of the Global Community. Unlike other biologically modified mutants, Aa-Aa Clone 14/54/G challenges the hegemony of the Global Community. Through mutation, the memories of the clones are erased; however, in the case of Aa-Aa Clone 14/54/G, her inner monologue shows that she remembers the events from her Original's past. Moreover, she wants to be understood by those around her instead of mechanically following orders only. In this biologically altered world, the mutants are constructed while following a strict protocol where the memories of their Originals are completely erased. The mutant Aa-Aa Clone 14/54/G, on the other hand, not only gains memory but also starts getting visitations about the complex historical setting of her Original who was a woman living at the end of the twenty-first century. Once the authorities realize that the clone is no longer a part of the mutant community as she refuses to abide by the rules, she is subjected to a different kind of painful routine where her physical strengths are tested. Although the clone is strictly punished for her acts of defiance, she keeps on exploring the memories from her Original's past. Moreover, Aa-Aa Clone 14/54/G resists the drugs and begins to menstruate unlike all the other mutants. With the help of technology, the Global Community tries to create mutants which are free of human traits, and specifically designed

to obey orders only. This application of technology manipulates the clones instead of facilitating them. In the case of Aa-Aa Clone 14/54/G, her Original is a third world woman from a twenty first century India who has been biologically altered but in twenty fourth century India, her genetic code is again subjected to manipulation in order to fulfill the commands of the creators of its mutant. Similarly, in Basu's *The City Inside*, the female protagonist Joey tries to restore lost humanity in a highly digitalized world. Joey lives in a futuristic city of India where controlling the masses through surveillance has been normalized. In Joey's city, everything—ranging from toothbrushes to tattoos—is a surveillance device which makes it very hard for her to have control over any aspect of her life, and this sense of discomfort never really gets dissipated. There are a number of protests against the political authorities in the country, however no significant step can be taken against the authoritarian regime because everyone is controlled via surveillance devices. In the novel, eventually, Joey decides to stand up against injustices even though technology, in the form of invasive surveillance, makes it harder to resist the prevalent hegemonic structures. My research, therefore, focuses on the idea of female protagonists reclaiming their agency while they try to restore the normal patterns of an otherwise disturbed world. It also explores how Welga Ramirez, Joey and Aa-Aa Clone 14/54/G rethink their future and resist technological advancement as they work through different kinds of oppression in their dystopian worlds. While fighting against technological advancements, these female characters try to exert their own agency as they deflect the idea of emancipation linked with advancement in techno-culture.

In all three novels it can be seen that technology is not completely emancipatory, unlike the claim made by western cyberfeminists Haraway and Plant. In *Machinehood*, Ramirez has to take pills even if her health condition does not allow her to, since she has to keep her productivity level high in order to compete with technology. Primarily, scientific inventions and machines were designed

to *help* humans achieve this objective; however, in Ramirez's world the machines strive to *replace* the humans completely. Therefore, Ramirez has to work around the clock and fight against machines in order to reclaim the superiority of humans over machines. Similarly, in the case of *Clone,* the Aa-Aa Clone 14/54/G has to resist the Global Community, which comprises humans, so that she can keep remembering the complex but tragic past of her original. Unlike western cyberfeminists' claims, which associate technology with the emancipation of women, we further see that Joey from *The City Inside,* feels uncomfortable because of excessive surveillance as it stops her from raising her voice against the unjust practices of political authorities. Through their resistance, the female protagonists of these novels work for a peaceful future where machines and humans can co-exist in harmony and the human consciousness is not easily replaced.

1.2. Imagining Hope and Conceptualising an Alternative Future

As the female protagonists of the selected Indian dystopian exert their agency to provide an alternative peaceful future, they introduce the idea of hope for a future that is neither bleak nor dark. Raffaella Baccolini explains that dystopian fiction also has the element of hope in it, however this hope exists only outside of the story (510). What Baccolini means is that dystopian fiction comes as a warning sign about a future that is both bleak and destructive. This warning tends to prepare people to avoid destruction which might become too difficult to stop (519). Despite that, Baccolini argues that utopian hope can only exist in dystopian fiction if these works have open endings where the characters are left to deal with their own choices. Contrary to Baccolini, my research primarily focuses on the idea that utopian hope can also exist inside the story amidst dystopian anxiety instead of being relegated to an unseen future that begins after the conclusion of the novel. With this idea in mind, I read how the selected Indian dystopian fictional works deflect the concept of pessimism. They offer a vision of a future world where authoritarian regimes are

challenged by the female characters as they strive to restore the normal order of events. By authoritarian regimes, I refer to bodies like the terrorist organization, Machinehood in Divya's novel *Machinehood*, the Global Community in Chabria's *Clone* and the unjust institutions in Basu's *The City Inside*. These authoritarian organizations try to take control of humans for they believe in the supremacy of machines and Bots over human consciousness. The female protagonists of these novels need to resist the technological devices employed by these authorities in order to bring peace to an otherwise disturbed world.

I further contend that Indian dystopian fiction attempts to subvert and modify many elements which constitute the dystopian genre such as pessimism, chaos and conflict. I argue that utopian hope is introduced in the dystopian world via the female characters by these Indian authors. In doing so, I have drawn upon the work of Banerjee who, in his book *Indian Science Fiction Patterns, History and Hybridity*, claims that Indian science fiction negotiates a multiplicity of oppressions amidst technoscientific advancements through utopian hope (101). By multiplicity of oppressions, Banerjee implies that certain science fiction works have to tackle political problems that foreground India's relationship with colonial and neo-colonial powers. Meanwhile, other such works address the connections of gender with these political formations (138). Banerjee further explains that Indian science fiction negotiates with its dystopian spaces by creating a utopian world through its protagonists. This utopian world is built upon the impulses arising out of gender equality and other anti-oppressive agendas. According to him, unlike European science fiction, the protagonists in Indian science fiction do not aim for colonizing missions. He goes on to explain that even if an imperial and colonial context is created in the text, it is subverted with the help of the protagonists and their journeys. What Banerjee means is that the protagonists in Indian dystopian fiction work for an egalitarian society rather than desiring mastery over foreign spaces

and objects. Drawing upon Banerjee's idea of utopian hope, I argue that Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction by Basu, Chabria and Divya attempts to subvert the generally accepted elements of dystopian fiction as their protagonists resist all such advancements which can disturb the normal pattern of events. Ramirez, Aa-Aa Clone 14/54/G and Joey try to work for a world that is peaceful and where humans and technology can co-exist in harmony. These writers and their female characters are rewriting the elements of dystopian fiction for they struggle to create a society where there are no wars or class divides and the individuality of each person remains intact. This makes my research significant as it explores how Indian futuristic fiction maps out a postcolonial feminist future where the postcolonial female protagonists work against authoritarian regimes in order to build a peaceful society. This research also subverts the elements of despair in dystopian fiction because the characters engender utopian hope amidst dystopian anxiety. In *Machinehood*, *Clone* and *The City Inside*, the female protagonists challenge technological advancements as they fight against authoritarian structures that comprise of machines and thus resist both biological modification and digital surveillance respectively. The protagonists are compelled to challenge the technological advancements on different fronts in order to restore peace and harmony.

1.3.Research Objectives

With this background in mind, my research revolves around the following research objectives:

1. To explore via the selected texts how cyberfeminism, as a western ideology, ignores the colonial past of the non-western women while it equates machine production with female emancipation.

2. To investigate how the portrayal of female protagonists in the selected Indian dystopian works challenges the western notion of cyberfeminism as they exert their agency as postcolonial women.

3. To explore the different ways in which the selected dystopian works *Clone, Machinehood* and *The City Inside*, despite their dystopian tilt, subvert the generally accepted ideas of futuristic fiction.

1.4. Research Questions

The above research objectives inform the following research questions on which this study is centered:

1. In what ways do the selected texts show that western cyberfeminism is reductive and exclusionary?

2. In what diverse ways does the agency of postcolonial female protagonists play out in the selected Indian dystopian works to challenge the western notion of cyberfeminism?

3. How do the selected fictional works subvert the generally accepted ideas of futuristic fiction?

1.5. Methodological Approach and Theoretical Itinerary

In the course of my current research, I contest the reductive approach that western cyberfeminism adopts when it indulges in techno-utopian hope. With the help of scholarly works by decolonial theorists like Ali and postcolonial South Asian cyberfeminist Gajjala, I rebut the claim made by western cyberfeminists Haraway and Plant. Moreover, I also argue that the female protagonists resist the multiple form of oppression inflicted upon their bodies on account of their gender and postcolonial subjectivity. While doing so, the protagonists envision alternative realities filled with hope for a better future. In order to explore South Asian futurism as alternative realities, my study draws upon the works of Suparno Banerjee. In this dissertation Gajjala, Ali and Banerjee form the core theoretical grounding, as their works directly engage with the neo-colonial exploitation of

postcolonial women, the decolonial critique of technological hegemony and element of hope in indigenous futures. While not constituting the core of my theoretical framework, my analysis also requires supplementary insights from the works of Jasbir Puar and Judy Wajcman. Puar's theorization of biopolitical strategy substantiates my argument that the female characters in the selected novels are rendered as sites of data extraction and experimentation. Likewise, Wajcman's work on gender and technology strengthens my claim that technological advancement does not benefit women in a uniform emancipatory manner.

Methodologically, my research is situated within the qualitative paradigm, examining how Indian dystopian fiction portrays postcolonial women navigating technologically advanced futures while striving to reclaim their agency. My sites of analysis comprise the selected Indian dystopian fiction *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside* as I focus on the neo-colonial practices of bodily exploitation of the protagonists. The textual analysis of the works serves as the primary method, as it facilitates my interpretation of the selected novels. Through this approach, I address the research questions by drawing on textual evidences from the speculative fictional works.

1.6. Chapter Overview

This thesis starts with an introduction that introduces my topic area and comprises problem statement, research questions, research objectives and methodology of the whole research. The introduction also includes significance and delimitations of my research.

The second chapter titled, "Western Cyberfeminism, Postcolonialism and Alternative Futures: Key Arguments and Debates" comprises the pre-existing debates in the area of cyberfeminism and postcolonial feminism and identifies my unique contribution to these debates.

The third chapter, that is, "Subverting Cyberfeminist Exclusivity: The Postcolonial Woman in a

Dystopian World" analyzes the selected Indian Anglophone Dystopian fiction in the light of the selected theorists. Via the novels, it foregrounds how the western cyberfeminists ideals cannot be uniformly applied to a postcolonial woman. It also analyzes how western cyberfeminism is not inclusive and disregards the colonial histories of marginalized women when it equates technological advancement with female emancipation.

The fourth chapter titled, "The Agentic Postcolonial Woman and Utopian Hope in Indian Anglophone Dystopian Fiction" explores how the selected Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction subverts the despair underlying the dystopian fiction as it brings in utopian hope. This is done so by referring to the three Indian Anglophone Dystopian works *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside*.

In the concluding chapter titled, "Postcolonial Indian Anglophone Speculative Fiction: Providing an Alternative Future" the discussion has outlined the conclusion of research based on textual references and in the light of theoretical evidences by different theorists.

Chapter 2

Western Cyberfeminism, Postcolonialism and Alternative Futures: Key Arguments and Debates

In this chapter**,** I have discussed the problematic approach taken by western cyberfeminism when it equates female emancipation with technological advancements. What actually makes this machine-woman relationship challenging is the reductive approach adopted by some cyberfeminists from the West as they turn a blind eye to the lived realities of a non-western woman or simply minimize them. In this context, I draw upon the works of Gajjala, Ali and Faith Wilding to contest this non-inclusive idea of emancipation. By formulating a nexus between Gajjala's idea of a South Asian cyberspace and Ali's concept of the need for a decolonial computing method, I further discuss the role of the selected fictional works in challenging the western idea of cyberfeminism. In this chapter I have also taken on board Judy Wajcman and Anne Balsamo to help me substantiate my argument that Haraway's idea of projecting a cyborg identity on a woman is not liberatory. Wajcman highlights how difficult circumstances are for postcolonial women in, for instance, Africa working on tech-equipment under harsh conditions (122), whereas Balsamo postulates that it is not possible for a cyborg to act as a liberatory figure since it has already been described as a female in popular culture (39). Furthermore, I supplement my argument by opposing Plant's idea of machines as emancipatory tools. According to Plant, since women are "better culturally and psychologically" prepared for the work habits of the new millennium, they will do better than their male counterparts in a more highly technologised world (324). By integrating the stance of Gajjala, Balsamo, Wilding and Wajcman I also articulate the same belief that women, especially those from Global South, cannot be emancipated via technology alone.

In this chapter I have also discussed that the selected Anglophone Indian dystopian fiction subverts the idea of pessimism that is associated with dystopian fiction and presents an alternative image of a future that is not only feminist in nature but also entails utopian hope for a better world. Previously, some Indian dystopian works have played on the idea of utopian lands where matriarchy rules and there are no men but only women. For instance, in Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain short story "Sultana's Dream", there is a Ladyland which the protagonist Sultana visits in her dream. Ladyland is the portrayal of a feminist utopia where gender roles are reversed. It was "Sultana's Dream" which introduced the idea of a feminist utopia in South Asian speculative fiction. However, the story does not address the inequalities of caste and class in perpetuating gender discrimination. My research aims to address this gap as it examines the idea of a utopian land that could be extended to such a place where women can co-exist and have agency regardless of class and caste. In *Clone, Machinehood* and *The City Inside,* what makes the futures feminist is that the protagonists do not need complete reversal of gender roles to exert their agency as they challenge technological advancements. In order to explore the concept of utopian hope for a feminist future in the selected work of fiction, I incorporate the works of Banerjee, Mark Dery and Nalo Hopkinson. While Dery proposes the idea of afrofuturism— that is, black futures—as alternative futures in African futuristic fiction, Banerjee primarily focuses on the subversive potential of South Asian speculative fiction as it challenges the western ideals associated with dystopian fiction.

2.1. Decentering Western Cyberfeminism and Formulation of Indigenous Cyberspaces

While it is true that technology provides women from the Global South with opportunities to mobilize and connect with the rest of the world, its distribution is not uniform. Rapid advancements in technology have helped humans lead easier lives as machines have been assisting human beings

in their routine tasks. With the help of technology and the internet, women from the Global South have been able to access the digital world by joining cyberspace. However, technology has not been emancipatory for everyone equally. For instance, according to Gajjala, in India only 25 % of workers engaged in IT related services directly benefit from it. Despite living in a developing country, these workers have lifestyles similar to those working in the Silicon Valley, Tokyo or London ("South Asian Digital Diasporas" 43). Within the Global South, the distribution of technology is therefore intertwined with class dynamics. The mobility that comes with cyberspaces provides opportunity to only those who enjoy a privileged position, whom Gajjala calls "internet elites" ("South Asian digital diasporas" 43). Gajjala offers a critical examination of western cyberfeminists' idea of techno-utopian hope. The techno-utopian idea is explored by both Haraway and Plant as they advocate the subversive potential of technology. In "A Cyborg Manifesto", Haraway has created the image of a cyborg as a merger between machines and humans, and argues that the boundaries between body and technology are socially inscribed, hence these discrete binaries between animal/human, organism/machine and male/female are no longer firm. Haraway extends her argument and challenges the idea of gender in her essay. She contends that there is nothing "female" that naturally binds women; her idea of a cyborg is basically a feminist figure that transcends all forms of ontological rigidity and binarization (155). According to Haraway, these binaries pertaining to gender, class or race have been forced on us by the terrible historical experiences of capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism to give a false sense of unity that emanates out of a central male principle. She contends that the anthropocentric male and the disposable category of female which it engenders can be subverted through the cyborgisation of bodies (155). The cyborg as a posthuman entity blurs the lines between human and non-human entities while it also rejects fixed gender identities. According to Haraway, the cyborg thus defies speciesist and

gender-based boundaries. For this reason, Haraway explores the idea of a cyborg as a symbol of resistance and argues that accepting "cyborg identities" leads to a utopian dream of a world without genders (157). What I argue here is that Haraway's idea of a cyborg as an emancipatory tool does not apply to a postcolonial woman from the Global South whose existence is mired within complex colonial history and class dynamics. The postcolonial female's history of marginalization and exploitation cannot be erased while reducing it to the level of a technological commodity.

On a similar note, in her book *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics,* Katherine Hayles argues that while discussing posthuman bodies, the materiality of the human body cannot be excluded since "the body is the net result of thousands of years of sedimented evolutionary history and it is naive to think that this history does not affect human behaviors at every level of thought and action" (284). Hayles contends that it is important to note that a posthuman body in its true sense would not negate its material history. Instead of preferring materiality over abstraction, or vice versa, the posthuman bodies should be perceived as assemblages and the relationship between flesh and machine should be fluid. Hayles' idea of the cyborg, however, is different from what Haraway proposes. While making this claim that the cyborgian identity can dismantle the binaries between human and machines, Haraway does not take into account the idea that human flesh is a mixture of both material reality and information. By subtracting the history of different forms of marginalization enacted upon the human body and preferring information over material reality, Haraway's conception of a universal cyborgian identity is not emancipatory, especially for a woman with colonial history of bodily oppression and violence. In a similar vein, while rebutting Haraway's idea of cyborg, Asma Mansoor argues that without engaging with the colonial and neo-colonial violence inscribed on the minds and bodies of the colonized, specifically on women, it is not possible to imagine a future without

binaries (4). Despite the progress that technology has made, the postcolonial female remains enslaved as her body is subjected to technological experimentation in a manner similar to her bodily exploitation that was a crucial part of her colonial history. In my study, therefore, I contest Haraway's idea of a de-essentialised cyborgian identity. Haraway contends that her introduction of the concept of a cyborg provided a critique of feminist identity politics that believed in the idea of an essential, shared female identity. This cyborgian figure, Haraway argues, also criticizes the idea of humanism which believed in an essential, shared human identity—one that is inherently male—that helped in distinguishing humans from animals and machines. According to Haraway, a cyborg thus implies overcoming the classical categories and this hybridization between humans and technology gives rise to new epistemological configurations that allows new ways of thinking and perceiving things in hybrids (160). By hybrids what Haraway means is that there are no longer machines and organisms, men and women, rather the binaries get blurred which gives birth to cyborgs. Despite her utopian claim, I find this hybrid, de-essentialised cyborgian identity problematic because its conception would mean a universal figure that fails to categorize the experiences of women based not only on their gender but also race and class. Mansoor argues that the de-essentialising of a cyborgian body tends to equate all forms of marginalization that women across the race spectrum experience so that a de-essentialised cyborg would not be able to erase these forms of marginalization, leaving them hanging like loose threads (4). In line with this argument, I attempt to develop a nexus between Mansoor's and Ali's argument as they both find it problematic to universalize women's experiences. Ali argues that universalizing women's experiences is basically a "de-racing" of the female bodies which means that the body cannot be an abstract concept (7). Therefore, Haraway's cyborgian feminism that claims to provide opportunities in order to escape oppressive binaries cannot work for oppressed women whose

materiality is erased or ignored.

In my dissertation, I proceed to throw light on the different ways in which the selected Indian dystopian fiction demonstrates that western cyberfeminism ignores the colonial past of non-western women while it equates machine production with female emancipation. For that purpose, I take one of the selected fictional works *Clone* on board and contest the idea of techno-utopian hope associated with the concept of cyborg proposed by Haraway. I argue that the selected texts highlight that the biologically modified clone of a postcolonial Indian woman is still subjected to a series of experiments in order to have a control of its bodily existence. In *Clone*, the protagonist is a fourteenth generation clone of a twenty-first century Indian woman. Clone Aa-Aa 14/54/G's Original dies moments before making an important announcement. During mutation, the clones are designed in such a manner that they are unable to retrieve the memories of their Originals. However, when Clone Aa-Aa 14/54/G shows aberrations and experiences different visitations, the Global Community decides to monitor it in order to successfully acquire that important announcement which its Original could not deliver. The Clone is subjected to extreme torture so that important data could be retrieved from its visitations. In a post-gender world, despite its cyborgian identity, 14/54/G's body is still subjected to experimentation that even involves the biological exploitation of her reproductive system. She thus remains enslaved thereby negating Haraway's prediction of liberation from constraints of categorization via a cyborg existence.

The idea of liberation via cyborgian identity has also been explored by Plant. Extending on Haraway's work, Plant in 1996 gave a similar idea that technology can have a subversive potential for females. In her essay, "On the Matrix: Cyberfeminist Simulations", Plant discusses how technological advancement that leads to the potential merger between machines and women is a "revolt of an emergent system which includes women and computers against a world view and

material reality of a patriarchy that still seeks to subdue them" (325). Plant argues that when technology had first emerged, it was considered solely a masculine domain; however, the addition of miniature computers in households meant a merger between technology and gender as women started entering the world of machines that helped them subvert societal norms (330). By the subversion of societal norms, Plant implied that once a computer no longer remained an intimidating object and women started joining digital spaces, they experienced a change. According to Plant, in the digital undergrounds previously technology had been associated with men, however later, with the rise of computers, old identities collapsed and gender identities became blurred which gave women a new meaning of existence. Women started using mini computers in domestic settings and technology no longer remained a domain of men only. While there is no doubt that technology did provide women with new opportunities, however the question remains the same: whether technology is emancipatory for all the women regardless of class and race? Gajjala also questions that "If cyberspace is produced at the expense of millions of women and men all over the world who are not even able to enjoy its conveniences, how can we make claims that Information and Communication Technology are changing the world for the better" ("South Asian Digital Diasporas and Cyberfeminist Webs" 48). Both Plant and Haraway advocate for a techno-utopian world where technology can help women in achieving emancipation and freedom. While technology does provide these women with a platform that connects them with the rest of the world, it still does not come close to the idea of the emancipation of these women. According to a 2023 report published by the UNICEF, nine out of ten young women and teenaged girls in third world countries have no access to the internet.[1] With limited resources and relatively

[1] For further information please see, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/27/unicef-digital-divide-hits-women-harder-in-poor-countries

poor living conditions, with the exception of a specific privileged section of the society, for a third world woman access to the internet is a luxury.

In my dissertation, I contend that these western cyberfeminists have not been able to adopt an inclusive approach while they talk about the liberatory potential of technology. Wilding in her work, "Where is the Feminism in Cyberfeminism?", criticizes the works of both Haraway and Plant as she believes that when cyberfeminists attempt to formulate cyberfeminist politics, it should not be limited to a specific section of the society. Wilding argues that many western cyberfeminists indulge in techno-utopian expectations that cyberspaces provide women with opportunities to create fluid identities. They also believe that in the digital spaces, the concept of economic position and race do not matter; that in fact women can recode, redesign and reprogram information technology to help change feminine condition" (Wilding 7-9). While the idea of creating emancipatory spaces with the help of technology is not completely wrong, it is important to acknowledge the hierarchical structures based on class differences especially in developing countries. This is because the possibility to create fluid gender identities in the digital world "is constrained by the material world" (Wajcman 292). In the material world, where technological as well as economic power rest with a select few, it is not entirely possible to rely on virtual spaces for freedom from gender constraints. On a similar note, in their work *Data Feminism*, Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein argue that when data teams are controlled by the dominant groups of the society, it results in the exclusion of other identities and perspectives (242). This idea of exclusion at the hands of those who are privileged is emphasized by Mansoor as well. She argues that "with the creation of cyborg, history can easily be uninscribed by those who have the technological capacity to do so resulting in a more egalitarian future (4). Even if these women from the developing countries join cyberspaces, it does not provide them with any freedom from

hierarchical structures (Mansoor 3; Wilding 7). In line with the arguments of Wilding, Mansoor and Wajcman, I problematize the reductive approach adopted by the western cyberfeminist ideology. The problem with western cyberfeminism is that it overlooks the colonial history and class dynamics of a third world woman. Some cyberfeminists from the West celebrate this idea of "universal sisterhood" forged through electronic communications (Fernandez & Wilding 23). This concept of universal sisterhood is what makes western cyberfeminism problematic as it presents itself as inclusive when in reality it caters to a specific audience only, which comprises women from the privileged stratum of the world. Moreover, proposing the idea of "universal sisterhood" means ignoring the colonial past and imperial present of third world woman because by proposing universality, the distinct situatedness of a postcolonial woman is undermined. Maria Fernandez and Wilding in their work "Situating Cyberfeminism" discuss how western cyberfeminist writings "assume an educated, white, upper-middle-class readership […] and ironically this attitude replicates the damaging universalism of old-style feminism (21). This preoccupation of western cyberfeminists with techno-utopian expectations ignores the complex position of women from third world countries. For a more nuanced and informed practice of cyberfeminist politics, Wilding argues that it is therefore necessary that "the histories of imperialist and colonial domination — and resistance to them —are taken into consideration ("Where is Feminism in Cyberfeminism" 7). The conception of an inclusive cyberfeminist idea in response to the reductive approach adopted by western cyberfeminists is crucial to formulating indigenous cyberspaces.

Wajcman in her book *Technofeminism* contests the idea of the liberatory potential of technology. She emphasizes the need to highlight the labor done by women of color while manufacturing machines and other tech-products (120). She points out that, "for a young woman in the West, her silver cell phone is experienced as a liberating extension of her body. The social relations of

production that underpin its existence are invisible to her" (121). According to Wajcman, these social relations include manufacturing material for digital devices in Central Africa under labor conditions (121). While technology does play a significant role in providing means of emancipation, it does not necessarily mean the same for women living in third world postcolonial countries. For women of color, working in technology manufacturing industries has not erased their oppression; it has merely re-perpetuated their oppression in a new work place (Booth & Flanagan 27). These women from the third world countries put in their best work while manufacturing tech-related products but it does not contribute towards their own emancipation, rather they have to continue working under harsh conditions as has been pointed out by Wajcman as well. Similarly, Aguilar García argues that Haraway's idea of a techno-utopian world does not take into consideration material reality and assumes that her cyborg figure will be free from constraints of race, gender and class. She further argues that while a mobile phone can be a source of mobility for women, its availability is limited to only western white world (qtd. in Elisa Sued 98). Here, I reiterate that technology in the developing countries is not emancipatory for everyone since its distribution is mired within class dynamics.

Keeping in mind this take by Wajcman, Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth on western cyberfeminism and its liberatory potential, I highlight the fact that selected Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction and their female protagonists situated in technologically altered worlds are not emancipated, rather they have to challenge these technological advancements in order to regain their agency. The protagonists in the novels are not underprivileged in a conventional manner, for all three protagonists Welga, Joey and Aa-Aa 14/54/G do not have financial problems. Rather, it is their bodies which are subjugated and technology does not bring in the promised emancipation. In *Machinehood,* Welga Ramirez has to consume productivity enhancing pills in order to provide

her services as a bodyguard to humans who produce pills that increase productivity in humans in order to compete with machines. Ramirez notices changes in her body like spasms and muscle contractions. Moreover, the pills have an adverse effect on her reproductive system, but she continues taking them out of obligation to her duties both as a human and bodyguard. Similarly, in *Clone* the Clone Aa-Aa 14/54/G is designed in such a way that it has to stay productive and carry out the orders of its manufacturers. In *Machinehood*, it is 2095 while in *Clone* the story takes place in the twenty-fourth century where human cloning is a norm. Similarly, in Basu's *The City Inside*, the protagonist Joey is living in a highly digitalized world; however, this is a world where surveillance devices are interwoven with human flesh. Joey carries a surveillance device in her smart tattoo which practically makes her a cyborg, that is, a merger of a machine and human flesh. However, in a manner very similar to the other two protagonists, Joey also is not emancipated via her cyborg identity, rather her identity is reduced to a technological commodity against her will. Despite their cyborgian identity, the protagonists remain subjugated which also negates Haraway's claim that cyborgisation of human body leads to emancipation. Taking into account Haraway's idea of a cyborg, Balsamo argues that although Haraway believes that the boundary between technology and human is arbitrary, yet "she explicitly maps the identity of woman onto the image of the cyborg" (Balsamo 40). By this what Balsamo means is that the cyborgian identity is the product of the same cultural interactions which gives birth to the identity of the woman. She adds that since "woman and cyborg are simultaneously symbolically and biologically produced and reproduced through social interactions" (40), hence the cyborg identity despite its existence in a world that is without dualistic binaries does not really provide women freedom. The identities of both women and cyborgs are nevertheless influenced by the same cultural environment since Haraway's cyborg does not exist outside of it. Balsamo's criticism of Haraway's idea of a cyborg

as an emancipatory figure is crucial to my argument as I problematize how the cyborg protagonists in *Clone, Machinehood* and *The City Inside* are not liberated rather they remain co-opted within oppressed spaces owing to their inferior race as postcolonial Indian bodies. While cyberspaces and cyborg culture seem "to represent a territory free from the burdens of history, it will, in effect, serve as another site for the technological and no less conventional inscriptions of the gendered race marked body" (Balsamo 131). Balsamo's theorization means that even in a technologically advanced world, a postcolonial cybernetic organism would be unable to escape its history of racial prejudices. This rebuts the claim made by some western cyberfeminists that cyborg is an embodiment of a post-gender world. In the selected fictional works, the female cyborgs are situated in the formerly colonized India, therefore as Balsamo argues, their cyborgian identities continue to be effected by their colonial history even in a highly advanced world. Haraway's claim that cyborgian identity can erase the traces of colonial history is not possible as is evident in the case of Welga, Joey and Clone Aa-Aa 14/54/G because their bodies continue to carry the traces of exploitation due to their racialized gender identity. In this dissertation, I also argue that although Haraway believes that with the conception of a cyborg, the boundaries between male and female are blurred which means that a cyborg is an embodiment of a genderless world; however, this is not necessarily the case. Haraway herself claims that a cyborg is a creature of social reality as well as fiction (149). Since the cyborg is a part of reality, therefore its existence is interwoven within a larger cultural framework. This relationship between science and culture has been reinstated by Mansoor as she argues that "historically science and technology have restated and replicated cultural outlooks. Race and gender identities are no exception to this rule" (6). What I argue here is that since for a cyborg it is not possible to escape the cultural realities, therefore the subjugation and exploitation that female bodies are subjected to in the real world extends to the cyborgian

identity as well. I substantiate my argument by taking into account the protagonists from the selected works. The bodies of the female cyborgs are biologically manipulated for social experiments and in case of Clone Aa-Aa 14/54/G, her body is not exempted from exploitation even after going through multiple stages genetic mutation (Chabria 45). The conception of a techno-utopian world as proposed by some western cyberfeminists would, therefore, only be possible if technology is able to emancipate women regardless of their class and race.

As stipulated earlier, the postcolonial cyborgian body is unable to escape colonial history and is subjected to scientific experimentations in the form of biological modification, surveillance and cloning. According to Ali, European colonialism brought with it the idea of modernity that persists in different ways even in postcolonial times as manifested in practices, artefacts and technologies (5). By this what Ali means is that although traditional forms of colonization no longer exist, colonial ideologies continue to influence modern systems and technology. The persistence of colonial epistemologies is found in the computing world as well which cannot be addressed via a postcolonial lens since it "tends to overlook the operation of global structural and institutional power in racially organized world system" (Ali 6). In his work, Ali discusses not only the covert form of neo-colonialism that is taking control of technology, he also emphasizes that the Eurocentric control of technology needs a decolonial computing method rather than approaching it via a postcolonial lens. In alignment with Ali's argument regarding decolonial computing, I take on board Walter D. Mignolo's idea of decoloniality. According to Mignolo, "today colonialism is again being practiced in new forms; the logic of coloniality has undergone many different shifts and is now presented positively in the form of modernity" (15). For both Ali and Mignolo, it is important that the epistemological supremacy of the West is disbanded so that technological manipulation of racially inferior bodies can be stopped. They also criticize the western

cyberfeminist idea of equating emancipation with technological advancement. Mignolo argues that "biotechnology has displaced eugenics" (15) which means in a manner similar to the colonial times, the body of inferior race is subjected to biological modification; however now this is done in disguise of modernity. Hence, not all women are emancipated by technology, rather a selective few can find opportunities of emancipation via technology.

According to Ali, for decentering West-centric universals, it is important to challenge those in the Global North who are responsible for the de-racing of the body. This is crucial because the "abstract" body that is produced tends to be presented by the "de-racers" as "universal" (7). By establishing that the experiences of women are universal without taking into consideration their history of oppression on account of their race results in uniformity that further marginalizes those who have historically been marginalized (Mansoor 3). Both Ali and Mansoor highlight the need to address the nuances of the complex situatedness of a third world woman whose racial identity cannot be undermined by claiming her experiences to be universal. The Euro-centric control of technology that Ali and Mignolo talk about can be witnessed in the exploitation of black female bodies that started during colonization and is in practice even today. In the 1840s, an enslaved Black woman Lucy was subjected to painful medical experiments without anesthesia by James Marion Sims, a white doctor in Montgomery, Alabama. These experiments involved surgical processes which helped Sims develop a technique that could repair chronic complications during childbirth. The series of experiments took place from 1845 to 1849 and more than five enslaved Black women were used as test subjects. For these life threatening clinical trials, Sims and his team legally needed permission only from the enslaved women's owners. Sim was celebrated for his achievements in the field of gynecology and lauded as the "father of gynecology" (M. Howell). During this time, the bodies of the enslaved women were consistently selected for medical trials

because of the belief that there is an inherent biological difference between superior white bodies and inferior Black bodies which makes the latter tolerant to extreme pain. With the passage of time, a broader understanding of Sim's racial injustices in the medical field developed and in April 2018 his statue was removed from New York City's Central Park. However, the legacy of colonial violence against Black female bodies still persists.[2] In 2018, the National Institute of Health conducted a medical trial for an HIV/AIDS drug in fourteen of South African villages. The participants of the trial comprised of women who were HIV-negative between ages eighteen to thirty five. They were tested for the drug without their consent since those conducting trials did not deliver complete information about the potential risks involving the drug. Some of the participants got HIV as a result. The trial involved a drug that came with life-threating risks, hence it was first tested on bodies of a supposedly inferior race, that is, Black female bodies. The disproportionate ways in which technology affects women of colour thus negates the claim made by some western cyberfeminists that the production of machines can result in a world that is free of oppressive racial and gender binaries which also shows that neo-colonial practices of bodily exploitation of women of color persists even today.

In order to challenge the western control of technology both Mignolo and Ali highlight the importance of a decolonial method that can put an end to Eurocentric hegemony of technology. I contend that speculative fiction by women of color which focuses on the nexus between technology and exploitation of female body is an attempt to call out those who are in control of technology. To support my argument, I have incorporated works by Indian female authors who explore the technological manipulation of postcolonial female bodies and envision alternative

[2] For further information please see https://sfonline.barnard.edu/a-historical-analysis-of-black-womens-stratified-reproduction-and-experiences-of-gendered-racism-in-reproductive-health-care-settings/

futures through their works. In the next section, I have discussed each of these works individually.

2.2. Indian Dystopian Fiction and Subversive Futures

The real world is marked by gender discrimination where women are subjected to sexual violence and bodily abuse. An alternative to our world would mean a utopic society that is a safe space for women. According to Sreejata Paul, this task, however, is specifically undertaken by feminist utopias, since "not all utopias posit alternatives to the heteropatriarchal social set-up" (40). The idea to introduce feminist utopias has been used by science fiction writers for decades to write about alternative worlds that are without gender constraints. The futurisms offered by South Asian science fiction and fantasy writers have been offering alternative visions of the future in contrast to the varying discourses of colonial history and neocolonialism. The idea to imagine alternative realities in Indian dystopian fiction was introduced by Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain when she published her short story, "Sultana's Dream" in 1905. In the short story, the protagonist Sultana has a dream in which she visits a place known as "Ladyland". In Ladyland, she meets a woman known as Sister Sara who introduces her to the routine of her world. Unlike the real world, where women are confined to segregated spaces, Ladyland places gender constraints on men by restricting them to the "Mardana"[3] where they engage in housework and childcare (Hussain 6). The females, on the other hand, are encouraged to take part in scientific researches and pursue education. Rosemarie Tong in her book *Feminine and Feminist Ethics* contends that according to radical feminists it is the reproductive roles and responsibilities of women which cause female subordination and male domination (10). In order to subvert such gender norms and empower the women of Ladyland, in "Sultana's Dream", the responsibility to raise kids and take care of them

[3] *Mardana* is the equivalent of a *zenana*—the female-only space within Muslim households. In Ladyland, men are confined to *Mardana* while females enjoy free movement.

is, therefore, given to men. According to Paul, Hossain gives men the nurturing duties since she believed that motherhood cannot be designated as colonial Bengali women's sole occupation in life (39). In her story, Hussain's utopia is completely opposite to the hierarchized world based on gender discrimination.

This led Hussain to introduce the idea of formulating alternative realities through the genre of speculative fiction. The story "Sultana's Dream" was written during colonial rule in India and people of color faced discrimination because of their race. However, this story does not address racial hierarchies that were relevant in colonial Bengal. According to Nudrat Kamal, in Ladyland women use education and modern technology to govern a futuristic state which is without the hierarchies of religion and gender, however caste is conspicuously missing (3). What I argue is that while Hussain's utopia talks about women's freedom which is made possible with the help of technology and reversal of gender roles, the women of colonial Bengal were also marginalized on account of their race which has not been explored in "Sultana's Dream". However, in Indian speculative fiction that has mainly been published after the end of colonization, the exploitation of female bodies on account of their racialized identity has been a consistent theme. Anglophone Indian dystopian fiction published post colonization, explores neo-colonial futures where female protagonists reclaim their agency, while resisting the technoscientific exploitation of their bodies

An instance of such fiction is Manjula Padmanabhan's novel *Escape* which is set in "Forbidden Country" (3) that is a place where women are extinct. In the forbidden zone, the Generals who control the country have introduced self-cloning technology. In a pamphlet distributed by these Generals, they announce that because of self-cloning, the women of the country might compete for breeding rights so "in order to control breeding and establish the collective ethic we had to eliminate females" (*Escape* 358). In the novel, the Generals also claim that clone technology is

superior to female reproduction because female bodies are allegedly polluted. In her other work *The Island of Lost Girls*, a sequel to *Escape*, Padmanabhan explains the working mechanism of Forbidden Country even further. In this dystopian land, women are destroyed in a systematic way that first started with the killing of unborn babies followed by eliminating the newborns. After that, the young married women are targeted and those who try to resist the Generals are punished brutally where they are raped by the whole community or stoned to death. Eventually it is decided that women are no longer required in the country since reproduction can be managed through cloning, hence females should be completely eradicated from the human race (*The Island of Lost Girls* 119). Sami Ahmad Khan in his book *Star Wars of the Modern Raj* discusses that Pandmanabhan, through her work, paints an image of a futuristic India where women are erased from all forms of social, economic and political structures. While history is rewritten in such a manner that ascribed a certain biological defect to them, it was the invasion of cloning technology that made women redundant (256). In both her novels, Padmanabhan shows that modern and newer technologies are used to eradicate women since they are no longer required for reproduction which also demonstrates that the females' role is limited to reproductive responsibilities only. The elimination of women in *Escape* and *The Island of Lost Girls* is reflective of female genocide in India. In 2019, a news report made shocking revelations when it revealed that in 132 villages of Northern India, no girl had been born in three months.[4] In a country where gender ultrasound scan is illegal, the report hinted at possible sex-selected abortions. In a manner similar to how technology is used in *The Island of Lost Girls* to kill unborn female babies (119), in India female foeticide—that is, gender selective abortion of the female fetus—increased with the advent of

[4] For further information, please see https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/7/23/india-probes-as-no-girl-is-born-in-three-months-in-132-villages

technological advancements that assisted in prenatal sex determination on a large scale (Ahmad 26). Padmanabhan's novels thus address the elimination of women and technology's alleged role in perpetuating gender-based violence in a scary version of futuristic vision of India. Despite their dystopian settings, the protagonists of Padmanabhan's novels attempt to exert their agency, which is in line with the focal point of my research as it explores the different ways in which postcolonial speculative fiction aims for presenting alternative realities and the protagonists attempt at reclaiming their lost agency. In her novels, Padmanabhan's female protagonists demonstrate gendered resistance to the neo-colonial dimensions of technological control of their bodies. In *Escape,* the Generals are successful in eliminating all women, except for a girl Meiji, whose existence is unknown to everyone in the country except for her three uncles who are successful in protecting her from being killed. For her protection, Meiji is fed hormone-suppressants which hides her womanly traits and she continues living disguised as a boy (165). However, her body starts resisting the suppressants resulting in the gradual restoration of her female characteristics. Meiji's body, symbolically functions as a cultural site through which new hopes for a better world are inscribed against patriarchal hierarchies (Adami 3). In Forbidden Country, Meiji is safe only if her true identity is hidden. However, her body's rejection of suppressants means that for a hopeful future which is free of gender discrimination, the tyrannical rule of the Generals needs to be resisted through her female identity. In order to transport Meiji to a safe Island far away from the Forbidden Country, one of her uncles, Youngest, accompanies her on this journey. Meiji's hope for a better future is shared by her uncle as well since he believes that despite the erasure of their country from the record of the civilized world, if anyone is going to be recognized from the forbidden zone, it is going to be Meiji, "that is, a woman. Not a man. Not any men (*Escape* 417). Unlike Hossain's utopia in "Sultana's Dream", Padmanabhan fictional works are tilted towards

postcolonial dystopias which are inhabited by characters who work for a hopeful future. Jessica Langer points out that in postcolonial science fiction, "dystopia is always thrown into a tangled arrangement with utopia" (185). She further contends that since the conditions for a utopia are exclusive which implies that "the utopia, in its perfection, must exclude the imperfect" which leads to the creation of perfect/imperfect binary (175). In "Sultana's Dream" men are completely replaced by women in order to create a utopian future where everything is seamless. However, the concept of an alternative futurism that I explore in my study with the help of the selected dystopian fiction is different. The protagonists of *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside* do not aim to subvert gender roles or establish a society that is without men; instead, they strive to reclaim their agency and bodily autonomy.

This idea to introduce female protagonists with agency in a utopian future has been explored by other Indian speculative fiction writers as well. In her short story "Reunion," the Indian physicist and science fiction writer Vandana Singh envisions a futuristic India that has been ravaged by climate change. Singh's story and her idea of an alternative future is different than Hussain's fully developed utopia and Padmanabhan's critical dystopia. While the larger narrative of the story is dystopian as India's infrastructure is destroyed because of floods, famines and droughts caused by climate change, Singh offers a way out of the dystopia. In the story, climate change has caused havoc in different parts of South Asia. However, a young woman of Adivasi heritage named Mahau designs zero-carbon *bastis*[5] that are connected to one another by green corridors. As an Adivasi woman, Mahau's work is an interaction between engineering and her indigenous knowledge to connect with nature (400). In India, the Adivasi women belong to indigenous tribes located in Gujarat, West Bengal and Rajhastan. The lands owned by the Adivasi people are

[5] Bastis is urdu word used for town.

constantly under attack by both private and state-led mining companies to access the resources beneath these lands. It is the Adivasi women who are at the forefront and recording protests against extractivism which is resulting in their forced displacement from their own land.[6] These women are therefore punished for their gender, class and their resistance against those in power. In Singh's futuristic India, the Adivasi women are able to manifest their love for nature and indigenous lands. The *bastis* are not only environment friendly as the carbon emission is zero, they also provide home to slum dwellers and climate refugees from across the subcontinent (401). Singh manifests hope amidst a dystopian calamity through an otherwise marginalized female character who can no longer be displaced from the land that she has created using her indigenous knowledge while protecting many from the catastrophes of climate change. The future imagined by Singh in her story is on the boundary between utopia and critical dystopia. What makes critical dystopias different from normal dystopias is that in critical dystopias some of the characters work through the dystopian elements and create a better life in the aftermath (Miller 337). According to Tom Moylan, critical dystopias gain their significance from utopian anticipations (13). In Singh's "Reunion", environmental changes have wreaked havoc and there is a state of dystopia; however, the female protagonists continue with their struggle and manifest hope regardless of the situation. According to Kamal, this mixture of eerily plausible dystopia and quietly revolutionary utopia imagined by Singh, is one from the range of possible futures that South Asian speculative fiction writers have been imagining (18). Keeping in mind the kaleidoscope of possible futures that are imagined by writers in Indian dystopian fiction, in the next section I have first discussed the difference between western and postcolonial science fiction which then follows by the discussion

[6] For more details, please see: https://minorityrights.org/resources/the-adivasis-of-india/#:~:text=Who%20are%20the%20Adivasis%3F,of%20the%20Constitution%20of%20India.

of the selected works of fiction by Chabria, Divya and Basu and the feminist utopias that these writers envision.

2.3. Conceptualizing an Alternative Future and a Feminist Utopia

Science fiction, according to Tom Moylan, serves the function of imagining a utopian world. In his book *Demand the Impossible,* Moylan discusses that science fiction presents "images of desire" and "figures of hope" (1-2) and it imagines a future that is different while saying "what cannot yet be said" (39). However, the concept of envisioning a radically different world and utopian future through science fiction is experienced differently by western and postcolonial science fiction writers respectively. John Rieder in his book *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* traces the origins of western science fiction and argues that it emerged as a product of imperialist culture, beginning in the late nineteenth century British and French fantasies of global conquest. He further contends that the two biggest myths in science fiction are those of the "Stranger (the alien, whether it is extra-terrestrial, technological or the human hybrid) and the strange land (the far away planet or a distant part of our own waiting to be conquered) and both of these myths also serve as pillars of the western colonial project" (65). In Western science fiction, envisioning a utopian future therefore means an alternative world where humans have conquered distant lands, reflecting an underlying colonial mindset to invade foreign, strange subjects. In the introduction to the anthology, *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*, Hopkinson argues that "Arguably, one of the most familiar themes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives" (3). However, for a postcolonial subject the concept of a utopian future means an egalitarian world without oppression and that the exploitation of bodies on account of their race and class is not practiced anymore.

As a response to Western science fiction's imperialist agendas, the genre of postcolonial science

fiction envisions futures that aim for the elimination of gender, race and class based exploitation. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay in his work, "Science Fiction and Empire" contends that those writers who have experienced American and European imperialism from the other side—the colonized—appropriate the speculative techniques of science fiction so that the imperialist agendas are not translated into the postcolonial science fiction (237). Postcolonial speculative fiction writers attempt to subvert western science fiction's tilt towards neo-colonial agenda of perpetuating colonial tropes of expansion and subjugation. The concept of utopia and dystopia in science fiction is therefore, envisioned differently by speculative fiction writers depending on which side of the history of colonization are they situated. William Limpert in his work "Decolonizing Encounters of the Third Kind" examines that the indigenous works of science fiction are different than the dystopian fiction produced in the West. He argues that, "in indigenous speculative fiction, western desires and anxieties regarding colonization, self-destruction and Euro-typical utopia-dystopia are absent as they explore different subjects, one of them being utopian sovereignty" (Limpert 165). By Euro-typical utopia-dystopia what Limpert means is that the European idea of utopia comprises a future where humans can colonize foreign lands, whereas if their own lands are invaded by foreigners then per Eurocentric ideals it is a dystopian reality. Malisa Kurtz in her work *Globalization, Postcolonialism, and Science Fiction*, therefore, defines postcolonial science fiction as a particular kind of science fiction that acknowledges and then subverts "the genre's genealogical and ideological debt to colonialism, and in doing so articulates a vision for the future which is more ethical and less exploitative" (244). Thus, to explore the different ways in which selected Indian dystopian fiction, despite its dystopian tilt, promises a utopian future, I build upon the works of Hopkinson, Dery and Banerjee collectively. While Banerjee's works primarily discuss the alternative futurism envisioned by South Asian science fiction writers, Hopkinson and

Dery explore the indigenous futurism in Black speculative fiction. The reason that I have delved into science fiction written by Black writers in this chapter is because in a manner similar to futuristic Indian speculative fiction, African speculative fiction also maps out futures which do not have traces of colonial histories of exploitation and racial profiling. In his book *Flame Wars*, Dery first coined the term Afrofuturism which according to him refers to speculative fiction that addresses the concern of Black people while drawing upon their unique histories (170). Afrofuturism, according to Dery, is response to a question that asks whether it is possible for such communities to imagine hopeful futures, whose past has been deliberately erased and their energies have subsequently consumed by the search for legible traces of their history (180). The concept of Afrofuturism, therefore emphasizes and suggests looking for alternative realities through a Black cultural lens. To reimagine alternative futures, it takes into consideration not only the historical account of oppression but also probes into perpetuating neo-colonial practices due to which Black bodies are exploited even today.

Since, this dissertation explores the idea of conceptualizing feminist utopias as alternative futures therefore to I have taken Hopkinson and Octavia E. Butler's speculative works to analyze Black feminist utopias. In a manner similar to the utopian future envisioned by the authors of the selected speculative fiction *Machinehood, Clone* and *The City Inside*, both Hopkinson and Butler's novels have strong female characters who amidst of dystopian settings works towards achieving freedom. Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* is based in a dystopian future in Toronto, a city that has been abandoned by the state because a series of financial disasters has led to economic depression. The rest of the city has fled to protective sanctuaries in the suburbs while people of color, including the protagonist of the novel Ti-Jeanne, are left to fend for themselves. As a Black single mother to a young baby, Ti-Jeanne has to survive not only the economic depression but also has to protect

herself from sexual violence that is used as a control tool by the leader of "the Burn", the neighborhood where people of color live. However, Ti-Jeanne resists the different forms of oppression as she uses her generational connection to "African powers" through which she can see more than the human sight can allow (Hopkinson 126). In African mythology, African powers are the most powerful deities which are summoned through prayers and are believed to help their followers. In the novel, Ti-Jeanne learns that her visions link her to one of the deities Eshu. By using her powers she not only gets into a battle with the leader of "the Burn" but also challenges the corruption of the suburbs to which the wealthy, privileged, and predominantly white people of Toronto have fled. According to Bryce, Hopkinson uses "a combination of African and Caribbean folklore to create a strongly feminized alternative world in which a female protagonist challenges and either defeats or subverts the threat of patriarchal power" (17). Along similar lines, in Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, the protagonist is a young Black girl called Lauren who lives in a dystopian California that has been destroyed by climate change, rampant sexual violence and corruption. Everyone in the story is affected by the destroyed infrastructure of the city, however women are more vulnerable because of gender-based physical and sexual violence inflicted on them. Females living in gated communities are not safe and on the streets, rape committed against women is no longer a shocking event. In the novel, Lauren notices a confused woman who may have "been raped so much she was crazy" and "a little girl, naked, maybe seven years old with blood running down her bare thighs" (Butler 13), which is a reflection that sexual violence again women of color is a normal order of events in the dystopian setting. Butler's attempt to create an agentic female protagonist is reflected in Lauren's character as she is born with hyper-empathy—a trait that makes her demonstrate empathy and kindness for people who are subjected to different kinds of violence. Born to a drug-addict mother, for a certain period of time Lauren is homeless and lives on the

street, however she continues believing in the power of empathy and is determined to bring a change in a world that is male dominated. Both Afro-futurist novels create dystopian worlds where violence affects women of color in disproportionate ways, however through the agentic female protagonists, both Butler and Hopkinson envision a future where females are resilient and find hope amongst dystopian anxiety.

Speculative fiction by South Asian writers does not only criticize colonialism and neo-colonial structures of oppression, it also seeks to enact alternative realities. According to Banerjee, since an inherent affinity exists between the fields of science fiction and postcolonial studies therefore their merger can act as an agent of subversion (26). By this what Banerjee means is that speculative fiction produced by postcolonial writers subverts the science fiction genre's long and complex relationship with colonialism. The alternative futures envisioned by indigenous speculative fiction comprises such worlds which are unburdened by colonial oppression where power relations are reversed. The possible futures that postcolonial science fiction imagines to establish strive to understand the complexity of problems faced by marginalized people. This idea of alternative futures is crucial to my argument as I explore the different ways in which protagonists of the selected India dystopian Anglophone dystopian works are subverting the conventional traits associated with dystopian fiction. However, the concept of alternative futures in these works is different, unlike the one envisioned in Hussain's "Sultana's Dream" where there is complete reversal of gender roles and men are absent from social sphere; instead, the female protagonists in *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside* want to exist in social harmony and achieve bodily autonomy. Clone Aa-Aa 14/54/G, Ramirez and Joey start reclaiming their lost agency by pushing against technological advancements. In these postcolonial dystopias, Chabria, Divya and Basu envision alternative realities as utopian futures that are feminist in nature since female protagonists

are resilient and challenge the techno-scientific hegemony. These feminist utopias, according to William Marcellino are alternative futures that critique the "dominant male power and instead offer some kind of imagined, idealized society that is not characterized by male domination (203). In the novels, although the dominating power resides with men who control technological advancements and women face discrimination because of their gender since their bodies are treated for different technical experiments. However, what makes these spaces utopian is the element of hope that makes the protagonists resist different power structures as they work for a better, inclusive future. The idea of an inclusive, feminist utopia is also discussed by the South Indian feminist, Avrina Jos in her work. Her notion of a feminist imaginary derives from the nuanced positionality of postcolonial woman, where she is subjected to oppression on multiple fronts because of her race, class and gender. By nuanced positionality, it is implied that a postcolonial Indian woman is not oppressed because of her gender only, rather she is enslaved because of her colonial history that reduced her body to an inferior racialized commodity which is still subjected to neo-colonial practices of exploitation. Jos argues that for an Indian woman in particular, technology alone cannot be an agent of emancipation. This is because "struggles are barely recorded but on whose backs histories are written: terrible histories of partition, colonization, casteism, and untouchability" (3). She takes the case of Dalit women in India who face discrimination on account of not only their gender but caste as well. For an Indian woman who is considered untouchable while she struggles with class dynamics as well, western cyberfeminism and its emancipatory ideals are not enough. Jos argues that for a practical framework for feminist imaginaries of technology it is necessary that such a network is created that will be derived from the lived realities of people and the agencies expressed by subjects in the margins, especially women. The feminist framework shall concern itself with people who are impacted in one way or

another by a colonial past and a neocolonial capitalist empire assisted by technological development (Jos 11). An inclusive feminist utopia can only be imagined if Indian Anglophone dystopia fiction takes into account the colonial past and neo-colonial present of a postcolonial woman while envisioning an alternative future for her. The subversive potential of feminist postcolonial science fiction to not only challenge both the past and the present but also strive for feminist utopias is endorsed by Bryce as he argues that "consider what might happen if, submerged, sublimed or suppressed stories, voices or philosophies became so dominant as to create a radically different world" (8). Recent works of Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction have not been working towards conceptualizing alternative realities; instead they seek to formulate feminist utopias where there is hope amidst dystopian anxiety. In the next chapter, I focus on the selected Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction as they challenge the reductive approach of western cyberfeminism because it ignores the colonial past of non-western women while equating machine production with female emancipation.

Chapter 3

Subverting Cyberfeminist Exclusivity: The Postcolonial Woman in a Dystopian World

This chapter analyzes the different ways in which the selected texts *Clone*, *Machinehood,* and *The City Inside* show that cyberfeminism, as a Western ideology, is reductive in its approach since it ignores the colonial history of women from the Global South while advocating for techno-utopianism. Before addressing this research objective, I wish to refer to two independent news publications. The first one is an article by the CEO of Serum Institute of India Adar Poonawalla, published by an electronic news medium, *Business Today*[7]. In his article, Poonawalla claims that by 2047, when India is nearing its hundredth year of independence, the nation has a future where technology enables everyone to live a healthy, productive life, regardless of their economic status. According to Poonawalla, with the help of technology, specialized care units will be brought to remote areas where advanced diagnostic tools shall allow specialists to conduct detailed examinations remotely. He further claims that the healthcare system of tomorrow is dynamic, powered by predictive analytics and accessible technologies which will consequently help in filling the health gaps. Keeping in mind the rapid technological development in India, Mr. Poonawalla's dream that India will have reached a new level of digitization by 2047 is an achievable goal. However, in a country like India where hierarchical structures based on class and caste persist, a claim that accessible and adaptable technology shall mean an equitable future for everyone regardless of their economic position is debatable.

[7] For further details, please see https://www.businesstoday.in/magazine/columns/story/heres-why-adar-poonawalla-thinks-indias-2029-journey-will-be-marked-by-a-balance-between-ambition-and-pragmatism-417106-2024-02-12

The second publication is an article about the custom of *Dadhicha Pratha* and has been published by *Legal Service India*. The tradition of *Dadhicha Pratha* is practiced even today in a village of Madhya Pradesh. It involves renting out women in exchange for a nominal fee, formalized on stamp papers. In make-shift markets, women are auctioned where men participate and select women, taking into consideration different parameters such as virginity, physical appearance, and age. This custom has been followed for decades and such arrangements are finalized each year.[8] Annual markets are set up where women in the age group of 8-15 years are traded off by their families due to financial burdens. Female infanticide, especially in regions of Haryana, Rajhastan, and Uttar Pradesh, has significantly led to reduction in female to male sex ratio. This has affected the men of these regions as they are often unable to find a suitable match, therefore through *Dadhicha Pratha*, they are able to find women on a temporary basis who can then carry forward their lineage. The families who trade off their daughters and wives belong to severely impoverished regions of India ("The Tradition of Renting a Wife in Madhya Pradesh: India Stories"). It is important to note that it is the bodies of females which are manipulated to find a way out of poverty. This also poses another question that when India is on its journey to becoming a tech-hub, a future where the life of each citizen will significantly improve as claimed by the largest pharmaceutical company of the country, would it actually emancipate all? In regions like Madhya Pradesh, where female infanticide persists and those who miraculously survive are later traded off for meagre sums due to poverty, the provision of mere technological networks cannot eliminate gender and economic exploitation. Hence in postcolonial India, technology *alone* cannot facilitate women's empowerment unless other forms of oppression, such as economic disparity

[8] For further information, please see https://www.theculturegully.in/post/dhadichapratha-the-disturbing-tradition-of-renting-a-wife-in-madhya-pradesh

and caste-based division, are also addressed. It is also important to note that the disparities in the material reality are also mirrored in the digital realm which adversely effects those who are already marginalized as is portrayed in *Clone, The City Inside* and *Machinehood.* In these works of fiction, the protagonists are further oppressed by technology which they resist in an attempt to reclaim their agency. The ensuing discussion delves into these ideas extensively.

3.1. "My Body Continued to Cry": Neo-technological Exploitation of Postcolonial Female Body

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the growth of medical education in the West, there was a great need for human bodies to be used for anatomical studies. During the British colonization, mass exportation of human skeletons from India to the West started when British doctors would hire thieves to steal bodies from the graves. The practice which continued for almost two hundred years was so common that according to a resident of Uttar Pradesh, almost all the graves in their village are empty now ("Into the Heart of India's Underground Bone Trade"). The trade of human bodies from India to Europe and North America continued until 1985, when the Indian Supreme Court banned the trade and termed it illegal. However, despite the ban, the smuggling of corpses and human bones from India to the West continued. In areas like Bihar, West Bengal and some parts of Uttar Pradesh, dire economic conditions often compel people into selling bodies of their relatives, otherwise dead bodies are stolen from graves and sold off to companies trading in human remains.[9] In a country that has already emerged as a technological giant, the continuation of colonial practices of exploiting bodies, particularly those of the poor, signifies that technology alone cannot guarantee emancipation, and for the liberation of a postcolonial body it

[9] For further information, please see https://www.wired.com/2007/11/ff-bones/

is important to address the multiplicity of oppression.

The selected Indian speculative fiction *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside* are set centuries after the present. Everything is digitized and technology has become highly advanced. What remains unchanged is the exploitation of the postcolonial body via clinical experimentation and biological modification. When Haraway published her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" in 1985, she presented the concept of a cyborg and claimed that it is a liberatory figure which will provide emancipation to women from rigid dualistic binaries. Haraway wrote that, "gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism" (155). According to Haraway, a cyborg can provide a way out of dualisms since it creates space for the existence of an identity outside the dualistic binaries resulting in ambiguity which is liberatory since it resists categorical divisions. With the introduction of the cyborg as a figure that confuses these binaries, the idea of techno-utopian hope took birth which believed in the emancipatory potential of technology. Haraway contends that cyborg figures have "made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and eternally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines (150). Balsamo, on the other hand, argues that when technology displaces stable boundaries, the gendered boundary between male and female remains the same. The cyborg, according to her "is technologically crafted simultaneously from the matter of material bodies and cultural fictions" (Balsamo 11). By this, Balsamo means that the cyborg exists within the same material reality which is patriarchal, therefore the gendered boundary is not erased rather it remains intact. The cyborg, despite being a fusion of flesh and machine, cannot escape the gendered, racial and cultural prejudices that a physical body is subjected to. In case of postcolonial bodies from third world countries, technology

often becomes a source of oppression as has been explored by Chabria, Divya and Basu in their work. In order to answer the first research question that explores the different ways in which the selected Anglophone dystopian works show that western cyberfeminism ignores the colonial history of non-western women while it equates machine production with female emancipation, I first delve into the novels' portrayals of neo-colonial technological exploitation of the female protagonists.

In Divya's *Machinehood*, it is 2095 and the face of the world has drastically changed. Machines have taken over and in order to keep up with them, humans have to take pills to increase their stamina and productivity. There are different kinds of pills in the market: flow enhances focus, zips and buffs enhance physical strength and productivity level, and juvers speed up the healing process (Divya 94). The protagonist Welga Ramirez works as an executive bodyguard in a company which provides security services to high profile clients, including pill manufacturers and funders. Before joining the agency, during her college days Ramirez avoided taking flow because she remembers how her mother had died due to malfunctioning of a flow design:

> She closed her eyes and remembered her mother's dying body covered in scarlet patches and weeping sores. Mama died of an early flow design, genetically incompatible and poorly tested, one of millions of cases that led to global riots and then new laws. (Divya 23)

This quote from *Machinehood* shows the vulnerability of postcolonial bodies which the West, through its operatives, uses to add value to its own research. In Ramirez's time, however, according to funders and manufactures, the pills are sufficiently tested and there are no side effects to them. Before embarking on a routine mission at work one day, Ramirez's boss gives the team new pills including buffs, juvers and zips that are provided for free by their clients. From the stash of pills she takes buffs and zip for superficial wounds (Divya 16). Despite the manufacturers' claims that

the pills are not unsafe anymore, the moment Ramirez takes a new zip, her body experiences a strange sensation:

> Ten minutes later, her body buzzed. The designers swore that humans couldn't feel the effects of zips—it wasn't like the mental high from chemical drugs or flow pills—but Welga could tell when they hit. A sort of restless energy filled her limbs, like when she'd been sitting still for too long and needed to stretch. (Divya 16)

This is a turning point in Ramirez's health as it continues getting worse upon which she seeks the help of her sister-in-law, Nithya, who works for one of the pill-manufacturing companies as a data scientist. She tries to uncover the reasons which might have caused harm to Ramirez's body and finds out that Ramirez's condition is due to the new zip model that has caused significant damage to her cerebral system and the changes to Ramirez's frontal lobe are permanent (Divya 251). Moreover, the new zips damage her body in a manner similar to addictive drugs; this is a strange phenomenon since the pills are designed to avoid habituating effects. Ramirez's body is subjected to drugs that are not properly tested and the manufacturers attempt to cover up the side effects that result in permanent damage to the body.

The bodily exploitation of postcolonial bodies to facilitate western research is one of the main themes in *The City Inside* as well. The protagonist, Joey, is responsible for managing the accounts of digital content creators on an application called Flow. The world Joey lives in has become highly digitized and international organizations in compliance with local government keep a check on people via surveillance devices to extract data. The society is hierarchical where divisions based on religion, caste and economy run deep. Human trafficking is widespread, with individuals from underprivileged strata of the society being sold into the illegal trade of human organs:

> Beyond her [Joey's] words, he understands her message when she shares that the upcoming physical brain implants that will soon be forced on the poor will do more than identify and monitor citizens—they'll measure them […] make the process of selling people's bodies wholesale to anyone who has use for them much more efficient. (Basu 151)

This excerpt from *The City Inside* is a dialogue between Joey and her friend Rudra as she explains the exploitation of bodies as a result of organ trade. In the novel, the organ trade works in a streamlined manner. International organizations are facilitated by local Brahmins (Rudra's family is one of them) and government institutions. The bodies of Dalits[10] and poor people are used for this business. Basu's story is set in Delhi of 2032 that has become a technological hub, however technology has adversely affected the outcastes, especially women who are subjected to reproductive manipulation. One of the characters, Rudra, describes India in 2032 as:

> He knows they're about perfect-child breeding projects using bodies from around the world, the birth-outsourcing industries booming […] organ-growth sweatshops, body farms, womb renting factories, sex slave training centres, cell-harvest centres, gene testing prison camps. He knows humans will never go really obsolete, because there'll always be uses for their bodies, right down to the last cell, there'll always be people willing to use them. (Basu 154)

The excerpts from *The City Inside* highlight that in the case of Dalits, poor people and women, technology oppresses them further as their bodies are manipulated for resource extraction. The local government facilitates organ transplant business where international organizations are involved in using the bodies from the Global South as their sites of bodily excavation. Kalindi

[10] In India, Dalit are people tainted by their birth into a caste system that deems them impure and thus less than human.

Vora has described this process of using postcolonial bodies as sites of biotechnological processes as "biocapital" (22). By biocapital what Vora means is that in the age of new technologies, the bodies belonging to people from the formerly colonized countries are extended as sites for "annexation, harvest, dispossession, and production" (23). Thus, in *The City Inside*, postcolonial female subjects are technologically manipulated as their wombs are rented for surrogacy and bodies are used in sex slavery resulting in new hierarchies instead of dismantling the older ones. Despite innovation in technology, the womb of a woman remains a site of biotechnological intervention—the only difference is that it now belongs to a woman situated in the Global South. The text particularly shows how international organ-trading organizations, with the help of local governments and Brahmin elite, excavate organs which are then traded off to clients in the West:

> But today's news crisis is a real estate tycoon openly advertising for partners for an organ farm business, claiming it could give backward Indians a chance to contribute value to the world. Somehow, the debate is not centred around rampant body ownership and its links to human trafficking and slavery, but around the maximum allowable percentage of foreign ownership of these firms. (Basu 29)

It is evident in this excerpt from Basu's novel that in a fast-paced, technologically advanced world, the bodies of poor and untouchable Indians are exploited as they are forced to contribute to society by surrendering their bodily rights. The processes of human trafficking and slavery are facilitated with the help of surveillance. Through surveillance, the Brahmins gain access to the addresses of localities inhabited by Dalits and other minorities, using this information to target their homes. In doing so, they reinforce their caste hegemony through a technologically mediated religious extremism. Furthermore, the data obtained through surveillance devices is also used in running slavery apps that provide easy access to otherwise untouchable bodies. The postcolonial Indian

women and their bodies are also subjected to reproductive technologies as their wombs become sites of surrogacy for Western clients. This aligns with Balsamo's stance who describes this technological hegemony over poor women as rebuttal to Haraway's claim. According to Balsamo,

> Despite the technological possibilities of body reconstruction, in the discourses of biotechnology the female body is persistently coded as the cultural sign of the "natural", the "sexual" and the "reproductive", so that the womb, for example, continues to signify female gender in a way that reinforces an essentialist identity for the female body as the maternal body. (9)

The western cyberfeminist idea that machines erase the essentialist gendered categories is negated when surrogacy as an advanced reproductive technology uses bodies of impoverished women from Third World countries. The concept of renting a womb from the Global South and subjecting it to biotechnological processes to facilitate a White woman is another form of subjugation. For the White woman, technology *is* revolutionary but it comes at the expense of exploiting the postcolonial female body in a Third World country. Echoing this exploitation is *Machinehood* where Ramirez's body is used for an early drug trial that leads to a permanent damage of her body. As a postcolonial subject, her body is deemed insignificant and thus exploited due to an early design of zips that is not sufficiently tested before. For the characters of both *Clone* and *Machinehood*, technology only adds to their oppression as their bodies are used in biotechnological processes. A postcolonial female, therefore cannot find resonance in Haraway's cyborg as it ignores the realities of such a woman whose body is commodified. When Haraway claims that a cyborg exists in a post-gender world (150), what she means is that with the creation of a cyborg the dualistic male/female binary is dissolved, hereby offering women a sense of freedom. However, in the selected novels, the protagonists' manipulation through technology challenges

Haraway's claim. In *The City Inside,* the Delhi of 2032 is home to refugees from neighboring poorer countries and women are abducted from the refugee camps whose bodies are used in gene-testing centers and cell-harvest camps which can be used to facilitate perfect child-breeding projects (Basu 154). Technology thus enables the manipulation of impoverished women's bodies, exploiting them for biotechnological processes aimed at advancing the reproductive industry. Rather than deconstructing old binaries, a new identity is established in which technology dominates, contradicting Haraway's argument that the cyborg transcends rigid boundaries and enables women's emancipation.

These neocolonial practices of technological exploitation are an extension of colonial tactics that were aimed at controlling people in the colonies. Previously, colonial processes mostly involved territorial colonialism, where land and natural resources used to be extracted from the colonies for the capitalist growth of the West. As mentioned earlier, dead bodies and human remains were also once part of the materials traded to the West for anatomical studies. However with changing times, neo-colonial practices, where chances of legal consequences were slim, became the new *modus operandi*. In clinical trials, Western companies conduct experiments in regions with economic instability, and easy access to test subjects such as African and South Asian countries (Petryna 2). In *Machinehood,* the early trials had resulted in Ramirez's mother's death, and in her case as well, it is a new zip that destroys her body and ultimately causes irreversible damage. Similarly, the genetic material of a twenty-first century Indian woman is repeatedly used to build the perfect clones that can obey orders. This technological manipulation echoes Mirca Madianou who, in her book *Technocolonialism,* argues that the clinical experiments conducted in the Global South are not neutral. By this what she implies is that Third World countries are often used as testing grounds for clinical experiments because their impoverished populations can be easily subjected to the risks

of such trials without significant resistance. She writes,

> Behind the veneer of objective science, experiments are steeped in ideologies, politics and vested interests. The field of tropical medicine was a tool of empire- building. Clinical trials in colonies, or former colonies, were largely conducted for the benefit of European people and for the advancement of Western medicine and pharmacology. (105)

Madianou's argument that clinical trials in Third World countries serve as a political tool for Western empire-building is reflected in *Machinehood*. Ramirez's sister-in-law Nithya discovers an unpublished report by one of the former bioethicists working for her company, Synaxel. In the report it is mentioned that the drug company is involved in targeting the vulnerable population with drugs which are not sufficiently tested, resulting in significant damage:

> They rushed out custom pill designs to those most vulnerable because they had the lowest cost margins. This in spite of the returns they gain from mass-market generics. My team discovered clear evidence of negligence leading to bodily harm. (168)

The excerpt highlights how pharmaceutical companies, as part of Western conglomerates, conduct early drug tests on vulnerable populations as there are minimal risks involved. The neo-colonial practice of using individuals from the Global South as human guinea pigs challenges the cyberfeminist claim that technology leads to emancipation.[11] Technology offers convenience, but only to a select few *and* at the expense of those on the other side of the globe. Furthermore, clinical trials are not a one-time phenomenon rather they push the subject into a vicious cycle of continuous torture as is evident in case of Ramirez in *Machinehood*. In her case, the zips cause a habitual

[11] For further information on how Indian bodies are used for clinical trials by western organizations, please see https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-20136654

dependency, forcing her to take more zips to prepare for the fight against them. As a result, her body is trapped in a relentless cycle of bodily torture:

> What had she done wrong to end up in this mess? For all the years spent being so damn careful to avoid flow, she had ended up almost exactly where Mama had, with a body destroyed by pills that she needed for her work […] I'm on zips almost constantly. It's the only thing that helps my symptoms. It's also probably what's killing me. (Divya 219)

The zips not only destroys Ramirez's body but also traps it in a vicious cycle of self-destruction as she becomes dependent on it—using more zips to subdue the pain that it inflicts. The permanent damage caused to Ramirez's body as a result of early clinical trials is an example of how the bodies from third world countries are exploited by using covert means of exploitation. Jasbir Puar calls this a "biopolitical strategy" that is "a source of value extraction from populations that would otherwise be disposable" (*Right to Maim* 586). Puar argues that instead of subjecting the colonized bodies to direct use of lethal force, value is extracted from them which causes them either death or a state of debility. She further contends that the debility caused is a "deliberate product of exploitative labor conditions, racist incarcerations and other modes of community disenfranchisement" (587). Despite their claims, pharmaceutical companies persist in exploiting bodies from the Global South—a practice that began with Ramirez's mother and continues despite years of advancements in manufacturing. When her sister-in-law investigates the cause of Ramirez's deteriorating health, she uncovers that the pills were tested on bodies in the Global South without taking into consideration the differences in physiological makeup. Both Ramirez and her mother fall victim to an early design of the pills, their bodies turned into sites of biotechnological experimentation—echoing the historical practice of transporting colonial bodies to the West for medical research as discussed earlier. Nithya finds out that Ramirez's condition is

because of damage caused by zips:

> It's a form of long-term synaptic fatigue. My best guess is that the zips trigger something in your DNA that then affects potassium ion channels. It's also stimulating activity in your mesolimbic system, which I don't fully understand. Whatever you have is an undocumented side effect, one that's likely triggered by something specific to your genetic makeup. (Divya 82)

Ramirez's mother dies when her DNA reacts to an early flow design. However, in Ramirez's time pharmaceutical companies claim that their products are safe to use by everyone regardless of their genetic makeup. However, this is not the case as her body suffers permanent damage which, in the light of Puar's argument, exemplifies the most intensive practice of "debilitation where maiming is a sanctioned tactic of settler colonial rule" (586). This value extraction which she calls "the right to maim" is done at the expense of postcolonial bodies as is evident in the case of Ramirez, the postcolonial women in *The City Inside* and the twenty-first century writer in *Clone* whose DNA is extracted to make clones with desirable qualities:

> Through tawny light her life-sized hologram appeared in the Ancestry Capsule; I was looking at myself, about a hundred years ago, when she was almost two hundred years old. Sheath by sheath, her skin peeled away, exposing musculature, peeled to expose organs, reveal skeletal structure; the final image was the double helix of her DNA swirling gigantically before my eyes which I imprinted into my recording circuitry. (Chabria 51)

This excerpt from *Clone* highlights a moment when Clone Aa-Aa 1/54/G encounters the genetic material of her Original, a writer from the twenty-first century, who is one of the Originals reserved for mating—an activity that is controlled by the Global Community (Chabria 10). The Original, a

postcolonial woman of Indian origin, is confined in a highly guarded facility for mating purposes. The society is run by a Global Community which ensures that their lineage is carried further by using the bodies of female mating partners. The writer is one of those females used by the Global Community who facilitate in giving birth to children who are then taken away from their mothers to be put under the supervision of those running the community. The writer dies a horrific death during a celebratory event and her genetic material is used for cloning purpose. When she is alive, her body contributes towards procreation. After her death, the genetic material of the writer contributes towards forming various categories of clones, designed for carrying out orders of the leaders of the Global Community in a manner similar to their Original. However, the process of biological modification does not stop with cloning; rather, her clone is subjected to a continued process of experiments to instill the desired qualities that can be used to serve the Global Community. The continuous exploitation of postcolonial bodies is also discussed by Deepika Bahri in her book *Postcolonial Biology*, as she argues that the manipulation of postcolonial bodies continues long after the colonization has ended as she famously says, "Empire reaches us where we live, all the way down to our gut" (Bahri 12). Bahri's argument that the exploitation of postcolonial bodies continues is evident in the selected works of fiction. These works are set in future, many years later and colonies no longer exist. However, neocolonial exploitation has permeated to the very core of the postcolonial body's existence. The clinical experimentation by a western conglomerate subjects Ramirez's body to eternal deterioration, while in *The City Inside*, the bodies of the poor Indian people, including Dalits, are used for organ transplant and reproductive functions. This process of continued manipulation is also reflected in the case of Aa-Aa Clone whose modification process does not stop even after it has been engineered into a clone.

The continued process of torture for the Clone Aa-Aa begins after an aberration in its behavior is

reported as it begins to recall the memory of its Original. The leaders of the Global Community subject the clone to further torture since they require it to retrieve an important message that the Original was meant to deliver but couldn't before her death:

> Immediately churning propeller sounds and depth charge explosions filled me. Constant. Ear-splitting. I stopped eating, sleeping, thinking; I could not find my way in the room. I tore my hair, hit myself. The noise would not stop. “When you are broken you are requested to affirm the success of Whale Torture,” my room said. (Chabria 97)

This extract from *Clone* highlights that despite being situated in a technologically advanced world, the body of Aa-Aa Clone remains a part of material reality, that is divided into hierarchies, as its body is subjected to torture. The clones are placed in the lowest category used only for labor work. This rebuts the claims made by Haraway that technology erases the binaries between machine and body. Despite being placed in a technological world, the Aa-Aa Clone is not relieved of the boundary that exists between flesh and machine. Instead, it is exploited in a manner similar to its Original. According to Haraway, the creation of a cyborg results in boundary confusion which she describes as pleasurable since the construction of boundaries is a tradition of “racist, male dominant capitalism” and that “why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?” (178). However, contrary to Haraway, Balsamo argues that the binaries are dissolved only in the virtual world and material reality remains the same. Simultaneously, Balsamo also contends that the gendered boundaries get translated into the digital world as well;

> In the cybernetic realm of techno-senses, the technological transformation of gender identity is more virtual than real. Promises of bodily transcendence, gender “neutrality” and race blindness are the main planks of the ideology of information age; […] and yet

gender distinctions persist in the new social spaces of virtual world. (Balsamo 161)

Balsamo's argument that gender distinctions transcend into the technological space is reflected in the selected works of speculative fictions. In the case of Ramirez and Aa-Aa Clone, while the boundaries between machine and skin are transgressed, it does not result in their emancipation. Instead, the inequalities inherent in their existence as postcolonial women are transferred to their cyborgian selves. Ramirez's body is subjected to an early clinical trial of a drug that is not sufficiently tested while the Aa-Aa Clone is repeatedly subjected to biotechnological modification to retrieve the message that its Original could not deliver. Moreover, bodies of the Dalit and poor women in *The City Inside* are used as reproductive sites for western companies. The female protagonists in the selected works of speculative fiction thus negate Haraway's idea of emancipation that she associates with cyborgian identity. Haraway's idea of a cyborg is criticized by Puar too, as she argues that a cyborg does not necessarily represent a breakaway from essentialised and dichotomized notions of identity, but exists in the liminal space not oppositionally but frictionally against other subjects and identities ("I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" 4). Hence, the fluid binaries that Haraway celebrates re-subject the cyborg to hegemonic cultural ideologies. This idea is reiterated by Bahri as she argues that if the malleability of bodies rescue them from deterministic fate, it also makes them a site for projection and manipulation (20). Aa-Aa Clone, Ramirez and the Dalit population in *The City Inside* therefore are unable to escape their racialized identities even when they become cyborgs thus rebutting Haraway's techno-utopian aspirations. Hence, the cyberfeminist discourse that women can be empowered through technology is discredited via the protagonists of the selected speculative fictional works. The neo-colonial technological exploitation of the protagonists signifies that a digitized world is different for everyone depending on which side of the globe an individual is

situated. For a woman from the Global South, emancipation and growth are hindered not only by technological manipulation but also by the unequal distribution of technological resources reinforced by hierarchical structures. In the following section, I will further explore the hierarchical structures of the Global South and their role in reinforcing technological disparities.

3.2. "They Want Them for Data and then for Meat": Technological Hegemony and Hierarchical Structure of the Global South

In the previous section, I discussed how technological exploitation of the female protagonists in the selected works of speculative fiction negates the utopian hope that Western cyberfeminists associate with technological advancement. This section will now explore how technological emancipation is connected to class and caste divisions. The concept of female emancipation via machine is also challenged by the fact that in a postcolonial society like India, where prejudices based on class and caste persist, technology alone cannot be a source of freedom. Instead, technology further oppresses those who lie at the bottom of the hierarchy. This is substantiated in *Clone* where, despite being situated in a twenty-fourth-century world, the clones remain segregated due to an imposed hierarchical structure that segregates beings based on their biological specifications. There exist different species of biologically modified entities: the Zombies are made for fighting and implementing laws, the Firehearts are made for intellectual labor (Chabria 80). The ones at the top are the Originals who are in control of all these species and reap the benefit of their labors. The protagonist Aa-Aa Clone, along with other clones from her range, are placed on the lowest tier of this social hierarchy. They are biologically modified to perform laborious tasks around the clock:

> But their DNA was extracted, synthesized and selectively programmed into the templates of our various orders to provide diversity. I, 14/54/G and my entire series do not possess

> any special abilities. We are merely Worker Clones. (Chabria 16)

The biologically modified clones are derived from the DNA of the women whose bodies, prior to their death, are used as reproductive machines by the Global Community. The G-series of clones, which the protagonist Aa-Aa Clone belongs to, is created from the genetic material of the twenty-first century female writer. Once the role of these women as reproductive machines is fulfilled, they are deemed useless. The biotechnologically modified clones, in a manner similar to their Originals, are placed at the lowest tier of the society. Despite the advancements of the twenty-fourth century, an era of highly advanced technology and a transformed world, the caste system of earlier India persists. Similarly, in the highly digitized world of *The City Inside*, control and hegemony over the masses is ensured via surveillance which has become extremely common that with the help of surveillance devices anyone and everyone can be targeted. Joey always convinces her parents to be vigilant about their conversations especially at home since surveillance devices are installed even in their toothbrushes. However, unlike Joey's generation, her parents fail to comprehend that surveillance is not merely about monitoring the masses anymore but it also operates to extract data which is then exploited by both local elite and international organizations:

> Romola [Joey's mother] can't process the idea that it isn't just the government snooping any more, but a peak-traffic cluster of corporations, other governments, religious bodies, cults, gangs, terrorists, hackers and sometimes other algorithms, watching you, measuring you, learning you, marking you down for spam or death. (Basu 23)

In *The City Inside*, power over the masses is maintained through constant monitoring and surveillance. The Brahmin elites have access to the data of Dalits and other minority groups and religious extremism is used as a political tool. Unlike *Clone* where divisions are not explicitly labeled as caste-based and the meaning is understood in relation to the novel's postcolonial Indian

setting, in *The City Inside* the division is clearly mentioned. Minorities are not only marginalized but actively hunted down through surveillance applications owned by the Brahmin elite, specifically designed to target Dalits and the Muslims. This passage from *The City Inside* is from one such instance where a Dalit family's house is targeted by an angry Hindu mob, setting fire to their home and abducting the daughter who is never found again:

> Of families who'd lost everything and had just been standing in the street next to the charred husks that were their houses, asking journalists and aid workers what would happen next. One family had led Romola inside […] shown her what used to be their daughter's bedroom, where everything had been slowly, systematically ripped apart and then burnt. The daughter had never been found. (Basu 103)

Dalits and other minorities are monitored through surveillance devices which are controlled by high-class Brahmins and international organizations while facilitated by the local government. The Brahmin elite have access to data obtained through surveillance applications which helps them to target the vulnerable sections of the society easily:

> The 2024 purge, when upper-caste boys all over the country had used mysteriously accessible data to destroy Dalit houses because a Dalit taxi driver had given a Brahmin a low rating in Jaipur. The 2026 horror, when police and mobs torched the few remaining lower-income Muslim ghettos in Delhi, targeting survivor families with pinpoint precision. (Basu 53)

Dalit bodies are regarded as untouchable and their bodies are deemed so insignificant that they are often exploited for organ trade and other technological procedures. Not only are their bodies used for organ trade, but the female bodies also become sites for reproductive business. In The City

Inside, Dalit bodies become cyborgs through the biotechnological processes. It is either through the extraction of their organs via medical technology or the use of women's wombs as sites for reproductive purposes that the bodies of Dalits adopt cyborgian identities. Contrary to the claim made by Plant that cyborgs betray patriarchal illusion and that technology and machine production enables women to navigate the challenges of a patriarchal and capitalist society, the reality is different for a postcolonial woman from the Global South. Despite being a cyborg[12], as she is an amalgamation of flesh and machine, she is not emancipated. The very technology that Western cyberfeminists claim to be a source of emancipation is instead used to facilitate and streamline the process of slavery targeting the untouchables in *The City Inside*:

> Chopra's saying something about human resources […] domestic workers, missing children, opportunity … The Libyan slave markets? Digital solutions? Immigrant control? The caste pyramid? Communist terrorists? Pragmatism. It dawns on Rudra that he's being told about a slavery app. (Basu 61)

Some of Rudra's family friends who are also high-class Brahmin elites use technology as a source to capitalize on bodies of poor and Dalits. One of his family friends, Chauhan, maps out a plan to create such an app that will help people outside India to get access to those bodies which are deemed the most insignificant. Once acquired, these bodies can be supplied for slavery and as sites of experimentation for biological purposes. Hence, technology is not emancipatory for everyone equally. The western cyberfeminist idea of technology as a means of escaping patriarchal structures without an inclusive approach is problematic which is also challenged by Gajjala. According to her, the idea that the creation of cyborgs or technological advancement have led

[12] Cyborg is a being that integrates both biological and technological components. By definition, the postcolonial women in *The City Inside*, Ramirez in *Machinehood* and Clone Aa-Aa in *Clone* are all cyborgs as machines become part of their bodies in different forms.

humans fully disperse into digital realms, disconnected from reality. The bodies of the poor Dalits are marginalized on the basis of both their economic position and caste. Despite technological advancements resulting in a seemingly progressive society, *The City Inside* depicts a world where their bodies remain exploited due to their perceived insignificance. Rudra's family and others like them constitute the Brahmin elite who are involved in capitalizing on the untouchables. One of the Brahmin characters contends that when technology eventually takes over completely, the rich must have been prepared for it well in advance:

> No matter who's in power, no matter who needs land or blood, no matter which country's secretly running ours, there's one thing all sides agree on—the children of the rich must be protected. The scientists making them perfect must be safe. We're on the way to hacking mortality itself, regeneration, replacement, human–machine integration. Maybe we'll get there within our lifetimes. (Basu 138)

For those who are situated at the top of the social hierarchy it is easier to shift social division to the digital world. The hegemony of the technological elite shall keep exploiting those who are already marginalized even in the digital realm. In *The City Inside,* the Brahmin elites are involved in safeguarding the bodies of their local influential people and international clients at the expense of using the bodies of Dalits and other minority groups. Similarly, in *Machinehood* and *Clone* Ramirez and the Aa-Aa Clone are subjected to bodily manipulation respectively.

In order to challenge the technological hegemony of the West, the postcolonial female protagonists of the selected works reflect a decolonization of the genre of science fiction. Through them the authors incorporate an element of hope in the genre as these women resist the technological annexation of their bodies. The next chapter explores this idea of utopian hope in detail.

Chapter 4

The Agentic Postcolonial Woman and Utopian Hope in Indian Anglophone Dystopian Fiction

Western cyberfeminism often equates technological advancement with female emancipation. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, contrary to the ideas proposed by Western cyberfeminists like Haraway and Plant, technology is not inherently emancipatory for everyone. For a postcolonial woman, technology is not an unquestioned tool of freedom; instead, it often exacerbates existing inequalities rather than erasing them. The adverse effect of technology on postcolonial women is reflected in the selected works of fiction, that is, *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside.* The protagonists of these novels, however, resist technological advancement as they exert their agency. This chapter begins with the research objective which examines how the protagonists of the selected Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction reclaim their bodily autonomy while resisting the technological manipulation of their bodies. Despite their situatedness in dystopian times, the agency of the female protagonists in the selected works signifies that postcolonial Indian speculative fiction envisions alternative futures. This chapter also aims to engage with the idea that these female characters embody hope as they strive for a future where human bodies are not exploited and there is less chaos and exploitation. By presenting visions of relatively peaceful futures, the selected novels challenge the despair assumed to be inherent to dystopian fiction as the protagonists introduce elements of utopian hope amidst dystopian anxiety.

4.1. "I Can Help Heal the World": Postcolonial Female Agency

The biotechnological augmentation of bodies and rampant surveillance in the selected novels allow them to be classified as dystopian fiction. However, the female protagonists' assertion of agency

in their fight against technological hegemony brings an element of hope within these otherwise apocalyptic works of fiction. The agentic role of postcolonial female protagonists as they resist the neo-colonial exploitation of postcolonial bodies challenges the tropes of traditional science fiction. I borrow the term "traditional science fiction" from Rieder's work who uses it in his book *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* to refer to Western speculative fiction. According to Rieder, the origins of science fiction must be contextualized as a product of patriarchal British and French imperialist cultures and their fantasies of global conquest as they mostly depict a male conqueror invading a foreign land (2). Thus, traditional science fiction mostly revolves around the idea of a male hero's colonizing mission and his quest to exert hegemony over those deemed the Other. On the other hand, in the selected works of Anglophone Indian dystopian fiction, it is the female protagonists who challenge the exploitative nature of neo-colonial technological manipulation through their resistance. According to Csicsery-Ronay, science fiction writers who experience American and European imperialism from the other side—as colonized, or alien others— use speculative techniques to critique imperialist ideas. These imperialist ideas suggest that the side with technological superiority shall have the future (Csicsery-Ronay 237). This Western technological superiority, according to Ali, must be challenged via decolonial computing, an idea that I shall discuss later in this section. In case of the selected novels, the attempt to manipulate the bodies of postcolonial female protagonists reflects the neo-colonial practices of Western hegemony. However, the agentic roles enacted by Clone 14/54/G, Ramirez and Joey against technology as the novels envision alternative futures subvert Western science fiction's tilt towards perpetuating colonial tropes, thus substantiating my argument that Chabria, Divya and Basu display what may be read as decolonial approaches in their narratives.

In *Clone, Machinehood* and *The City Inside* technology operates as a modern mechanism of

oppression. This change in the operation of power influenced by advancement in technology aligns with Haraway's idea of informatics of domination. In her essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto", Haraway contends that there has been a shift from an organic industrial society to a polymorphous information system where the ontological differences are becoming increasingly blurred in postmodern times. She argues that:

> We are living through a movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system—from all work to all play, a deadly game. Simultaneously material and ideological, the dichotomies may be expressed […] from the comfortable old hierarchical dominations to the scary new networks I have called the informatics of domination. (Haraway 161)

Haraway contrasts the contemporary forms of control with earlier systems of domination. She argues that power is not about obvious means of control anymore. Instead, the modern framework of control and power has been influenced by technology and information system as "they have been 'techno-digested" (163). It is evident in the selected novels as well that through techno-capitalist manipulation of bodies and surveillance networks, masses are stringently and invasively controlled. Up to this point my argument that technology can serve as a medium that exacerbates oppression aligns with Haraway's idea that, in the age of information, network of domination has shifted to tech-based hierarchies. However, I diverge from Haraway's point when she proposes cyborg as a means to escape these binaries. To elaborate this point, I draw attention to her following passage:

> The actual situation of women is their integration/exploitation into a world system of production/reproduction and communication called the informatics of domination…. One important route for reconstructing socialist-feminist politics is through theory and practice

> addressed to the social relations of science and technology, including crucially the systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations. The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code. (163)

Haraway contends that the cyborg is the feminist figure best suited to challenge the technological domination since as a hybrid —a mixture of machine and human—it does not fit into any category and thus rejects the binaries created by technology. She further adds that the cyborg is

> [a]lso an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a post-modernist non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also world without end. The cyborg incarnation is outside salvation history. Nor does it mark time on an oedipal calendar, attempting to heal the terrible cleavages of gender in an oral symbiotic utopia or post-oedipal apocalypse. (150)

The concept of salvation history refers to the Christian theological belief in God's intervention to redeem humanity following its fall from grace due to its first act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden. It thus implies that history follows a linear progression from the creation of the world towards a positive end. Haraway, however, argues that a cyborg exists outside salvation history implying that it does not have a beginning or ending and that it exists in a world without gender. What Haraway means by this is that a cyborg is detached from history and its fragmented identity in a post-gender world can dismantle the binaries created by technology. I argue that cyborg's detachment from history does not align it with the situation and experiences of the protagonists of the selected novels since their bodies continue to carry traces of colonial history which shape their existence and hence, nor do they escape the patriarchal salvation history nor, by extension, colonial

history and its patriarchal hegemony over the colonized. As Mansoor also contends that a new historical order cannot be conceived "without engaging with the colonial and neo-colonial violence inscribed both on the minds and on bodies of the colonized, specifically on women, in the previous historical ages?" (4). The female characters, therefore, challenge the notion that in the post-human world the network of domination influenced by technology could be challenged through the figure of the cyborg. Instead, in a post-gender world, the protagonists in *Clone, Machinehood* and *The City Inside* are able to gain their agency by embracing their woman-ness instead of disowning it or transcending it in some gender-neutral manner. The protagonists embrace their identity as postcolonial women which gives them agency as they challenge the biotechnological manipulation of their bodies without denying their gender, thereby subverting Haraway's concept of subversion of tech-based binaries through cyborgs.

In Chabria's novel *Clone*, the DNA of a twenty-first century woman is used to create a G-series of worker clones to which the protagonist 14/54/G Clone belongs. Before DNA is extracted for cloning, her body is first exploited to bear children for the leaders of the Global Community. After childbirth, the children are separated from the mother as her role as a reproductive machine is fulfilled (Chabria 144). The exploitation continues as her Clone 14/54/G undergoes bodily manipulation, while the worker clones are repeatedly subjected to biotechnological processes that strip them of memory, rational thinking and the capacity to disobey. However, despite the restrictions, Clone 14/54/G revolts as it experiences visions of its Original's memories. Its body also exhibits signs of mutation which it attempts to keep a secret:

> This is how I knew about the womb. I believe I am mutating into an Original-like being, akin to the human species. But I know nothing more. Would I age over 250 years, and pass away like Originals, or perish like a Clone when my functions fell below par and could no

> longer be refurbished? This provided I was not caught beforehand. How much longer could I keep my mutation a secret? (Chabria 51)

In the novel, the clones are placed at the lowest tier in the society since they are primarily assigned laborious works only. They are monitored through biotechnological processes, hence are unable to develop characteristics such as the ability to remember, think and resist. However, as Clone 14/54/G acquires memory, emotional intelligence and undergoes bodily mutation, it develops a sense of identity. To sustain its bodily mutation, Aa-Aa Clone stops taking pills that are used to prevent the clones from developing human consciousness. Thus, 14/54/G cultivates an identity that resembles its Original, a historiographer from the twenty-first century, as the clone struggles to reclaim its agency:

> Who is now speaking—Aa-Aa or me? Why do I wish it not to be her? "Clone 14/54/G" is no longer enough. I am more—and less—than what I was. Less sure, less safe, less isolated. More curious, more in pain, more resolute about my uncertainties. With more words at my command. (Chabria 89)

This excerpt from *Clone* demonstrates that Aa-Aa Clone not only acquires human consciousness but its body also resists the pills used to change its physiology. When it stops the consumption of pills provided by its superiors, 14/54/G begins to experience hormonal changes. As a worker clone, it is expected to perform duties since any aberration in routine is immediately noticed by the authorities. However, Aa-Aa Clone is able to hide the new developments in its body:

> Beneath my overalls I grew hair. At work, I made no error. I was allowed full rations […] Except that I began to menstruate with the crescent moon. Three drops on day one, seven on day two, five on day three. I discovered that the split stuffing of riverweeds made good

> pads. I buried the pads at the roots of trees. (Chabria 48-50)

These excerpts reveal that despite the technological manipulation, Aa-Aa Clone resists the authorities as it does not comply with the routine followed by the clone community. Moreover, although the clones are strictly monitored, it manages to hide its mutation from the authorities due to which the aberrations in its body remain unnoticed for a period of time. When the Global Community notices that Clone Aa-Aa 14/54/G has acquired the ability to experience the memories of its Original, they use the clone to revisit certain historical events from the past to uncover some truths. The Original of the Aa-Aa Clone had lived in the twenty-first century; however in her role as a historiographer, she documented history dating back to the seventh century. In the process, Aa-Aa is subjected to extreme torture to provide the desired information:

> Clone 14/54/G, your last visitation existed in the seventeenth century, we are now many centuries ahead. You have more stories to reveal. The Global Community will not withdraw you till they are certain the complete truth is disclosed. And silenced. (Chabria 70)

Despite enduring continuous sessions of torture, Clone 14/54/G does not succumb to the pressure and remains resilient. It is also noteworthy that while Chabria has presented a clone with agency, the role of its Original as a historiographer is also significant. Clone 14/54/G has visions about the historical archives recorded by the twenty-firth century writer that brings complexity to its character since it begins to question its identity, “I was living in two worlds. Is this what is meant by loneliness? That you don’t belong to any world. Not the old one. Not the new. You don’t even seem to belong to yourself” (Chabria 48). Clone 14/54/G gains complexity as not only does it acquire and individualistic identity but it also becomes a means for the Global Community to revisit history by remembering archives from the past. The archives comprised of documentation

from various periods in the history of Indian subcontinent, starting with Ashoka's reign as the emperor of the Maurya Empire extending down to the Mughal Empire and the rise of religious extremism in the twenty-first century. In *Clone,* the Global Community effectively regulates the bodies of clones however 14/54/G challenges their hegemony as it is able to both think and retain the memories of its Original. It gains an individualistic identity shaped by both personal experiences and the memories of its Original. The complexity in her character gained by the Clone echoes Mehan's argument as he argues in his afterword to the anthology *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*, that the visions of the future articulated by postcolonial science fiction not only question colonial practices but also attempt to represent complex identities that are otherwise simplified (22). Clone 14/54/G also no longer remains a subservient worker clone devoid of individuality and rational thought; instead, it becomes an extension of its Original as it revisits her memory and retains it. In the case of Aa-Aa Clone, it asserts agency through an embodied resistance that is centered on its memories and postcolonial womanhood.

Moreover like Clone 14/54/G, Ramirez and Nithya and Joey also embrace their positionality as postcolonial women and exercise their agency to challenge the manipulation of their bodies and actively participate in bringing peace to their respective worlds. This also negates Haraway's claim that women's identity shaped by dualistic binaries need to be disbanded due to their minimal agency in the age of information and that cyborgs can replace them. She builds upon the concept of "negative identity" (156) and argues that constructing identities that are based upon opposition, that is binaries like human vs machine, man vs woman reinforces old dualisms which are oppressive in nature. The identity of woman, argues Haraway, is often constructed in opposition to a man thus making it negative. She contends that:

> There is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women... Gender, race, or class

> consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. (155)

In order to challenge the identities that are formed as a reaction to oppression, Haraway positions the cyborg as a figure that blurs categories, resists fixed identities and embraces hybridity and fragmentation. I argue that the negative identities that Haraway considers oppressive are re-employed by the protagonists of the selected novels to assert their agency. Clone 14/54/G, Ramirez and Joey use their identities as biologically manipulated and highly surveilled *female bodies* and launch their resistance against technological oppression. They do not subvert the network of domination by rejecting their onto-epistemological [13]makeup shaped by caste, class and race; instead it is through the awareness of their inferior positionality that they launch their agency.

In a manner similar to Clone 14/54/G, the protagonists in *Machinehood,* Ramirez and her sister-in-law Nithya, also assert their agency as they navigate a highly digitized world. Ramirez's mother dies because of an early design of flow that had been insufficiently tested:

> Those final days of her mother's life, watching Mama waste away, unable to swallow […]. She [Ramirez] closed her eyes and remembered her mother's dying body covered in scarlet patches and weeping sores. Mama died of an early flow design, genetically incompatible and poorly tested. (Divya 23)

Due to her mother's death caused by flow, Ramirez also avoids using them due to which during her college days "she couldn't keep up with the other students. They used flow. She didn't (Divya

[13] Onto-epistemology refers to the relation between reality of things (ontology) and the way this reality is conceptualized (epistemology). Hence by onto-epistemological makeup I imply that the inferior positionality of a postcolonial woman is shaped by her reality influenced by caste, race and gender; while her identity is further marginalized by dominant discourses, that is Western ways of knowing. The protagonists in the selected novels instead of rejecting their inferior position use it to assert agency.

53). She continues with the consumption of other pills including buffs and zips that are safe for her body —until they no longer are. Following her mother's death, a couple of years well into the future, Ramirez's body also becomes a victim of newly designed zips which cause permanent damage to her body. Despite her body's inability to function effectively against Machinehood, a terrorist organization, Ramirez's struggle persists:

> I'd rather the Machinehood never happened. But they're here, and I might have an opportunity to stop them. If you tell me that I can do something to make sure the people I love are safe, that they'll have the chance to live well because of my actions? That's worth my life. (Divya 233)

As she continues resisting the debilitating effects of the pills, Ramirez's agentic role as a bodyguard remains intact. Despite her deteriorating health, she continues with her mission in order to stop Machinehood from further attacks on civilians. Ramirez's sister-in-law Nithya also plays a significant role as a postcolonial woman who works remotely in India for an international pill manufacturing company, Synaxel. Upon discovering that Ramirez's deteriorating health is caused by the newly designed zips, she decides to dive deeper into the case. During her research, Nithya receives a report from an anonymous tip that her company had previously been involved in experiments for another early pill design resulting in the death of one of the test subjects. The report that documents the unethical practices of Synaxel is released by the company's former bioethicist Jospehine Lee. Upon discovering the dark practices of her employers, Lee quits her job. However, in Nithya's case, instead of just quitting her job she wants to take action against the perpetrators for their reckless policies. In 2095, while there are less jobs for humans and the available opportunities are only temporary gigs, Nithya's job with Synaxel is her family's only source of financial stability. Despite the risk of losing her job, she decides to make the details

public. She, thus, plays an agentic role to stop the biotechnological manipulation of bodies by international pill production companies:

> Nithya watched her daughter playing on the floor. Her daughter still looked up to her. What kind of role model would she be if she kept quiet? When the girl grew up, when she asked, what did you do to prevent this? She'd have no better answer than, I quit. That's the only action Josephine Lee had taken. If people like Lee—or herself—kept guarding the misdeeds of the powerful, the state of the world would get worse. How could she face her daughter in a decade or two without shame? (Divya 263)

This excerpt from *Machinehood* highlights that in a world that has become highly mechanical, and humans have to constantly consume pills to keep up with machines, Nithya seeks to enact change through means and resources available to her. Nithya helps not only her sister-in-law, Ramirez, in uncovering the cause of her deteriorating health but also plays an important role in stopping the unethical testing practices of pills by manufacturing companies. Unlike Western science fiction that often revolves around colonization and conquest, in Divya's *Machinehood* Nithya challenges the neo-colonial practice of using postcolonial bodies for testing. The decolonial method to decentralize the genre of Western science fiction by both Chabria and Divya is an attempt to challenge the technological hegemony of the West. The idea to question the West's epistemic control of technology aligns with Ali's views. In his work, Ali argues:

> Practitioners and researchers adopting a decolonial computing perspective are required, at a minimum, to […] consider their geo-political and body-political orientation when designing, building, researching or theorizing about computing phenomena; and […] embrace the 'decolonial option' as an ethics, attempting to think through what it might mean to design and build computing systems with and for those situated at the peripheries

> of the world system, informed by the epistemologies located at such sites, with a view to undermining the asymmetry of local-global power relationships and effecting the 'decentering' of Eurocentric / West-centric universals. (7)

The decolonial option that Ali suggests revolves around the idea that in order to challenge the western hegemony over technology, an alternative framework of technology needs to be implemented. In the selected works of fiction, postcolonial authors have adopted alternative narratives that challenge the Euro-centric control over science fiction and decentralizes the genre. The postcolonial women—often marginalized in both real and mainstream fictional narrative—are given an agentic role by Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction as has been the case with *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside*.

The agentic role of female protagonists as they re-constitute their identity through self-construction also challenges Haraway's idea of non-subject. According to Haraway, the subject in Western epistemology represents something that is whole, coherent and has fixed boundaries; it often represents power and authority. On the other hand, Haraway's non-subject—as represented by her cyborg—negates the subject as it resists essentialism, disrupts binaries and consequently challenge the hierarchical networks of power. In "A Cyborg Manifesto" she thus rejects the idea of a single, coherent subject since it excludes people who do not fit into dominant categories of race and gender. Instead, she introduces the concept of a non-subject, through her cyborgian figure which is fragmented and never whole. Based on her definition:

> The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household. (Haraway 151)

According to Haraway, a cyborg is a figure of a post-gender world that does not "re-member the cosmos" (151) which means that it is not concerned with stories of origin or essential identities. However, her fragmented cyborgian figure does not apply to the postcolonial protagonists of my selected novels. For a postcolonial woman whose body is marked by traces of colonialism, caste prejudices and biotechnological exploitation, the idea of becoming a non-subject as proposed by Haraway is neither possible nor liberatory. Unlike cyborg which does not have a beginning or ending, a postcolonial female body cannot leave behind scars of empire, class, caste, and techno-colonialism. In *Clone*, for Clone 14/54/G it is not possible to move beyond an essential identity when its body still carries traces of its Original's colonial as well as neo-colonial history. Instead, the protagonists in the selected novels reconstitute their identity through self-construction as Clone 14/54/G develops emotional intelligence, Ramirez and Nithya unanimously challenge the hegemony of pill manufactures while Joey also exerts her agency and plays an active role in working against bodily manipulation of Dalits and other minorities.

In Basu's *The City Inside*, the protagonist Joey has an important role in the media industry. She single-handedly manages social media accounts of big companies and celebrities who are followed by millions of people. However, despite the monetary benefits associated with social media, Joey makes conscious decisions regarding brand-endorsement projects. In a highly digitized Delhi, smart-tatts that are enmeshed in the skin are part of routine surveillance. When a new smart-tatt is introduced in the market to help people filter out potential partners for matchmaking, as a social media manager Joey refuses to promote it:

> Joey had immediately refused to work with the wrist-chastity-belt version of the device—it was very easy to see, in a country where most kids got their first smart-tatts from their parents, how the upgrade could be used by families or communities to filter potential

> matches for people in their power by religion, or caste, or any of the dazzling array of discrimination options India continues to use. (Basu 39)

The passage highlights that in her own capacity, Joey plays an agentic role in fighting against technology that is used to facilitate the discrimination against certain religions and castes. In 2032 Delhi, surveillance devices are used to collect data about Dalits and other minorities which makes it easier to categorize the bodies that are to be used for organ trade and other clinical procedures. Joey's agency as a postcolonial woman is strengthened when she joins an activist group dedicated to helping religious minorities and Dalits, whose bodies are manipulated by international organ trade groups and local Brahmin elites. One of the activists working for the group convinces Joey about the significance of her active participation in their fight against the biotechnological manipulation of bodies that are deemed lesser:

> Let me say that once more: millions of people—numbers that will never be counted but so large they are incomprehensible to people in better countries—could never again die, and be erased from the world without punishment for those responsible. That people have decent lives wherever they live, and do not need to come to this slaughterhouse of a city at all. But they will not let us. They don't want people to live like humans. They want them for data, and then for meat. (Basu 176)

The activist group runs an underground clinic to help manipulated bodies regain their health. Joey's help is needed to uncover the forces that are involved in the destruction of selected bodies through her social media presence. Technology is used to extract data from bodies which is then used to increase the manipulation of oppressed section of the society even further. In the novel, one of the Brahmin elites uses data collected through surveillance to launch a slavery app that will help international clients have an easy access to Dalits (Basu 61). In their resistance against

technological oppression, the activist group seeks Joey's agentic role to highlight the dark side of organ-trade and other manipulative services:

> How you [Joey] nurture your charges, how you build their lives, how you give away grand ideas to the fools you work for. How you stay away from the traps of fame, and walk among snakes without growing poison sacs yourself. And above all, how you want to do more. It's time to become one of us, and have a real adventure. I promise you, there's a deeper, richer life to be had in the shadows, whole worlds that you can save. Look at me. We need you. Will you help us change the world? (Basu 179)

This excerpt from *The City Inside* emphasizes the agency of female protagonist in challenging the hegemony of an authoritarian regime. While the bodies of Dalit and poor women are exploited as their wombs are used for reproductive purposes by the West, strong female protagonists like Joey assert their agency. Similarly, Clone 14/54/G and Ramirez are also subjected to biotechnological manipulation but they fight against as they work towards less exploitative futures. The protagonists in the selected speculative fiction thus not only critique neo-colonial practices but also seek to enact alternative realities. In a post-gender world the female protagonists do not deny their essential woman-ness rather they accept it. Through self-construction they are able to articulate their own version of identity and resistance to technological oppression. The agency of the postcolonial female protagonists in the selected novels introduces an element of hope as they work toward a better future. In the following section, I further explore the idea of utopian hope in *Clone, Machinehood* and *The City Inside* as the female protagonists envision alternative futures.

4.2. "Prepare for the Joy of Liberation": Reimagining Futures through Indigenous Hope

In the previous section, I discussed how the narratives in the selected science fiction portray dystopian societies where biological modification, constant surveillance and the exploitation of

specific bodies as testing grounds have become normalized. However, despite the chaos and despair, the female protagonists do not merely resist technological hegemony but also envision hopeful futures. Not only do Clone 14/54/G, Ramirez, Nithya and Joey subvert Haraway's concept that fragmented identity of a cyborg could subvert the digitalized systems of oppression but they also reject the idea of victimhood associated with South Asian women. It is evident in the selected works of fiction that the female protagonists are agentic as they embrace their postcolonial identity while working toward hopeful and utopian futures. Before I delve into the analysis of the texts, it is essential to acknowledge the significance of futures that do not mirror the colonial past and neo-colonial present particularly in the context of postcolonial subjects. In her TedX Copenhagen talk titled "Re-imagine the Future", futurist Angela Oguntala asserts that the manner in which the future takes shape depends on who is envisioning it. In her words, "When we choose to be curious about the future and take them seriously, we'll start to think in new ways, solve problems in new ways and see possibilities we couldn't see before" (Oguntala). For a postcolonial subject, it is therefore essential to envision futures that are neither entirely disconnected from the material past nor should they allow the colonial history of subjugation to persist in the future through neo-colonial practices. Western and indigenous science fiction approach future in different ways. According to Nicole Ku Furtdado, Western science fiction often depicts dystopian futures where the planet becomes uninhabitable due to capitalist exploitation, or climate catastrophe. In contrast, futures imagined by postcolonial science fiction challenge these narratives by questioning the role of technology and envisioning sustainable futures and offer a critical alternative to capitalist and neo-colonial exploitation (84). In the selected dystopian fiction, the protagonists therefore envision alternative futures as they hope to regain bodily autonomy and live in a world free of Western imperialist and neo-colonial agendas.

In *Machinehood,* when a terrorist organization Machinehood carries out multiple attacks targeting Ramirez's clients, she pledges to stop it from causing further destruction. However, the gradual decline in her health makes her employers and colleague skeptical of her abilities. In order to complete her mission, Ramirez has to join an outer-space station because the masterminds behind Machinehood have established their sanctuary in space. Despite the challenges, Ramirez's commitment to stop Machinehood from further attacks is a manifestation of hope as she exclaims:

> I can't promise I'll come back, but—short of abandoning this mission—I'll do everything in my power to make it happen. I've spent my whole life looking for a way to help people. Don't ask me to stop now, not even for you, please. If I can find and destroy the facility […], we can stop the Machinehood, and people can go back to whatever their lives were before all this." […] I can help heal the world. No one's life is worth more than that. (Divya 196)

The hope for an alternative future does not begin with Ramirez; rather, it traces back to her mother's desire to live in a peaceful world where harmony prevails , "My mother wanted to make the world a better place, but I had to find my own way to do the same thing" (Divya 105). Both Ramirez and her mother are victims of insufficient testing of drugs; however despite the circumstances she continues her struggle believing in a better future:

> As long as the Machinehood had power and she [Ramirez] had the capacity to stop them, she would Mama had always said, Ayalas don't quit until they're dead. Welga wouldn't give up either. She'd always needed a goal in life, the bigger the better. As long as the Machinehood had power and she had the capacity to stop them, she would move forward. (Divya 191)

This excerpt highlights that in the selected novels including Machinehood, there is not a complete utopia; instead amidst biotechnological othering of the bodies, there are elements of hope that subvert the tension and despair associated with dystopian fiction. As Machinehood continues attacking civilians and Ramirez's health continuously deteriorates, there are traces of hope for better times. This lingering hope amidst dystopian times is prevalent in *The City Inside* as well. Despite the hegemony of the Brahmin elites and international organ-trade facilitated by local governments, there is defiance and optimism for better times. The resistance posed by an activist organization to help in the restoration of manipulated bodies comes at a time when there is uncertainty in Indian society:

> Delhi's people like us and need us, for now; we make their lives easier and safer and so we are allowed to thrive. But things change fast, and before the next wind blows us away, I want—we want—to make a real difference to things we do not understand. Things that hold the world together in a way that better machines cannot. Culture, the arts, the people's hearts. Ideas that grow and become new worlds. We need experts we trust to build those for us. I have heard you are the best in the field. (Basu 177)

Despite the pervasive surveillance and the continued exploitation of Dalit bodies, the above excerpt highlights that the characters in *The City Inside* do not let despair associated with apocalyptic times diminish their hopes for an alternative reality different from their neo-colonial present. The approach to imagining an alternative future is also reflected in *Clone*. During an annual ceremony, when the Global Community expect Clone 14/54/G to reveal the truth that its Original had failed to deliver, the Aa-Aa Clone initiates a rebellion. It does not succeed as the rebellion fails; however the protagonist clone manages to leave the Global Community and flee Earth with some other clones to the dark side of the moon where it continues planning a counter

attack:

> The vastness makes me conscious of my smallness, and my body. My body feels as if uncontainable things are bursting into strange new life, for resistance to horror throws out new lifelines, each more desperate and subtle. Gradually I hear again the lure of words though I wish to draw into myself and turn into silence. (Chabria 281)

The idea to create a utopian world by negotiating dystopian spaces to perpetuate ideas such as resistance, anti-colonial narrative has been advocated by Banerjee. According to him, certain indigenous science fictional works have to address the political issues and other ground realities which cannot be addressed under the umbrella of western science fiction (138). By this what Banerjee implies is that for a postcolonial subject, an imagined future will be different because of its situatedness and complex colonial history. Indigenous speculative fiction thus imagines alternative futures where colonial oppression no longer exists, and power dynamics are overturned. In doing so it challenges the conventions of dystopian narratives, particularly their intricate ties to colonialism. The selected works *Clone, Machinehood* and *The City Inside* thus subvert the elements associated with traditional science fiction as they challenge the neo-colonial practices of technological hegemony and envision hope amidst dystopian anxiety.

Chapter 5

Postcolonial Indian Anglophone Speculative Fiction: Providing an Alternative Future

In the Indian subcontinent under classic colonialism, the colonizers dispossessed the natives of their land, exploited their resources and asserted control. Moreover, the bodies of colonized people were also transported to the West for medical studies and thus, were subjected to horrendous abuses in the name of science ("Into the Heart of India's Underground Bone Trade"). Ironically, with the departure of the colonizers, colonization did not end; it was merely transformed in its multiple manifestations. Earlier mechanism of control was replaced by neo-colonialism and now in the age of information, technology came to be used as a tool to assert power and further exacerbate the exploitation of postcolonial bodies. Referring to this, a Chinese newspaper pertinently observes that colonialism "has never truly disappeared. Instead, it has evolved into new forms, leveraging new technologies to exploit, suppress and even enslave Global South countries — a phenomenon now termed technological colonialism" ("Global South Must Remain Vigilant").

Technological control over the Global South is particularly evident in the exploitation of postcolonial female bodies as they continue to serve as sites for clinical trials conducted by Western pharmaceuticals. Moreover, these bodies are also bio-technologically manipulated and exploited for the extraction of raw data via surveillance mechanism. With this in view, in my dissertation, my core argument has continuously affirmed that technology is not completely emancipatory especially in case of a third world woman; instead, it often functions as a source of oppression. This control over technology by Eurocentric power networks is also reflected in Western science fiction as it portrays foreign lands invaded and their inhabitants controlled through

advanced technology (Van der Vleuten 185). To challenge Western hegemony over technology and its hold on science fiction, postcolonial science fiction emerged as a genre that posited alternative perceptions regarding technology's emancipatory potential. In the words of Daisy Rani, by critiquing Western science fiction's desire to control, postcolonial science fiction questions "its colonial gaze, the appeal to an ideology of progress, the focus on future and … and its implicit faith in technological solutions or inclination towards the West" (4). In like manner, the Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction that I have analyzed in this dissertation challenges Western cyberfeminism's faith in technology to provide emancipation. The selected novels also challenge the traditional futuristic setting of the Western world as the female protagonists strive to restore peace instead of invading foreign lands to exert their control. They imagine alternative futures or parallel universes that could lead to a better tomorrow. As Kurtz argues, "postcolonial science fiction does not just critique colonialism and neocolonial structures, it also seeks to enact alternatives" (36). In sum, through the analysis of the selected works of Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction, the aim of my study has been to highlight the importance of agentic postcolonial female protagonists as they seek hopeful alternative futures despite the many layers of oppression they experience.

5.1. Technological Hegemony and Neocolonial Exploitation: The Postcolonial Female Body in the Global South

In this dissertation I analyzed three Indian dystopian novels *Clone*, *Machinehood* and *The City Inside* to discuss how the protagonists in these works subvert the idea that technology is inherently emancipatory as proposed by Western cyberfeminism. With respect to this angle of exploration, my study finds that in the Global South, where a postcolonial woman carries the traces of colonialism and neo-colonial capitalist manipulation, technology is not liberatory; rather, it

exacerbates the existing inequalities. Moreover, for a third world woman whose present is marked by economic exploitation and caste-based oppression, technology alone cannot serve as her sole source of liberation. These tech-enhanced hierarchies in the age of information, according to Haraway, can be eliminated via the figure of a cyborg. Haraway contends that since the cyborg exists outside of history in a post-human world, it can escape the binaries, therefore it is the emancipatory figure that feminists *must* adhere to. However, my analysis of the selected works, in contrast, negates Haraway's idea and present agentic female protagonists who retain their gendered subjectivity and assert autonomy through their woman-ness instead of denying it.

Thus, to answer my first research question that looks into the ways the protagonists show that cyberfeminism, as a western ideology, ignores the colonial past of non-western women while it equates machine production with female emancipation, my analysis finds that the female characters are not liberated via technology unlike the claim made by Western cyberfeminists like Haraway and Plant. The protagonists Ramirez, Nithya and Clone 14/54/G as postcolonial women are technologically manipulated in highly digital worlds. The bio-augmentation of female bodies by western pharmaceutical companies, including the biotechnological manipulation of a clone made from genetic material of a postcolonial female and the exploitation of female Dalit bodies for reproductive purposes, highlight the role of technology in intensifying oppression against certain bodies deemed insignificant. In so doing, the texts highlight that the reductive approach adopted by western cyberfeminism does not take into consideration the historical understanding of postcolonial women which thus makes it problematic. The selected postcolonial Indian science fiction therefore challenges the exclusive approach of western cyberfeminism as it highlights the complex situatedness of the female protagonists owing to their postcolonial positionality. My study highlights that, contrary to the claims made by western cyberfeminism, for a postcolonial woman,

technology *cannot* necessarily be liberatory. As Kurtz argues, "postcolonial science fiction reminds us that the global North and South not only have different pasts and presents, but if we continue to ignore these fundamental differences, they will have different futures as well (28). The female protagonists in the novels enact their agency as they fight against technology and power networks in their respective worlds. Conclusively, by contesting Haraway's idea of cyborg, my research asserts that the agentic female protagonists do not consent to cyborgian identities; instead they embrace their identity as postcolonial women and assert power through it, despite its inferior positionality as it is marked by colonial history, racial and gendered prejudices. For postcolonial women in the novels, technology acts an oppressive tool and hence they resist its advancement in their respective worlds. Their resistance also brings an element of utopia in an otherwise apocalyptic setting as they work towards envisioning and establishing better futures

5.2. Postcolonial Female Agency and Utopian Possibilities

The fourth chapter of this dissertation has presented an analysis of the novels to answer my second research question, which foregrounds the diverse ways through which the female protagonists in the selected Indian dystopian works challenge the western notion of cyberfeminism as they exert their agency as postcolonial women. The female characters Ramirez, Nithya and Joey challenge the authoritarian regimes that are involved in the bio-augmentation and bodily exploitation of female colonial bodies. The Clone 14/54/G resists biotechnological manipulation of its body and embraces her woman-ness as an act of defiance against authoritarian power regimes. The female characters embrace their onto-epistemological makeup that comprises their postcolonial positionality and use it to asset their autonomy. They do not let go of their positionality that is marked by traces of the colonial history of oppression; instead it provides them with the foundation from which they assert their agency. To answer my third and last question which explores the

different ways in which the selected novels despite their dystopian tilt, subvert the generally accepted ideas of futuristic fiction, my analysis finds that the protagonists strive to restore peace and harmony as they work towards better futures. My research also highlights that to formulate a future that is different from the colonial past and neo-colonial present, it is imperative that postcolonial subjects seek alternative realities themselves. In the novels the protagonists use their inferior positionality shaped by a colonial history of oppression to launch their agency and strive for an alternative reality. As Susie O'Brien argues, there is a "ludicrous quality to future speculations that fail to take into account the historical violence that undergirds the present and, by extension, the place from which speculation unfolds (245). In the novels, the struggle of the protagonists is not confined to changing their neo-colonial present only rather they actively seek to reshape their future trajectories. As Antonia Navarro contends that "the purpose of feminist activism and utopian envisioning is to subvert the existing social dominance hierarchy" (209). My research posits that the Indian Anglophone dystopian fiction thus subvert the element of dystopia by bringing in hope for a better future. It does not negate the apocalyptic settings completely; instead the female protagonists navigate the oppressive technological structures while remaining conscious of their ability to bring change.

5.3. Towards Alternative Futures: Directions for Further Research

In this thesis, the research conducted was limited to Indian speculative fiction as the selected novels challenge the Western cyberfeminist idea that technology is not inherently emancipatory. It would be relevant to broaden the research and explore the reductive approach of Western cyberfeminism in the contemporary world rather than being confined to speculative fiction only. On ground, in caste-based societies like India, Dalit women and other religious minorities are targeted because of their marginalized gendered and social position and in certain cases technology further

aggravates their sufferings. Hence, it would be significant to examine the material conditions of marginalized women in postcolonial societies and how their bodies are subjected to bio-technological manipulation. Moreover, for future research, this concept of treating the postcolonial bodies as bare bodies could also be further explored through other contemporary Indian dystopian fictional works such as *Meru* by S.B Divya and *The Wall* by Gautam Bhatia. In *Meru* only genetically modified posthumans are allowed to escape a dying Earth, while the rest of humanity is left to endure the ecological destruction. Similarly, in *The Wall* the ruling elites decide who will remain inside a protected city enclosed by the wall, while who must be left outside to die. The texts can be analyzed through Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics which highlights that sovereign powers determine who may live and who must die, that is, it operates by designating some lives as disposable or unworthy of preservation.

Furthermore, this dissertation has also highlighted the role of postcolonial science fiction in envisioning alternative futures as the protagonists operate from their limited social position while asserting their agency despite the technological oppression. It would be appropriate to explore different options as how to find hope while operating from liminal spaces in fascist regimes amidst the current chaos and anxiety that is prevalent in the world.

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