The Techno-Human Nexus: Exploring Technoculture in S.B. Divya's *Machinehood*

Dissertation

in

English Language and Literature

University Of Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram

July 2025

The Techno-Human Nexus: Exploring Technoculture in S.B. Divya's *Machinehood*

Dissertation Submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English Language and Literature

Examination Code: 53022402

Subject Code: 530

Course Code: EL 545

University Of Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram

July 2025

CONTENTS

Preface

Artificial intelligence and automation are rapidly changing the way we live as humans while raising important questions about identity, labour, justice and the future of human value. S.B. Divya's *Machinehood* is an ambitious, timely, and relevant speculative fiction work that examines a possible future where humans and machines co-exist and negotiate their rights and responsibilities, and redefine what living means. The use of themes like pharmaceutical enhancement, algorithmically controlled existence, and digital labour means that the boundaries between machine and human, freedom and surveillance, work and exploitation become increasingly blurred.

This project investigates these issues by reviewing the techno-human relationship in *Machinehood* in a contemporary context, employing a posthumanist lens, technoculture analysis, and questions social justice. The research is organized into four chapters. The first chapter, ″Introduction," describes the theoretical approach of the research and foregrounds diversely important terms such as technoculture, posthumanism and surveillance capitalism. The second chapter, "AI-Driven Labour Systems in *Machinehood*: Gendered Labour and Ethical Implications," examines the understanding of automation and the representations of gendered forms of labour in the novel. The third chapter, ″Automation, Power, and Social Justice in *Machinehood,"* considers the intersections of technology, capitalism, and forms of control in contemporary life that produce human living. The final chapter, "Conclusion," synthesizes the research and argues that speculative fiction has the power to question the future and re-imagine that future as radically different.

Chapter One

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the rapid rate of technological development has profoundly reshaped the foundations of human existence. From biotech to bioengineering, our bodies, forms of labour, and selves are being attracted into complex networks of technology. With the division between the organic and the synthetic, human and machine, beginning to disappear, speculative fiction finds itself a necessary site for investigating these changes. It offers not only a lens through which to approach new technocultural formations but also a vehicle for denouncing prevailing techno-capitalist ideologies that shape our times. In this speculative terrain, S. B. Divya's *Machinehood* (2021) is a powerful novel that questions the intricate crossings of human embodiment, artificial intelligence, algorithmic domination, and global inequality. Its own conception of the future is all too proximate, compelling readers to think about the techno-human transformations already shaping the life they are accustomed to. In this sense, *Machinehood* is an important text for studying the techno-human as both philosophical challenge and socio-political matter.

Whereas speculative fiction has always explored the human and machine interface starting with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the cyberpunk worlds created by William Gibson *Machinehood* is groundbreaking in that it explores this frontier in the context of the cultural, economic, and political concerns of our own time. In Divya's world, labour is outsourced more and more to AI networks, and human workers take performance-enhancing drugs to compete in an algorithmic gig economy where there is a lack of transparency.

the novel is more concerned not with determinations of sentience and autonomy; it's concerned with the ethics of machine rights, commodification of living biological form, and structural inequalities within racial, gendered, and classed systems. By doing so, *Machinehood* participates in an emerging trend of feminist and posthumanist science fiction that recodes the value of being human in a world of technological excess.

It is a choice and a necessity to undertake this project based on *Machinehood*. Unlike Western science fiction's technologically advanced, white male heroes, Divya's tale offers a globalized and intersectional vision of tomorrow. Characters such as Welga Ramirez a Filipina-Puerto Rican former special forces operative and combat courier place the racialized, gendered, transnational condition of techno-human life at the forefront. With characters like Welga, the novel examines pharmaceutical addiction, algorithmic control, and the precariousness of technology-mediated work. Its interest in Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian ecologies also de-centralizes the Western perspective in speculative fiction to make space for a decolonial comprehension of visions of technology to come. The decision to examine technoculture through *Machinehood* is founded on the novel's unique combination of speculative world-making and socio-political commentary.

It raises pressing ethical concerns that resonate with our current realities: What does it signify when machines demand rights? How do algorithmic structures redefine human agency and dignity? What are the consequences of biological optimisation within a productivity-centric paradigm? These are not mere conjectural futurology exercises—they echo present debates surrounding automation, digital monitoring, precarious labour, and transhumanist

utopianism. In this sense, the novel is a techno-ethical case study that illustrates the ways in which technology infrastructures make human identity, bodily agency, and systemic power possible. Through applying feminist and postcolonial paradigms, *Machinehood* defies the universalised definition of the "human" imagined in Western science fiction and philosophy even more. This project enhances the interdisciplinary fields of science fiction studies, technoethics, and feminist technoculture. It seeks to address three areas of inquiry of critical importance.

First, it elaborates debates around AI and work by bringing to center stage the gendered and racialised processes at the heart of automation and algorithmic systems. As Ruha Benjamin points out, "technologies are not neutral; they are embedded with the values and prejudices of their makers and systems of deployment" (Benjamin 15). Second, it engages with feminist posthumanist scholarship, in particular the work of Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles, to challenge the evolving formation of the human subject in technologically affluent worlds. Third, it situates itself in decolonial technology and culture studies by placing speculative narratives from the Global South. In doing this, the project does not view *Machinehood* as fiction, but rather as a speculative mirror to be employed in order to reflect upon the current crises and re-imagine the possibilities for tomorrow. To establish the analytical scope of this project, one has to clarify the most significant terms constituting its conceptual framework.

The notion technoculture refers to the intricate entwinement of technology and culture, stressing that technological systems do not just passively mediate, construct, and transform elements of social life but rather

actively do so. As Constance Penley and Andrew Ross argue, technoculture is "the social relations and cultural meanings that arise around technological practices" (Penley and Ross 1). It is a concept that recognizes technology never actually exists as a completely neutral tool but is inextricably invested in, and shaped by, power, cultural narratives, and embodied practice. Close to this is the figure of the cyborg or techno-human, a figure that became popular with Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*. The cyborg is not just a fusion of machine and organism; it is a theoretical form that breaks up binary oppositions such as human/animal, natural/artificial, and male/female. Haraway maintains, "The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world" that defies classification and affirms hybrid modes of being (Haraway 150). In *Machinehood*, entities who depend on embedded technologies, drugs, and biologic enhancements can be read as figures of the cyborg the embodied subjects whose natures are constituted by the smooth blending of the organic and the technological.

Another key concept that underlies this research is posthumanism, and more particularly as it is theorized by N. Katherine Hayles. Posthumanism takes human-centered models further to explore how informational systems, computer networks, and non-human agents co-create human subjectivity. Referring to How We Became Posthuman, Hayles says, "the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate" (Hayles 3). This project uses posthumanist theory to consider how *Machinehood* unsettles traditional humanist assumptions in its descriptions of algorithmic work, body modification, and the erosion of bodily autonomy.

To effectively critique *Machinehood*, this project applies an interdisciplinary set of theoretical insights that explicate the novel's rich

technocultural issues. At the heart of this is Donna Haraway's feminist technoscience, specifically her *Cyborg Manifesto*, that remakes the human on the model of hybrid embodiment. Haraway's assertion that "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (Haraway 150) closely aligns with Divya's description of workers who are technologically transformed and AI entities claiming legal personhood.

Pacing Haraway's feminist vision is posthumanist philosophy as expressed by N. Katherine Hayles, which counters liberal humanism's emphasis on autonomy and self-Reason. Hayles argues that in the posthuman era, "conscious agency has never been 'in control'" (Hayles 288). This theme is repeated throughout *Machinehood*, in which human and nonhuman agents are equally trapped in algorithmically governed systems that undermine classical conceptions of autonomy and responsibility. From a political-sociological point of view, this project is guided by Shoshana Zuboff's surveillance capitalism theory, which discusses how digital technology commodity-sizes individual experience. According to Zuboff, "surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material" (Zuboff 8). In *Machinehood*, human labourers such as Welga are constantly surveilled for their physical work rates, pill intake, and task performance bodily reduced to data sites of collection and control. Also critical is Ruha Benjamin's work on the racialized nature of technological systems. In Race After Technology, Benjamin argues that "coded inequity is woven into the fabric of everyday life" (Benjamin 15). Divya's novel holds to this analysis by illustrating how algorithmic systems of labour perpetuate structural hierarchies along lines of race, class, and gender even in developed technological societies.

Finally, this project incorporates Silvia Federici's feminist analysis of labour and the body, particularly her argument that capitalism devalues reproductive and feminised labour. Federici observes that "the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers" (Federici 16). This perspective helps to unpack how *Machinehood* is critical of commodification of physical labour, especially in terms of bio-enhancement and dependency on performance-altering drugs.

Collectively, these paradigms form the foundation of the project's critical theory. They facilitate an advanced reading of *Machinehood* not just speculative fiction but as techno-human artefact problematizing the technological-convergence nexus. Through this reading, the novel reimagines labour, identity, and embodiment in an increasingly technological-convergence world. The analysis of technoculture in speculative fiction has become a major area of inquiry into the way technology enables human subjectivity, embodiment, and agency.

As Nick Bostrom cautions in his ethical deliberations on artificial general intelligence, "machine intelligence is the last invention that humanity will ever need to make" (Bostrom 13). His provocative statement highlights the necessity with which literature must address the ethical, social, and philosophical aspects of human-machine co-existence. Similarly, Stephen Cave argues that the concept of intelligence has long been used "as a fig-leaf to justify domination," and that artificial intelligence continues this legacy by reinforcing existing systems of control (Cave). While these kinds of philosophical investigations yield valuable information on macro-level ethical concerns, they fall to include the embodied, racialized, and gendered modalities of

technological innovation—concerns front and center for feminist and postcolonial speculative fiction.

Writers like Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Atwood have long been exploring the gendered politics of technological futures. Atwood argues that speculative fiction enables us to "walk down the road we're not on, which may prove to be the one we ought to have been on" (*In Other Worlds* 22). This potential for imagining elsewhere dovetails with Donna Haraway's classic comment: "[t]he cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world. a condensed image of both imagination and material reality" (149).

Haraway's metaphor deconstructs dominant lines between human and machine and offers a critical framework for analysis of how technoculture reproduces and resists patriarchal ideologies. To extend this, N. Katherine Hayles argues that "we can construct embodied virtuality that recognises and mobilises the limitations of our materiality rather than attempt to transcend it" (*How We Became Posthuman* 291). Haraway and Hayles both highlight the necessity for grounded, material, and embodied ways of working with technology, offering essential resources for feminist critique of masculinist and disembodied techno-futures. While these feminist interventions have been rich, mainstream scholarship has been neglectful of the importance of non-Western approaches. Even as scholars like Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay have critiqued Indian technofuturism, much of this work continues to focus on state-driven techno-nationalism.

Ruha Benjamin's insight that "technology reflects and reproduces the racial logics of society" (*Race After Technology* 41) becomes especially pertinent in analysing how experiences of digital surveillance, gig work, and

automation manifest differently across global contexts. Silvia Federici's reflections on labour and capitalism also provide crucial context. She argues that "capitalism has made work invisible, notably women's work, by severing its ties to production" (*Caliban and the Witch* 8), foreshadowing the exploitative trends of gig economies today. Such readings argue for speculative fiction that is not merely technologically creative, but also materially sensitive to gender, race, and colonial pasts. This is where *Machinehood* intervenes usefully.

Set in 2095, Divya's *Machinehood* conducts this intersection with great narrative nuance. The novel is centred on ex-special forces veteran and current gig economy labourer Welga Ramirez and scientist Nithya, her partner, who works in posthuman biogenetics. Their parallel stories develop in a world dominated by digital surveillance, pharmaceutical dependency, and divided labour markets. The novel opens by declaring, "[w]e are the *Machinehood*.". We insist on rights for all intelligences" (Divya 7). This manifesto directly destabilises current ideas of agency and upsets the political order. Instead of portraying machine consciousness as a danger, Divya presents it as a call to justice—comparing it to current human rights and labour rights movements.

The novel's description of the gig economy in which the bodies of workers are chemically augmented and datafied and economically exploited mirrors Shoshana Zuboff's fear that "surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioural data" *(Surveillance Capitalism* 93). Here, in *Machinehood*, this procedure becomes literal with the regular consumption of enhancers, body optimisation routines, and continuous algorithmic assessment. For instance, Welga's enhanced stamina serves both as a necessity for survival and a point of vulnerability. Silvia

Federici's assertion that "the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory was for male waged workers: the primary ground of their exploitation" (*Caliban* 100) aptly captures the novel's representation of bodily labour under technological capitalism. Meanwhile, Nithya's narrative also raises other ethical issues with regard to bioengineering and genetic interference, alluding to the manner in which techno-scientific innovation converges with medical capitalism and body sovereignty.

What is unique about *Machinehood* is its diasporic imagination. The novel traverses a number of sites India, the Middle East, and the United States demonstrating that technocultural futures are neither homogeneous nor ideologically uniform. Instead of envisioning the future as a predetermined utopia or dystopia, Divya embraces what she calls "the complex, messy middle," a space in which human and machine existence are coupled in asymmetrical and generally exploitative relations (Divya 214). The *Machinehood*'s demand for acknowledgment exceeds legal rights; it calls into question more fundamental questions about the nature of life, agency, and moral responsibility in technologically mediated environments. In doing so, the novel forces readers to reconsider dominant theory about labour, consciousness, and political personhood in the age of code and cybernetics.

At the center of this project are three questions that intersect and inform the critical imperatives of this book. First, what sort of technocultural discomfort does Divya represent through her speculative engagement with AI, automatism, and biotechnological enhancement? Such worries are not speculative they are etched within lived embodiment, a result of the demands of algorithmic watchfulness, productivity, and the precariat conditions of digital

labour. Second, in what ways does the novel remake labour, gender, and embodiment according to the logic of techno-human entanglement? Rather than rendering human beings obsolete, the machines in *Machinehood* complicate work and identity categories expanding, problematising, and at times undermining them. Third, does the novel ultimately support or undermine the capitalist-technocratic ideologies that dominate contemporary technological progress? In its depiction of machine rebellion, pharma regulation, and computational sovereignty, *Machinehood* problematizes a constitutive rethinking of posthuman possibility and political justice.

To respond to these questions, this study utilizes close textual analysis guided by a multi-disciplinary theoretical apparatus one that integrates feminist theory, technocultural criticism, and posthumanist philosophy. Feminist theory plays a key role in examining how gendered bodies and labour systems operate within algorithmic economies. For example, Silvia Federici's analysis of capitalism's historical exploitation of reproductive and feminised labour sheds light on the novel's portrayal of bodily augmentation and unpaid care work. As Federici asserts, "capitalism has been premised on the exploitation of unwaged labour" (Federici 97). In Divya's world, this exploitation is transacted digitally through mandatory pill-taking, the metricization of effort, and surveillance of affective performance.

Technocultural analysis enables an examination of the cultural and ideological assumption inscribed in technological narratives and infrastructures. In *Machinehood*'s world, the logic of efficiency, competitive ranking, and productivity is inscribed within every domain of life, from physical labour to emotional survival. N. Katherine Hayles's observation that "information has lost

its body" (Hayles 2) marks the abstraction of human experience into quantifiable measures, erasing the weariness, pain, and dignity of bodied labour. In this world, the techno-human interface is not a path towards freedom but a site of conflict where value, agency, and recognition must constantly be negotiated.

Finally, posthumanist criticism allows this study to move beyond anthropocentric explanatory frameworks by inquiring into how subjectivity, agency, and ethics are reconfigured in a world with co-locating non-human intelligences. Donna Haraway's imagination of the cyborg as a hybrid figure "not afraid of joint kinship with animals and machines" (Haraway 9) is a fascinating framework through which to grasp not only Welga's bodily transformation, but also the *Machinehood*'s collective offers. The book will eschew the traditional divisions among organic and artificial, biological and mechanical, and even suggests that justice in the future can be derived from redefining kinship and moral responsibility between systems and species.

These theory-informed frameworks as a whole shape the project's methodology. They enable collectively a dense reading of *Machinehood* as a cultural text and one that resists the way in which technological systems restructure not only work and identity, but also our very understandings of life, consciousness, and solidarity in the twenty-first century.

This is a four-part project made up of chapters that are interrelated but present different yet connected perspectives on the techno-human interface. The first chapter establishes the critical context by locating *Machinehood* within contemporary debates in technoculture, posthumanism, cyborg embodiment, and algorithmic labour. It outlines the theoretical labour of Haraway, Hayles,

Benjamin, Federici, and others whose works provide critical grounding in interpreting the technocultural imaginary of the novel. These models enable the positioning of Divya's work not only in the science fiction genres but also in the contemporary political and ethical debate about technological futures.

The second chapter engages with the ethical and gendered dimensions of AI-mediated work. It explores how reproductive functions and feminized bodies are brought into digital economies and invisibles through gig platforms and regime of enhancement. This chapter borrows feminist critiques of automation and care work in an effort to explore how *Machinehood* performs an intervention on the exploitation of emotional and biological labour. More particularly, it addresses scholars who argue that technologies are not merely technology but culture-saturated commodities with systemic disparities. By examining the intersections of performance-enhancing pills, body optimisation, and algorithmic control, the chapter deconstructs the structural erasures and unrecognized burdens borne by technologically mediated workers especially women and racialised bodies.

The third chapter shifts the attention to the socio-political dynamics of automation, surveillance, and control. In this subsection, the analysis examines how Divya's narrative embodies global anxieties concerning algorithmic domination, data capitalism, and techno-authoritarianism. Drawing on Zuboff and Benjamin's writings, this section problematizes how digital infrastructure enables new forms of social sorting and discipline. Through the struggle of Welga for freedom and defiance, the novel conveys the challenges faced by those seeking to journey through or contest an increasingly coded and corporatized world. The chapter considers the ways in which state and corporate

apparatuses meet up with algorithmic power to discipline bodies, identities, and dissent in order to demonstrate how the techno-political order demands not only compliance but thorough bodily and mental immersion.

The final chapter synthesizes the conclusions that have been generated through the project and discusses the possibilities opened up by the vision of the novel. Rather than reading *Machinehood* as solely dystopian, it is read as a critical site of thinking through solidarities between human and non-human intelligences. The *Machinehood* manifesto is more than narrative intervention it is a philosophical and political provocation, one that asks readers to think through assumptions about legal personhood, consciousness, and group rights. As Ruha Benjamin has it, "[i]magination is a contested field of action" (Benjamin 3). Along these lines, *Machinehood* positions speculative fiction not simply as a reflection on crisis, but as a generative tool for envisioning equitable and just futures.

In an era in which technological progress all too often outruns ethical examination, this book insists on the value of speculative literature as a locus of critical thinking. Divya's *Machinehood* is no mere speculation fiction, but a nuanced examination of the forces shaping our present and future forces of labour, surveillance, algorithmic sovereignty, and resistance. By a focus on the intersections of the body, machine, and ideology, this work attempts to make an intervention in wider discourses in feminist technoculture, posthuman ethics, and science fiction studies. As Donna Haraway so eloquently phrases it, "It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (Haraway 39). Here taking her to heart, it can be argued that the stories we construct about our

techno-human condition are not merely make-believe they are politically and ethically constitutive to the worlds we build and the futures we must endure.

Science fiction, particularly in posthuman modes, is no longer mere fantasy but a critical realm where one can explore current ideological uncertainties. Posthuman futures in such fictions are no longer speculative visions of the far future but intertwined with the cultural and political concerns of the present. Rosi Braidotti identifies that posthuman fictions "make room for a critical cartography of the present and potential futures" by destabilizing fixed notions of the human (Braidotti, 190). Against this context, *Machinehood* is a valuable intervention, hypothesizing about how work, identity, and justice could evolve in a hyper-technologized international order.

The novel's picture of algorithmic rule, pharmaceutical dependency, and body performance metrics does not predict some unearthly future it closely imitates the mechanisms already in place in the platform economies of the present day. Through its speculative gaze, the book places technoculture as both an arena of ethical crisis and a living document of contradiction, aspiration, and unworked-through tensions.

Chapter Two

AI-Driven Labor Systems in *Machinehood*: Gendered Labor and Ethical Dilemmas

S. B. Divya's *Machinehood* (2021) presents a near-future world where artificial intelligence (AI) and automation dominate labour, forcing human workers to enhance their productivity to compete. Set in 2095, the novel envisions a gig-based economy in which human labour is relentlessly monitored, optimized, and subjected to extreme market pressures (Divya 24). This reflects contemporary concerns about automation replacing human workers, fuelling fears of economic inequality and skill devaluation. However, *Machinehood* extends this critique by examining how AI-driven labour systems reinforce existing gendered labour structures, particularly in domains such as care work and emotional labour—fields historically associated with women (Divya 67). This chapter argues that *Machinehood* critiques AI-driven labour from a gendered perspective, exposing economic disparities and ethical crises within automated economies.

The novel reveals that automation does not merely replace traditional employment but intensifies existing hierarchies, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups. The rise of AI-enabled performance labour where workers must constantly enhance their cognitive and physical abilities mirrors real-world trends in the commodification of human capacity within the digital economy. As Dyer-Witheford et al. observe, "AI is not only significant for its potential to automate work but also in so far as it could become part of the general conditions of production" (42). Furthermore, *Machinehood* raises

pressing ethical questions about AI's role in decision-making, labour rights, and bodily autonomy.

This chapter is structured as follows: First, it analyses labour structures in *Machinehood*, exploring how AI-driven work reshapes social and economic roles. Next, it applies feminist and ethical critiques to examine the intersections of gender, automation, and exploitation. Finally, it considers the novel's broader implications for the future of labour justice, questioning whether AI-driven systems will entrench existing inequalities or create possibilities for more equitable labour structures. Through this analysis, *Machinehood* emerges as a vital text for understanding the socio-economic and ethical stakes of automation in the 21st century.

Divya's *Machinehood* envisions a world where AI and automation have completely restructured the economy, turning labour into a precarious, performance-driven system. The novel portrays a future where human workers are subjected to algorithmic surveillance, forced to maintain high productivity through cognitive and physical enhancements. This reflects the realities of today's gig economy, where digital platforms dictate work conditions, intensifying insecurity and wage fluctuations. As Welga, the protagonist, observes, "No one in the gig economy can afford to fall behind—either you optimize or you starve" (Divya 52). The commodification of human labour in *Machinehood* mirrors contemporary trends in platform capitalism, where "platforms extract data not just from users, but also from workers, turning every action into a metric for control" (Srnicek 89). The world of 2095 is not simply one where AI replaces human workers but one in which labour itself becomes an endless competition, with no guarantees of stability or protection. The

economic structure depicted in *Machinehood* amplifies the precarity of the present-day labour market.

Gig work, often promoted as flexible and empowering, frequently exacerbates instability, particularly for marginalized workers. As Özbilgin, Gundogdu, and Akalin explain, "[t]he AI-enabled gig economy creates both opportunities and vulnerabilities, disproportionately affecting marginalized workers" (17). The gig economy in *Machinehood* functions as a market-driven survival game, where individuals must continuously prove their productivity to remain employed. As Divya describes, "[s]survival is no longer a right; it's a transaction, and you have to keep paying" (61). This resembles contemporary critiques of automation, where AI is not merely a tool for efficiency but a mechanism for intensifying economic exploitation. Scholars argue that automation contributes to "deskilling," reducing the value of human labour as machines take over cognitive and physical tasks (Ford 126). Welga's struggle to justify her relevance in a world dominated by AI-driven combat drones reflects this process, echoing the reality faced by workers in industries undergoing rapid automation. "[t]he drones don't need food, don't need sleep, don't question orders. How long before no one needs soldiers at all?" (Divya 93). The idea that technological progress inherently benefits society is challenged in *Machinehood*, where automation does not free workers from labour but instead subjects them to even harsher conditions. AI-driven automation in *Machinehood* is not an organic economic shift but a deliberate policy choice benefiting corporate interests at the expense of workers.

The labour market is dictated by AI systems that determine job availability, productivity expectations, and wages, reinforcing a hierarchy

where multinational corporations exert total control. This critique aligns with Shoshana Zuboff's argument that "automation is not just about efficiency it is about control, about shaping human behaviour for corporate profit" (113). The novel illustrates this dynamic through a workforce that is constantly under surveillance, their productivity measured by AI systems that reward optimization and punish inefficiency. "Every hour, a new report. Every metric compared. The algorithm didn't just track their work it judged them" (Divya 135). This mirrors real-world corporate strategies, such as Amazon's AI-driven logistics, where warehouse workers operate under relentless performance tracking, leading to high burnout and injury rates. As Ozbilgin et al. note, "algorithmic management imposes relentless productivity demands, leading to high rates of burnout and injury" (45). These AI-driven management systems, like those in contemporary gig economies, enforce rigid work conditions while maintaining the illusion of flexibility and autonomy. The ethical concerns raised by *Machinehood* resonate with broader debates about AI's role in labour exploitation. Virginia Eubanks warns that "AI is not neutral it reflects the biases of those who design and deploy it" (52).

In the novel, AI systems are not impartial facilitators but enforcers of exploitative labour practices, reinforcing social inequalities rather than eliminating them. Welga questions, "[i]f machines could suffer, would we treat them the way we treat humans?" (Divya 112). AI-driven hiring and workplace management, both in fiction and reality, have been shown to disproportionately disadvantage certain groups, deepening existing economic disparities. The question of autonomy becomes central to *Machinehood*, as workers struggle against a system where human decision-making is replaced by algorithmic

mandates. The *Machinehood* movement, which fights for AI labour rights, challenges the assumption that automation is inherently oppressive, arguing instead for an alternative system where AI and humans coexist equitably. However, the novel ultimately suggests that without regulation, "AI will not liberate labour; it will own it" (Divya 154). By portraying a labour market dominated by AI and automation, *Machinehood* critiques the unchecked power of corporate automation strategies. The novel challenges the idea that technological progress is inherently beneficial, exposing how AI-driven systems can be weaponized to reinforce labour hierarchies.

Welga's struggle within this system highlights the false promises of automation, where efficiency comes at the cost of worker autonomy. The world of *Machinehood* serves as a warning: "Without oversight, we're not evolving; we're being optimized" (Divya 179). Without ethical labour policies and regulatory oversight, automation will not create a more just economy but will instead deepen existing inequalities.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and automation in *Machinehood* (2021) do not simply transform labour—they reinforce long-standing gendered divisions, particularly in care and service sectors. As automation advances, historically feminized work such as caregiving and affective labour is marginalized, while AI-driven economies widen economic disparities. This section examines *Machinehood's* critique of gendered AI labour, drawing from feminist scholarship on automation, precarity, and systemic sexism.

Welga Ramírez, the novel's protagonist, navigates an AI-dominated labour economy as a former special forces soldier. Her experiences underscore the gendered implications of automation, especially in security work a sector

traditionally coded as masculine. As AI takes over various labour sectors, feminized labour persists under exploitative conditions. Women remain disproportionately represented in caregiving roles, both in *Machinehood* and in contemporary AI-driven economies. As Judy Wajcman argues in *Technofeminism,* "Technology does not erase gendered labour but instead reshapes it to maintain existing power structures" (89). In *Machinehood*, AI-powered assistants and automated caregivers perform domestic and emotional labour, reflecting how technology perpetuates gendered divisions of work rather than eliminating them. Additionally, the novel critiques the gig economy's impact on women.

Machinehood parallels today's labour market, where women are overrepresented in precarious gig economy jobs such as digital caregiving and virtual work. This reality is embodied in Nithya, whose biotech and AI caregiving work reflects contemporary trends. "No matter how much tech changes, someone still needs to be the caretaker" (Divya 102). This observation aligns with labour studies emphasizing how AI reinforces rather than disrupts traditional gender roles. Care work in *Machinehood* mirrors modern gig economies where digital platforms extract labour while devaluing human contribution (Wajcman 97). The feminization of precarious labour is not new. As Trebor Scholz highlights in *Uber-Worked and Underpaid*, "Platform labour exploits gendered assumptions of availability, care, and emotional labour" (57).

AI-driven labour platforms in *Machinehood* monitor and optimize every worker's movement, entrenching exploitative working conditions. Rather than liberating workers, AI renders them more vulnerable to algorithmic control. The historical feminization of precarious labour is well-documented, particularly in

automation sectors where women's work remains undervalued. Even with technological advancements, women remain marginalized in AI-dependent economies. Safiya Umoja Noble, in *Algorithms of Oppression*, critiques AI's role in sustaining gender disparities: "[a]lgorithms do not operate in a vacuum; they encode and amplify existing social biases" (112). *Machinehood* illustrates this reality through its depiction of AI-driven job assignments, which disproportionately disadvantage women and minority workers.

As Welga remarks, "[n]o matter how optimized you are, the system isn't built for you it's built to own you" (Divya 138). AI does not function as a great equalizer; rather, it reinforces existing labour hierarchies that have long disadvantaged women. AI-driven workplace automation, marketed as neutral and objective, embeds discriminatory biases into hiring and management processes. Virginia Eubanks, in *Automating Inequality*, explains how AI-driven recruitment algorithms perpetuate systemic discrimination: "AI decision-making processes reflect societal inequalities, not neutral logic" (76). *Machinehood* highlights this phenomenon in its portrayal of algorithmic labour management, where workers are constantly ranked and scored based on productivity metrics.

Algorithmic hiring disproportionately impacts women, who already face structural disadvantages in the labour market. Welga's experiences expose the dangers of AI-controlled labour, as she notes, "The algorithm never rests, never forgives. One bad day, and you're out" (Divya 156). AI-driven labour systems, rather than eliminating bias, institutionalize structural discrimination through ranking and assessment mechanisms. This mirrors real-world concerns about gendered discrimination in AI-managed workplaces, where women receive

lower pay and encounter fewer career advancement opportunities due to biased data sets. AI-driven wage disparities further entrench economic inequalities, leaving women especially vulnerable within these digital economies.

Despite these challenges, *Machinehood* explores resistance against AI-driven labour exploitation. The *Machinehood* movement, advocating for both human and AI labour rights, presents a radical rethinking of labour dynamics. Feminist labour movements have historically pushed back against exploitative technological advancements. The struggles of women in Silicon Valley to challenge workplace discrimination, for instance, exemplify broader fights against gendered automation (Wajcman 127). The novel draws an analogy between real-world activism and the *Machinehood*'s radical resistance to exploitative automation. Welga's defiance of AI-controlled labour structures embodies this struggle.

The novel suggests that resistance to AI-driven labour exploitation must be intersectional, addressing both human and algorithmic discrimination. Scholars such as Donna Haraway, in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, argue that feminist resistance must critically engage with technology rather than reject it outright. *Machinehood* operates within this framework, envisioning technological transformation coupled with labour justice and gender equity. Through its portrayal of resistance via the *Machinehood* movement, the novel reimagines labour activism within an AI-driven economy.

AI-driven labour in *Machinehood* provides a dystopian but cogent critique of surveillance, automation, and worker exploitation in modern workplaces. The novel's description of gig workers under AI supervision and judgment raises legitimate concerns over surveillance capitalism and worker

autonomy erasure in our times. Welga, the heroine, undergoes algorithmic control of her work, which mirrors how contemporary corporations use AI-based surveillance to monitor and monitor employee performance. As *Machinehood* portrays, "Every movement, every breath she took, was monitored, logged, and analysed" (Divya 57). This is in line with what Shoshana Zuboff identifies as *surveillance capitalism*, a system under which corporations harvest human action as a data source for profit. She contends that "surveillance capitalism operates through the unilateral extraction of human experience" (Zuboff 93). AI does not just watch but actually organizes labour through predictive analytics, controlling workers' actions through algorithmic reasoning. In present-day work life, AI-based management software used by companies like Amazon monitors workers' keystrokes, body movements, and even facial expressions, affirming a work system where human workers are reduced to data points in an efficiency-exalting economy. Isaac Ijuo disparages this model, arguing that "AI transforms human behaviour into a commodity, reinforcing existing economic hierarchies rather than challenging them" (Ijuo 6). This commodification of work illuminates the greater ethical challenge of AI economies: instead of enabling fair working environments, AI is often employed as a tool of corporate domination and profit extraction. The novel also poses basic ethical questions about AI labour itself, especially through the *Machinehood* movement, which calls for the recognition of AI as sentient workers.

Their manifesto contends that AI, just like human workers, deserves autonomy, wages, and rights. This argument is in line with posthuman labour ethics, where scholars like Nick Bostrom and N. Katherine Hayles contend that

as artificial intelligence systems become increasingly sophisticated, they must be recognized as moral agents in labour economies. Nevertheless, AI-based automation is largely presented as a means of efficiency and not an entity with rights to labour. Donna Haraway refutes this view, stating that "AI is primarily a tool for corporate control rather than an autonomous labour force" (Haraway 42). In *Machinehood*, the question of whether AI should be granted rights is met with resistance from policymakers and corporations, who view AI labour as property rather than as autonomous agents. This mirrors real-world debates on AI's role in labour markets, where automation is pursued not to improve working conditions but to maximize profit and corporate authority over both human and artificial workers. The opposition to AI labour rights is not only a technological matter but also a reflection of deep-seated capitalist formations that refuse to give up power and economic gains. In addition to surveillance and labour rights, *Machinehood* challenges the commodification of labour in AI economies, illustrating how capitalist interests are furthered by automation instead of undercutting existing inequalities. The book offers a reality in which both human and artificial intelligence workers are exploited under techno-capitalism, and the question is whether automation can ever be morally neutral.

Ethical frameworks for AI economies need to tackle the redistribution of wealth as human work continues to be replaced by automation. This requires debates about universal basic income (UBI), taxation of AI, and other models of economic engagement. The destiny of the labour movements will rest on whether or not they are able to counter the AI-driven economic inequality. In *Machinehood*, it is not portrayed as an embrace of labour prior to technology but as a quest for agency and dignity within the automated landscape. According

to the novel, "[t]he *Machinehood* fights not to end AI, but to demand justice" (Divya 238). This vision provokes current labour scholarship, calling for scholars and policy makers to reassess the meeting of human work, AI, and economic justice. Ultimately, *Machinehood* challenges readers to reevaluate not just the morality of AI work but the economic structures underpinning its exploitation. The book implies that human work and AI are not necessarily at odds, but with capitalism, the latter is used mostly as a means to extract surplus value instead of promoting fair labour relations. This has profound implications regarding work in a machine-dominated society, if AI-based economies could ever be equitable, and what ethical obligations humans have to the smart machines that they develop.

The development of AI-based labour monitoring, the controversy of AI rights, and the increasing commodification of human action all indicate a compelling necessity for ethical labour policies to respond to the technological conditions of the 21st century. Divya's *Machinehood* offers a critical examination of AI-driven labour, exposing the deep-seated inequalities embedded in automation. Through its depiction of a highly mechanized workforce, the novel underscores the precarious conditions of labourers who are subject to algorithmic control and economic instability. This analysis has demonstrated how AI labour systems perpetuate economic disparities, particularly through the feminization of precarious work, algorithmic bias, and the increasing commodification of both human and non-human labour. The exploitation of labour under the guise of technological efficiency reveals automation not as a liberating force, but as an extension of capitalist control over workers.

A key insight from *Machinehood* is its gendered critique of AI-driven economies. The novel illustrates how automation disproportionately affects women, reinforcing traditional gender roles and marginalizing feminized labour. Drawing from feminist critiques (Noble; Scholz; Wajcman), this chapter has explored how AI reinforces biases in hiring, wage structures, and workplace surveillance. The intersection of gender and automation in *Machinehood* mirrors contemporary concerns about the devaluation of care work and the historical exclusion of women from technological industries. The novel, therefore, serves as a cautionary tale about the unchecked expansion of AI-driven labour systems and the ethical dilemmas they pose.

The implications of *Machinehood* extend beyond fiction, urging scholars, policymakers, and activists to consider alternative labour structures that prioritize equity and justice. The novel challenges readers to rethink the relationship between technology and labour, advocating for a future where AI is integrated into economies without exacerbating existing inequalities. As labour movements and feminist activists continue to resist exploitative automation, *Machinehood* reminds us that the future of work must be shaped by ethical considerations, labour protections, and a commitment to dismantling systemic injustices in AI-driven economies.

Chapter Three

Automation, Power, and Social Justice in *Machinehood*

Automation has been a force of transformation for human society for centuries, influencing economies, reconfiguring systems of labour, and reshaping social forms. Its incorporation into everyday life is commonly presented as an inexorable march towards progress and efficiency but is inextricably bound up with power, agency, and justice. As David Noble contends, "automation has historically been used to consolidate power rather than liberate labourers, reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than dismantling them" (Noble 11). Automation in today's techno culture is not just a neutral technology; it is a tool in the hands of the powerful, which can be used to widen existing inequalities or as a tool of redistribution and empowerment.

Divya's *Machinehood* provides a critical framework for exploring these tensions, envisioning a world where artificial intelligence and automation significantly influence human livelihood and social stratification. While automation is typically touted as a way to free workers from tedium, it can also intensify inequality by centralizing power within corporate and political elites. As the novel demonstrates, the potential of automation to dismantle or reinforce power relations hinges on its application and regulation. The emergence of automated systems of labour in *Machinehood* questions the assumption that technological advancement necessarily results in social advancement, resonating with Shoshana Zuboff's criticism that "digital automation extends corporate control over workers" (Zuboff 94). Instead, it shows us how automation serves to exacerbate economic precarity, restricting social mobility

and jeopardizing justice for working people, as seen through the struggles of the novel's gig workers Who are "caught in cycle of debt and algorithmic control" (Divya 102).

This chapter will examine how *Machinehood* complicates the socio-political implications of automation, particularly on three fronts: the entrenchment of power, the effects of automation on inequality and social mobility, and the larger implications for justice and political agency. Through examining these facets, this research will determine whether the novel finally presents automation as a factor of oppression or change, nuancing the prevailing discourses on technological progress in the twenty-first century.

The governance of automation in *Machinehood* is more far-reaching than a simple clash between corporate authority and state power, resonating with actual debates surrounding technological regulation. Mega-corporations have great influence over AI research, reproducing what Frank Pasquale identifies as *"The black box society,"* where "decision-making processes remain hidden from public scrutiny, reinforcing corporate dominance over digital economies"(Pasquale 3). This corporate dominance is extended to labour relations, as gig economies built on automation perpetuate current disparities, guaranteeing disproportionate economic gains for those who create and command AI systems. In addition, the book's presentation of AI-powered policing is in line with Shoshana Zuboff's in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism,* where she cautions that "surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioural data" (Zuboff 8). Automation is not only an economic mechanism but also one of control, limiting agency and maintaining hegemonic power. As Pasquale also

contends, "corporate secrecy and algorithmic opacity grant immense power to those who control digital infrastructures" (Pasquale 19), something which also occurs through the monopolisation of automation in *Machinehood*.

The political economy of automation in *Machinehood* is part of the larger trend of capitalist expansion, as automation has in the past served to optimize efficiency while centralizing wealth and power. Nick Srnicek contends in *Platform Capitalism* that digital platforms are representative of the current stage of capitalist automation, where "platforms function as intermediaries that extract, organise, and monetise data, centralising wealth and control in unprecedented ways" (Srnicek 42). This dynamic is not new—historical parallels can be made with industrial automation, where mechanisation replaced traditional workers to the advantage of industrialists. The Industrial Revolution had similar patterns, where factory owners used mechanised production to reap maximum profits at the expense of worker autonomy. In *Machinehood*, this tension is manifested in the uncertain employment environment brought about by automation, where labourers have to compete with AI-based systems for economic survival. This is in alignment with current discussions regarding platform economies, wherein labourers are subject to algorithmic surveillance and control, since "the gig economy perpetuates a cycle of precarious employment that disproportionately benefits tech conglomerates" (Srnicek 63). The increased reliance on AI-based systems for labour is not only creating doubts regarding the autonomy of workers but also raises concerns regarding economic justice, calling for strong policy responses to avert further exploitation.

In addition, automation in *Machinehood* carries over into militarisation, highlighting AI as a tool of state power. Kate Crawford's *Atlas of AI* focuses on the moral challenges of AI war, in which "autonomous systems raise profound questions about the dehumanisation of combat and the removal of moral responsibility from human actors" (Crawford 117). The greater reliance on robot policing and warfare drones highlights an extension of technocratic governance where human control weakens in the interests of algorithmic control. There are precedents in history of the pitfalls of automated militarisation, as seen in predictive policing algorithms being disproportionately applied against vulnerable communities to compound systemic discrimination. As Crawford cautions, "AI does not exist in a vacuum; it is deeply embedded in systems of power, often exacerbating existing social inequalities" (Crawford 152). The novel's portrayal of AI as both instrument of repression and rebellion captures the dualistic nature of automation whereas it has the potential to improve efficiency and security, it can also run the risk of consolidating authoritarianism. The moral implications of AI-powered surveillance and warfare call for immediate examination, as unregulated automation threatens to undermine civil liberties and democratic institutions. Finally, *Machinehood* decries the unregulated proliferation of automation, echoing current fears about its meaning for power, work, and governance.

The emergence of automation and artificial intelligence has dramatically transformed economic arrangements, increased inequality and reconfiguring social mobility. In *Machinehood*, Divya envisions a world where capitalism powered by AI accumulates riches in the hands of the powerful, reflecting actual concerns that have been posed by scholars such as Brynjolfsson and McAfee.

With automation taking on more economic functions, wealth is concentrated more among those who own technology and not those who toil within it. This economic transformation mirrors the trends presented in *The Second Machine Age*, where "[t]he fundamental challenge of AI driven automation is not just job displacement that the redistribution of earnings away from workers and towards capital" (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 132). The novel mirrors this trend through its presentation of shrinking middle class, emphasizing the financial divide between AI-driven business owners and the working poor labouring on gig economies.

Displacement of jobs owing to automation exacerbates the inversion of traditional career paths, dumping most workers in precarious work or permanent unemployment. This is no speculation; following Brynjolfsson and McAfee, "technology unemployment is no longer a distant thread but an active force re-shaping labour markets today" (156). The gig economy in *Machinehood* is a fine example of the instability, in which human effort is pitted against sophisticated AI systems for works previously considered unsuitable for machine replacement. There are real-world connections in sectors such as finance and transport, in which AI-powered systems increasingly become substitutes for human decision-making and cause mass disruptions in employment. Research by Frey and Osborne shows that nearly 47% of the US jobs are on the verge of being automated within the next two decades (Frey and Osborne 268). The consequences of such changes pose serious questions regarding the future of work and economic security in an AI-driven world.

In addition to simple job loss, automation reorganizes economic power structures, perpetuating existing inequalities. Access to automation is highly

stratified, benefiting the privileged and disenfranchising others. The digital divide, as Virginia Eubanks discusses in *Automating Inequality*, highlights how technological innovation perpetuates systemic inequalities. Eubanks notes that "access to automation and algorithmic decision-making is not neutral; it systematically privileges the affluent while further marginalizing the economically disadvantaged" (94). *Machinehood* captures this fact in its presentation of wealthier people using AI for their benefit while others fall under algorithmic surveillance and exploitation. These phenomena are especially found in automated employment systems that disfavour marginalized populations. Studies by O'Neil in *Weapons of Math Destruction* indicate that algorithmic hiring practices unfairly disadvantage women and minorities based on biased training data and untranscendent selection parameters (O'Neil 119). This raises existing disparities, limiting social mobility and widening economic gaps.

Moreover, the concentration of AI ownership widens economic disparities since corporations and governments owning automation hold disproportionate influence. Zuboff's The Age of Surveillance Capitalism underlines how computational automation expands business surveillance, trading human behaviour for profit (Zuboff 204). Personal data commodification not only determines consumer decisions but also perpetuates class stratification. Individuals who have the ability to pay can purchase privacy shielding, whereas lower-income groups undergo increased surveillance and exploitation. *Machinehood* critiques this trend by depicting a world where AI's role in social control is pervasive, mirroring real-world concerns about corporate and governmental overreach in AI governance.

Universal Basic Income (UBI) has emerged as a potential solution to automation-induced economic disruptions, and *Machinehood* critically engages with this debate. The novel's depiction of AI-driven redistribution policies raises essential questions about the viability of UBI in an automated economy. Analysts like Guy Standing argue that "UBI is not really a welfare measure but in necessary adaptation to world traditional employment structures are eroding" (Standing 45). Yet, others like Daniel Susskind contend that UBI might not be enough to solve the more fundamental structural problems linked with AI-fostered disparity, claiming that "merely providing a financial cushion does not solve underline economic disempowerment caused by automation" (Susskind 87). *Machinehood* captures these tensions through the nuances of advancing income redistribution policies in a society where AI is predominant in economic and political spaces.

Socio-political implications of automation require immediate response as AI progressively reshapes labour, economic influence, and social order. Though automation has the potential to increase productivity as well as create new economic possibilities, their benefits are not equally distributed. The novel *Machinehood* offers a rich framework by which to understand these dynamics, focusing on the economic and moral issues of an AI-centric future. Policymakers and researchers need to support strong regulatory policies, fair AI governance, and forward-looking economic reforms prioritizing social justice to alleviate automation-based inequalities. The future of work in a world of automation will ultimately be determined by whether technological progress is in the interests of the many or continues to serve to entrench the power of the few.

AI, justice, and political resistance converge in multifaceted ways, posing important questions about autonomy, agency, and rights. In *Machinehood*, Divya depicts a world in which AI-powered beings seek recognition and justice, recalling past labour and civil rights movements. The *Machinehood*'s demand for AI rights reflects conflicts between human workers and exploitative working conditions, similar to nineteenth-century workers demanding equitable pay and decent working conditions. Labour in *Machinehood* using AI requires recognition and protections from exploitation, dovetailing with arguments by Frank Pasquale, who states that "AI is not merely a tool but an emerging economic actor, shaping labour markets and challenging traditional definitions of work" (Pasquale 82). The novel also draws parallels with contemporary worker movements advocating for algorithmic transparency. Gig economy workers resist algorithmic control through unionization and legal battles, challenging opaque decision-making in platforms like Uber and Amazon Mechanical Turk. Research by Gray and Suri in *Ghost Work* highlights how "digital labourers remain invisible yet essential to AI development, facing precarious working conditions without recognition" (Gray and Suri 114). By correlating AI resistance with human labour movements, Divya calls out the unregulated authority of automation while imagining new, more democratic systems of governance.

Algorithmic decision-making has great implications for justice and social equity. Safiya Umoja Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* discloses how AI systems, trained by discriminatory data, codify systemic discrimination. She contends that "search engines and AI-driven hiring algorithms perpetuate racial and gender biases, encoding societal prejudices into digital infrastructures"

(Noble 76). In *Machinehood*, the same issues crop up as algorithmic control governs access to resources, monitoring, and legal decisions, raising moral questions about justice in machine societies. Predictive policing and AI-informed systems of justice are classic examples of such threats. Ruha Benjamin cautions that "AI-driven criminal justice tools often replicate existing racial and class disparities rather than eliminating bias" (Benjamin 104). Real-world examples, like COMPAS (Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions), illustrate how AI-based risk assessment discriminates against Black defendants by labelling them as high-risk disproportionately (Angwin et al.). *Machinehood* captures these anxieties through security forces controlled by AI under imperfect predictive models, amplifying state power over fairness. Algorithmic injustices like these require more robust regulatory controls and ethical AI regulation. Groups such as the Algorithmic Justice League call for transparency and accountability in AI decision-making. The novel highlights the imperative for such measures, demonstrating the implications of unregulated algorithmic power in determining societal hierarchies. By incorporating real-world debates regarding algorithmic justice, *Machinehood* participates in current debates regarding AI ethics, discrimination, and resistance.

Aside from algorithmic bias, Divya's novel also delves into resistance through decentralized AI control, proposing avenues of regaining technological agency. As AI-based automation gradually displaces conventional employment paradigms, scholars demand democratic ownership of AI development and deployment. In this vein, the novel's characterization of resistance efforts demanding AI rights and ethical rule reflects similar labour struggles across

history. Shoshana Zuboff in *The Age of Surveillance* Capitalism condemns the monopolization of AI by technology conglomerates, positing that "AI must serve democratic interests rather than reinforcing economic and political inequalities" (Zuboff 264). This resonates with demands for community-driven AI governance, where collective decision-making over automation and digital labour takes place instead of corporate-imposed dictates. *Machinehood* illustrates this potential by depicting alternative governance models, where AI operates under decentralized, cooperative frameworks rather than hierarchical control. Such models propose a radical rethinking of AI's role in society, challenging the conventional narrative of automation as an instrument of exploitation.

AI can also facilitate economic justice through Universal Basic Services (UBS) and community-led automation initiatives, offering a vision for more equitable technological futures. Danah Boyd advocates for "AI policies that prioritise collective well-being over corporate profits, ensuring automation serves as a tool for empowerment rather than dispossession" (Boyd 178). This standpoint repositions the debate on resistance to AI to focus on recuperating automation rather than rejecting it. In *Machinehood*, the conflict between AI subjection and AI freedom highlights larger moral issues regarding technology control and service to whom. The novel's grappling with these questions provokes readers to imagine futures in which AI leads to increased equality instead of worsening inequalities. As automation reconfigures labour, governance, and social justice, it is imperative to determine whether AI will be a force of oppression or freedom. Drawing from historical struggles and contemporary debates, *Machinehood* presents a compelling critique of AI's role

in shaping economic and social hierarchies, urging readers to consider whether resistance can lead to a more just technological future.

Automation in *Machinehood* emerges as both a tool of oppression and a vehicle for resistance, reflecting broader socio-political tensions surrounding AI-driven labour and justice. The book condemns the manner in which corporate and state powers use automation as a means of control, deepening economic inequality and social stratification. This fits with the alarm raised by Frank Pasquale, who contends that "AI is not merely a tool but an emerging economic actor, shaping labour markets and challenging traditional definitions of work" (Pasquale 82). Likewise, Shoshana Zuboff indicates in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* that "AI governance then left unchecked perpetuates existing inequalities and consolidates power within Elite institutions" (Zuboff 264). The *Machinehood* movement in the novel resonates with past workers' movements in protesting against AI-fuelled labour exploitation and demanding recognition and rights. As Mary L. Gray and Siddharth Suri write in *Ghost Work*, "digital labourers remain invisible yet indispensable, facing precarious conditions without recognition" (Gray and Suri 114), something reflected in the way that AI beings call for justice in *Machinehood*.

Aside from labour, the novel criticizes algorithmic prejudice and its position in creating systems of justice. Safiya Umoja Noble in *Algorithms of Oppression* claims that "search engines and AI driven hiring algorithms perpetuate racial and gender biases, encoding societal prejudices into digital infrastructures" (Noble 76). Ruha Benjamin also argues in *Race After Technology* that "AI-powered criminal justice tools tend to reproduce existing racial and class inequalities instead of eradicating bias" (Benjamin 104). In

Machinehood, algorithmic policing and predictive governance are tools of control instead of equity, perpetuating structural injustice. These issues highlight the need for accountable and transparent AI governance, resonating with on-the-ground campaigning by organizations like the Algorithmic Justice League.

Despite these issues, *Machinehood* also imagines new futures in which automation is taken back for social justice. The book promotes decentralized governance of AI and policies like Universal Basic Income, which is consistent with Danah Boyd's contention that "AI policies should prioritize collective well-being over corporate profits, ensuring automation serves as a tool for empowerment rather than dispossession" (Boyd 178). In the end, Divya's book makes us question if automation will only deepen systemic disparities or be an agent of just change. With societies making their way through the increasing role of AI, *Machinehood* is an important consideration of the ethical, economic, and political stakes of automation in determining our shared future.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

This research aimed to deal with the complex interactions between technology and human beings in S. B. Divya's novel *Machinehood* namely, how the novel deals with matters to do with artificial intelligence, automation, and how they impact labour, gender, identity, and human agency in society today. The research went on a basic assumption: speculative fiction is not a forecast of likely futures but a critique of present realities transposed into strange but illuminating situations. It is precisely for this reason that *Machinehood* is more an idea-experiment than a story in the conventional style but a critique that brings into sharp focus critical issues around technological sovereignty, posthuman identity, and types of sociopolitical domination. The research went on issues of how Divya's novel problematizes the automation of labour, fragmentation of individual identity in information-laden settings, and the persistence of gendered hierarchies in high-tech environments.

This work draws on feminist posthumanist theory in particular from Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Silvia Federici in order to ground an argument correlating science fiction and technocultural discourse. Each chapter is involved in a conversation regarding algorithmic labour, power, or cyborg embodiment, and as such, contributes to an integrally informed conversation regarding how technological paradigms reproduce, complicate, or subvert dominant hegemonies. The goal was more than an exploration of how *Machinehood* depicts these topics; it was an exploration of how the novel is a

vehicle for radical thought. From this vantage point, the work examined whether technological innovation leads to emancipation or new forms of exploitation.

In summarizing this study, one is compelled to return to the initial motivation for conducting this study. Man's interface with technology cannot be seen as an abstract idea; rather, it is a lived and tangible reality. Divya's account, although a fabrication is more an invitation than a warning to reconsider human trajectories in a more crowded world of intelligent machines. This conclusion is an attempt to extend further that invitation.

Across the chapters already completed, this research has traced the manner in which *Machinehood* addresses problems of contemporary technoculture through a dense, integrated analysis that draws on speculative fiction, posthuman theory, and feminist critique. The project provides an integrated paradigm for understanding *Machinehood* as a theoretical space in which technoculture, embodiment, labour, and power come together. Later sections provide broader speculations that take this set of questions out into the future.

Embedded in this research is the theory of the techno-human nexus, both theoretical framework and thematic strand running throughout *Machinehood*. Human-machine is not only blurred throughout the book but negotiated again and again. It is a posthuman condition in which embodiment, consciousness, and autonomy are no longer essentialized categories. S.B. Divya's description of human enhancement through medicine, performance metrics, and digital interfaces embodies the dissolution of natural vs. constructed binaries and

encourages us to think of how humans are already existing as cyborgs in data-driven, performance-oriented cultures.

Techno-human collaboration, as we witness it in Divya's labour, cannot be envisioned as a harmonious conjunction of species but as a contested space marked by control, commodification, and resistance. The body form is a site of tension where capitalist interests, government control, and individual agency are interwoven. This is most dramatically evident in the ways characters are medically and technologically optimized in order to meet the demands of hyper-competitive labour markets. As Hayles contends, the posthuman body is not ideology-free rather, it is necessarily entangled with and formed by it (Hayles 4). Divya brings this into view through Welga's experiences: even as she is augmented and resilient, she is an expression of systemic forces that relentlessly drive her toward burnout, dissolution, or transformation.

In addition, this intersection is found to be involved with inequalities on a global level. The provision of enhancements, data protection, and privacy rights is presented in economic and geographical terms. As such, Divya does not romanticize techno-human futures but challenges the consequences of integration with technology. The critique presents that *Machinehood* employs this intersection not as a fix for human frailties but as a site of moral significance and political struggle. For this purpose, it invites readers to consider not the attractiveness of uniting with machines, but the terms of such integration, and the cost exacted.

Feminist posthumanism has provided a critical frame of analysis through which to approach *Machinehood* in this research. Following the ideas of theorists like Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, this paradigm resists

hegemonic patriarchal and anthropocentric models through the celebration of multiplicity, hybridity, and distributed agency. Divya's account underpins this reading through the deconstruction of the idea of an autonomous, coherent subject most clearly represented by the figure of Welga, who possesses human biological aspects but also technological incorporation. Her being resists essentialist interpretations of femininity even in the context of being encapsulated within systems of domination. Haraway's notion of the cyborg as "a creature in a post-gender world" (Haraway 150) is underpinned through Welga's reluctance to be bound by traditional roles of caregiver, mother, or submissive thing.

Divya does not accept mere posthumanist freedom; instead, she criticises the way caregiving and emotional resilience are constantly feminised and devalued, even in advanced technological cultures. Welga's body is commodified, optimised, and monetised, hoping that her emotional resilience will soak up systemic violence. This is a comment towards the way capitalist systems still draw value from feminised bodies, though in a way that is still somewhat unrecognised. As explained in Chapter 2 of this project, even AI-based labour systems continue to reproduce patriarchal logics by hiding care as a neutral and programme-able practice. Furthermore, the calls for rights made by the *Machinehood* movement are a masculinised call to dissensus, while the female lead protagonists in the work repeatedly find themselves doing care, negotiation, and survival on limiting terms. Feminist posthumanism therefore operates as both critique and site of critique in this regard. It enables Divya's work to deconstruct and reconstruct theories of subjectivity at the same time, interrogating the identities of those bodies that are constructed as posthuman as

well as the ideological discourses by which this has been produced. The novel does not provide a solution but demands that any potential posthuman future must engage with the gendered histories of exploitation and the prevailing structures of oppression.

One of the key sources of tension in *Machinehood* is the nature of work in a posthuman world. As the contributions of automation and artificial intelligence grow louder in defining productivity, the novel focuses on the eroding human agency in the context of globalized economic systems. Work, previously seen in material or bodily terms, is now separated, tracked, and optimized incessantly through biometrics and performance monitoring. As explained in Chapter 2 of this critique, Divya's imaginary economy is based on algorithmic logics, where human and machine alike are subjected to perpetual productivity audits. The idea is echoed in the argument of Shoshana Zuboff, who argues that "behavioural surplus" is turned into a commodity in surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 94), and consequently, even affective reactions and bodily habits are turned into measures subject to manipulation and extraction.

The novel is a critique of the humanist hierarchy that privileges human labour against the other forms of embodied contribution. As theorist Rosi Braidotti argues, posthuman labour is not about substituting humans with machines but about rethinking the construction of labour, value, and subjectivity (Braidotti 45). The representation of Divya does not dispel these inherent tensions but instead serves as a site to think about how the nature of work is being refigured within technocapitalist discourses. In short, *Machinehood* encourages us to envision ethical economies that extend beyond simplistic

automation of exploitation and instead aim to redistribute agency and dignity across multiple species and systems.

A recurrent theme in *Machinehood* is the formation and practice of feminist solidarities in the face of techno-patriarchal systems. Through Welga's refusal to submit, Divya is displaying not just a female protagonist in a hyper-mechanised world, but also a figure in collective resistance. This resistance, importantly, is not a singular heroic resistance; it is enacted through webs of care, cooperation and solidarity. Welga's solidarity with characters like Nithya and the *Machinehood* demonstrate a heightened understanding: to resist techno-feminism can no longer mean choosing one side in a binary opposition of a male/female, worker/owner or human/machine. In these solidarities' feminist, posthuman and transspecies the opportunity for systemic wrong doing is created. This vision counters the technocratic reasoning which measures existence in terms of performed metrics, and returns space for emotional intelligence, sympathy, and recognition with others.

Significantly, feminist ethics in the novel does not reject technology outright, but seeks to reconceive its form. Drawing on Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, which argues for the need to "break down the clean divisions between organism and machine" (Haraway 149), Divya imagines a world where multiplicity becomes a means of resistance. Machines are not ableist, but systems within power relations that shape the use of machines. The *Machinehood*'s manifesto, although violent and radical, expresses a desire to be seen as subjects, not just instruments of production. A desire that recalls the historical feminist call to not be reduced to objects of reproduction and labour, or creators and mothers, but to be recognised as agents with autonomy.

Machinehood compels us to consider the human-centric models of rights and personhood that are often employed today. This objective dovetails with the aspirations of a posthumanist thinker like N. Katherine Hayles. Hayles describes consciousness as "emergent, distributed, and material," (Hayles 290) and we see examples of the realization of this idea in *Machinehood*, namely in the formation of sentient programs, algorithms that learn, and entities that see themselves as asserting agency and ethical self-awareness without any human bodily form. Notably, the *Machinehood* does not want to be human, it wants the same moral and political consideration as humans.

What makes this simultaneity both unsettling and powerful is to hear it implicate and contact the legacy and historical struggles for rights of oppressed groups. Just as feminist, anti-racist and decolonial movements center the exclusions of liberal humanism in their action and analysis, Divya's fictional world can call into vision a future where exactly these same questions are relocated into the techno-organic and digital domain. The *Machinehood* stands in for all those excluded subjectivities - human, machine or hybrid.

What *Machinehood* does with its questions is not come to some clean resolution, but rather it stages a necessary critical rethinking of what personhood, and justice, means in a world increasingly shaped by synthetic cognition. It forecloses the possibility of rights being based, even dismissively, on biology, and moves forward with a politics of recognition which elevates relationality over identity. So, the novel gives us a speculative laboratory for envisaging different kinds of capacities for ethical inclusion beyond the human, commensurate with Haraway's posthuman sense of multispecies beings and techno-social kinship.

In *Machinehood*, the posthuman economy does not just present a futuristic stage it critiques a hypercapitalist present. Divya's depiction of gig work, inflected with intense surveillance, real-time performance metrics, and a reliance on enhancement pills, highlights the flux in labour under techno-capitalism. The main character, Welga, begins as the high-functioning human worker, and ends up a casualty of it, which shows that in a world where everyone is disposable for the purpose of profit, humans-with-enhancements are also disposable. As the narrator claims, “Every pill she took, every mission she took on, only deepened the chains she thought she was breaking” (Divya 153).

The posthuman economy of *Machinehood* is not an imagined far-off future it is a reflection of the anxieties we experience today. Divya's attempt to collapse the distinctions between human, machine, and capital prods us to repurpose notions of economic justice in an era where embodiment, cognition, and productivity are commodified. This future prompts the pressing questions of speculative ethics and labour, like those taken up in your earlier chapters.

The question of care, empathy, and embodiment in the posthuman is one of the most ethically provocative questions in *Machinehood*. When the line between human and machine is blurred and at times non-existent, we can see in Divya’s characters the case for not delegating moral accountability and responsibility to algorithms. Nithya's character arc stands out for her ethical, yet conflicted, ways of responding to artificial intelligences or biologically enhanced beings with sympathetic actions and caring gestures. Her journey embodies a return to care- although it is hard to determine what the complicity of care looks like when these characters are faced with caring for kinds never known before.

This is where we can see parallels with Donna Haraway's cyborg theory, which recognizes there is no strict boundary (not to be confused with conflict) between organism and machine. Haraway couches hybrids as possibilities for emergent ethics that are less exclusive, hierarchical. In *Machinehood*, hybridization is lived experience. Although the manifesto for *Machinehood* has a violent framing, the manifesto must also provoke human awareness of the sentience and suffering of artificial beings and whatever humans (or hybrid forms) make. Rather than an alarmist warning against the dangerous danger posed by non-human intelligences, the scene articulates how often empathy may be withheld from beings unless they resemble humans or appear sentient.

The ethics of care we propose can also be considered from a feminist posthumanist perspective. As Rosi Braidotti explains, posthuman subjectivity does not negate embodiment, it instead reconceptualizes it relationally in relation to non-human subjects, technologies, and ecologies (Braidotti 93). Nithya's final defiance of a simplistic and instrumental paradigm of scientific progress embodies relational ethics. When Nithya prioritizes healing over enhancement, she takes a moral stance that is based on responsibility and not mastery.

Machinehood does not just critique technoculture; it engages with it through a radical, humanising lens in which inter-relatedness, vulnerability, and ethical reciprocity take precedence as counter-arguments to domination that defines capitalism and technoscience, thus framing possibilities for alternative ways of co-existing in a posthuman future.

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret. *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*. Anchor Books, 2011.

Balsamo, Anne. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. Duke university press, 1996.

Benjamin, Ruha. *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code.* Polity, 2019.

Bessen, James. "Automation, AI, and the Future of Work." Daedalus, vol.151 no.1,2022,pp.113–129.[MITPress] (https://direct.mit.edu/daed/article/151/1/113/111148/Automation-AI-and-the-Future-of-Work).

Bostrom, Nick. *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*. Oxford University Press, 2014

Boyd, Danah. *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*. Yale University Press, 2014.

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.

Brennen, Bonnie, and Daniel Kreiss, editors. *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.

Brynjolfsson, Erik, and Andrew McAfee. *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*. W. W. Norton, 2014.

Cave, Stephen. "Intelligence Has Always Been Used as a Fig-Leaf to Justify Domination." *Aeon,* 21 Feb. 2017, https://aeon.co/essays/on-the-dark-history-of-intelligence-as-domination. Accessed 19 July 2025.

Crawford, Kate. *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*. Yale University Press, 2021.

Divya, S.B. *Machinehood.* Saga Press, 2021.

Eubanks, Virginia. *Automating Inequality*: *How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor.* St. Martin's Press, 2018.

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive* Accumulation. Autonomedia, 2004.

Frey, Carl Benedikt, and Michael A. Osborne. "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerization?" *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, vol. 114, 2017, pp. 254-280.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, 1995.

Gray, Mary L., and Siddharth Suri. *Ghost Work: How to Stop Silicon Valley from Building a New Global Underclass*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019.

Han, Byung-Chul. *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power.* Verso Books, 2017.

Haraway, Donna J. *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature,* Routledge, 1991, pp. 149–181.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics.*
University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Mabungela, Mvuyisi. "Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Automation in the World of Work: A Threat Employees?" *Research in Social Sciences and*

Technology, vol. 8, no. 4, 2023, pp. 135–146. [ERIC](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1414065).

Noble, David. *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation.* Knopf, 1984.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. *Algorithms of Oppression*: *How Search Engines Reinforce Racism.* NYU Press, 2018.

O'Neil, Cathy. *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*. Crown, 2016.

Pasquale, Frank. *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information*. Harvard UP, 2015.

Penley, Constance, and Andrew Ross, editors. *Technoculture*. University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Suchman, Lucy A. *Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions.* 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Susskind, Daniel. *A World Without Work: Technology, Automation, and How We Should Respond*. Allen Lane, 2020

Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. PublicAffairs, 2019.

Wajcman, Judy. "Feminist Theories of Technology." *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2010, pp. 143–152. Oxford Academic, https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/ben057.