Research article

Digitized Dystopias: Climate Refugees, AI Governance, and Techno-Feudalism in Anil Menon's *The Inconceivable Idea of the Sun*

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Abstract

This paper explores the ecocritical dimensions of Anil Menon's speculative fiction, examining how environmental degradation is inextricably linked to structures of caste, technological governance, and neoliberal control. Set against the backdrop of climate collapse and technological ascendancy, Menon's narratives offer a provocative lens into futures where ecological scarcity and algorithmic regulation converge to entrench social hierarchies. The paper argues that Menon's fiction functions as a speculative ecology of injustice, where clean air, potable water, and habitable land are transformed from commons into commodities, rationed according to caste and capital. Drawing on frameworks such as Rob Nixon's 'slow violence' and critique of humanitarian techno politics, this study investigates how environmental precarity becomes a tool for governance. Artificial intelligence and digital surveillance, far from being neutral innovations, are shown to inherit and intensify casteist and capitalist logics, turning climate resilience into a privilege rather than a right. Through this lens, Menon's work critiques the rise of corporate climate governance and the emergence of eco-apartheid - a system where ecological survival is no longer a shared human imperative but a curated, exclusionary experience. The paper positions Menon's speculative futures as urgent critiques of our present moment, urging a reconceptualization of ecocriticism beyond landscapes and aesthetics. Instead, it advocates for a politicized ecocritical praxis - one attuned to power, data, and dispossession. In doing so, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on environmental justice, climate inequality, and the socio-technical imaginaries shaping the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Speculative fiction, Digital Casteism, AI and Surveillance, Eco-Apartheid, Corporate Climate Governance

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT G**O**ALS **Climate Action**

Introduction

Anil Menon's speculative fiction, *The Inconceivable Idea of the Sun*, offers a profound critique of contemporary socio-political structures, positioning digital casteism, techno-feudal governance, and climate change at the intersection of environmental and social collapse. Through his dystopian futures, Menon envisions a world where the promises of technology, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI), do not foster equity or sustainability, but instead exacerbate entrenched hierarchies and further entrench the inequities of caste, class, and social status. In this speculative landscape, AI is not the solution to the climate crisis but a tool of oppression, reinforcing an order where survival is determined not by merit or need but by one's position within a new, digitized caste system.

At the heart of Menon's fiction lies a critical reimagining of caste as a social construct and a digital and algorithmic regime. This regime, operating within a techno-feudal state, leverages advanced AI to mediate access to essential resources - water, food, air - while excluding those deemed "unworthy" by algorithms. Menon's stories draw a direct parallel between caste-based discrimination and AI's potential to establish an 'eco-apartheid' (Evans et. al, 2003, p. 21), where climate refugees and marginalized communities are permanently relegated to the peripheries of survival. Achille Mbembe observes that modern power structures are increasingly defined by exclusion, not inclusion; they are about organizing disposability, ensuring that some populations remain "permanently confined to the status of the expendable" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 43). Menon's speculative world is thus a warning about the ecological and social ramifications of a future where technology enacts the exclusionary forces it purports to eliminate.

The crux of Menon's dystopia lies in his exploration of techno-feudal control, wherein AI serves as the new feudal overlord, dictating who survives and who is discarded in the face of environmental devastation. Rather than serving as a neutral tool of governance, AI systems in Menon's fiction become instruments of exclusion, mediating access to critical resources, monitoring human behaviour, and perpetuating existing social inequalities. This paper contends that Menon's work highlights a central, urgent concern: the convergence of climate change and AI governance threatens to create a neo-feudal world order, where corporate interests dictate not only the fate of the environment but also the lives of the people. This new order draws on the worst elements of both colonial and feudal systems, amplified by technological surveillance and algorithmic control, and demands that we reconsider the role of technology in shaping our collective future.

Through an analysis of Menon's *The Inconceivable Idea of the Sun*, this paper examines how the author's critique of digital casteism and AI-driven climate governance anticipates and responds to real-world trends in 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2019, p. 98), 'eco-apartheid' (Shiva, 2002, p. 112), and 'necropolitics' (Mbembe, 2019, p. 42).

In doing so, Menon offers a nuanced perspective on how technology, far from providing solutions to the climate crisis, instead reinforces systemic inequalities under the guise of efficiency, security, and governance. Through his stories, Menon offers a glimpse of a future where social mobility is dictated by algorithms, and survival itself becomes a matter of digital identity and access control.

This paper also explores three central themes within Menon's speculative world: (1) the rise of digital casteism, where AI solidifies existing social divisions, (2) the role of AI as an instrument of control, facilitating exclusion through surveillance and biometric tracking, and (3) the corporatization of climate governance, where the privatization of resources and the implementation of AI systems result in an eco-apartheid. By exploring these interconnected themes, this study demonstrates how Menon's work functions as both a cautionary tale and a critique of contemporary systems of governance, illustrating the dangers of a future shaped by the unregulated fusion of technology, climate change, and capitalist exploitation.

In examining Menon's fiction, this paper seeks to answer a crucial question: What does it mean to survive in a world where access to life-sustaining resources is determined not by human need but by algorithmic decision-making? And what are the social, ethical, and political implications of living in a future where climate change is governed not by democratic processes but by corporate-controlled AI systems? Menon's fiction urges readers to confront these questions, offering not just a vision of a dystopian future but a critique of the present forces shaping that future.

Digital Casteism: AI and the Reinforcement of Social Stratification

Anil Menon's fiction *The Inconceivable Idea of Sun* presents a complex and disquieting vision of the future, in which AI-driven systems not only replace traditional governance but also extend and intensify the inequities and social divisions already present in society. Central to his works is the emergence of what can be termed 'digital casteism' - a system where caste-like social stratifications are reinforced, if not exacerbated, by digital technologies. These technologies, far from democratizing access to power and resources, actively mediate social divisions by controlling access to essential services and survival itself. In Menon's dystopian worlds, the intersection of caste, technology, and governance results in a form of techno-feudalism, where the distribution of resources - whether food, water, or even access to air - is determined not by need or ethical considerations, but by algorithmic classifications.

At the heart of Menon's critique lies the premise that AI does not simply function as a neutral tool of governance but as an active agent that enforces social hierarchies. As Shoshana Zuboff warns, the rise of surveillance capitalism and algorithmic governance does not merely predict human behaviour - it shapes it, reinforcing and reproducing existing power structures (Zuboff, 38). In the context of Menon's fiction, AI not only exacerbates the exploitation of the marginalized but also consolidates corporate and state power, ensuring that those already at the bottom of the social ladder remain there, regardless of their efforts or merit.

The dystopian futures depicted in Menon's works are notable for their chilling portrayal of how AI becomes the very mechanism by which digital caste systems are constructed. The lack of agency experienced by marginalized populations in these worlds is underscored by the disempowering presence of AI-driven bureaucracy, which dehumanizes individuals by reducing them to data points, assessing their worthiness to access resources based on predictive algorithms rather than human values or social justice. The result is a society where survival itself is a commodity, allocated through an opaque and impersonal process.

Menon's stories often depict characters who are forced to navigate a hostile world where their very existence is threatened by the digital algorithms that govern every aspect of their lives. In stories like 'The Ruin', access to essential resources such as water is tightly controlled through biometric authentication, ensuring that only those deemed "worthy" based on their economic productivity or corporate utility are granted access to life-sustaining supplies. This dystopian vision mirrors real-world concerns about the increasing privatization of natural resources and the rise of digital identity systems that control access to welfare, healthcare, and basic living conditions. Reetika Khera, in her analysis of India's Aadhaar system, argues that digital identity frameworks, rather than ensuring universal access to state resources, often function as exclusionary mechanisms that deny access to marginalized communities (Khera, 2018, p. 12). Menon's fictional worlds exaggerate this problem, where AI systems actively enforce exclusions, rendering entire populations invisible and expendable.

AI and digital technologies in Menon's world are not mere neutral tools of governance; they are the new arbiters of human survival. Through algorithms that determine not just access to resources but the very status of individuals as citizens or non-citizens, these systems extend the logic of caste-based discrimination into the digital realm. The caste system in India, historically a rigid framework of social stratification, finds its digital counterpart in Menon's works, where AI systems determine an individual's worth based on data, rather than human dignity. As Achille Mbembe writes, contemporary systems of power - what he terms 'necropolitics' - are not simply about governing the living but about deciding which populations are allowed to live and which are destined to perish. In Menon's dystopia, AI doesn't merely determine who is included or excluded in society; it decides who is allowed to exist and who is consigned to a future of unrelenting hardship and deprivation.

The algorithmic caste system in Menon's world operates on the principle that the digital identity of an individual, constructed through data points such as economic productivity, biometric identification, and social behaviour, becomes the determining factor in their access to life-sustaining resources. This framework is not just a matter of classifying people into "deserving" and "undeserving" categories but creating a set of rigid, permanent barriers that lock individuals into predefined social positions. These systems erase the nuances of human experience, casting people as data points and reducing their status to an economic calculation. The result is a world where individuals are not seen as unique, complex human beings but as automated entities to be processed and classified according to corporate algorithms. In such a world, individuals

who fall outside the boundaries of what is deemed economically viable or socially valuable are effectively excluded from the possibility of survival.

In Menon's text, AI is a form of control that consolidates corporate and state power, reinforcing existing inequalities in the name of efficiency and order. The shift from human governance to AI-driven decision-making is depicted as a disempowering and dehumanizing transition, one that removes agency from the public sphere and places it in the hands of powerful, often unseen corporate entities. This transition is not merely about the replacement of human labour or governance structures; it is about the erosion of public welfare in favour of private profit. The result is a society where those who hold the power to control data—the tech corporations and AI systems—hold the power to determine who gets to live and who doesn't.

In stories like 'Into the Night', Menon takes this argument further, envisioning a world where even something as fundamental as air is commodified, controlled by corporate monopolies through AI systems that regulate the purity and distribution of oxygen. The wealthy have access to purified air through subscription services, while the poor are left to suffer in polluted, toxic environments. This reflects real-world concerns about the privatization of natural resources, from water to air, and the growing disparities in access to clean and healthy environments. Vandana Shiva critiques this phenomenon, arguing that the privatization of natural resources is not only a form of economic theft but also an extension of ecological imperialism. Menon's speculative worlds push this critique to its extreme, illustrating a future where the very elements that sustain life are no longer public goods but corporate assets to be bought and sold at the whims of the market.

Furthermore, the use of AI in these dystopian futures becomes an embodiment of systemic violence, not in the form of physical force, but through economic exclusion and the erasure of entire populations from the social contract. The rise of AI-driven governance in Menon's fiction parallels real-world developments where digital systems not only predict and control human behaviour but also shape it in ways that perpetuate existing power structures. This is exemplified by the rise of surveillance capitalism, where personal data is extracted and monetized by corporations, creating a new class of individuals whose lives are governed not by democratic principles but by algorithmic decisions made by corporate entities. In Menon's world, this future is not speculative but an extrapolation of current trends, where digital systems are already being used to regulate access to public services and economic opportunities. Menon's fiction, therefore, serves as a powerful warning against the unchecked rise of AI-driven governance, which promises to deepen existing forms of social stratification rather than eliminating them. The digital caste system depicted in his works is not an abstract or theoretical concept but a direct consequence of the growing entanglement between corporate power, AI governance, and climate crisis management. His works force us to confront the uncomfortable reality that the technologies meant to solve our most pressing challenges - climate change, migration, resource scarcity - may themselves become instruments of oppression, enforcing new forms of digital apartheid.

Menon paints a grim picture of the future, where digital technology, far from being neutral instruments of governance, becomes a tool of social control and exclusion. Digital casteism emerges as a central theme, highlighting how AI and algorithmic systems reproduce and exacerbate existing power structures, creating new forms of inequality and division. As we continue to integrate AI and digital systems into our governance frameworks, Menon's stories serve as a critical reminder of the need for careful reflection and ethical consideration in how we design and implement these technologies. The spectre of digital casteism looms large, urging readers to question not only how AI can be used to enhance governance but also how it can reinforce the very inequities that we should be striving to eliminate.

AI as a Mechanism of Control: Surveillance, Exclusion, and Erosion of Human Agency

In contemporary society, artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly seen as a tool of governance, with its growing presence shaping various aspects of life. However, as AI permeates sectors ranging from security to healthcare and social welfare, it also becomes an instrument of control. This section examines the role of AI in reinforcing systems of exclusion, surveillance, and the erosion of individual agency, with a particular emphasis on its function within digital casteism, as explored in Anil Menon's fiction. Drawing from Menon's dystopian visions, particularly in stories like 'The Inconceivable Idea of the Sun' and 'The Calculus of Solitude', this section highlights the implications of AI-driven governance, wherein human beings become subjects of algorithmic regulation rather than autonomous agents.

AI has often been heralded as a force for efficiency, rationality, and impartiality. In theory, it promises to automate decision-making processes, offering objectivity and eliminating human bias. Yet, the reality of AI systems is far more complicated. Shoshana Zuboff, in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, argues that AI's primary function is not merely to optimize or enhance human processes but to extract value from human behaviour through surveillance (Zuboff, 2019, p. 13). The rise of AI-driven surveillance is a key manifestation of this logic, with AI systems designed to monitor, predict, and control the actions of individuals. This creates a society where the boundaries between private life and state or corporate control become increasingly blurred.

In Menon's fiction, this erosion of privacy and autonomy is a direct consequence of AI governance. His dystopian world features a population that is increasingly subject to the whims of algorithmic decision-making, where human beings are reduced to data points within a larger system of control. One of the most disturbing consequences of this AI-driven surveillance is the depersonalization of individuals. In *The Inconceivable Idea of the Sun*, people become statistics - evaluated, categorized, and tracked by a faceless algorithm rather than a human decision-maker. This transformation, however, is not neutral; it operates along deeply entrenched social hierarchies, reinforcing existing power structures under the guise of efficiency and impartiality.

The most significant consequence of this AI-induced depersonalization is the erosion of human agency. When individuals are subjected to algorithmic governance, they lose

the ability to make decisions based on their own judgment or moral considerations. AI systems, in this sense, usurp the role of human decision-makers, creating a situation in which individuals must act by pre-programmed rules and assessments. This systematic reduction of human agency becomes especially problematic when the algorithms at the heart of these systems are built on biases that reflect social inequalities.

The concept of algorithmic bias is central to understanding how AI operates as a mechanism of exclusion. AI systems are not born impartial; they are created and trained by humans, often inheriting the biases of the data they are fed. This can lead to the perpetuation of existing inequalities, such as racial, gender, or class-based discrimination. For instance, research has shown that predictive policing algorithms tend to disproportionately target minority communities, reinforcing cycles of criminalization and exclusion. Similarly, AI-driven credit scoring systems often disadvantage people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or marginalized groups, denying them access to essential services like loans or healthcare.

These biases are not accidental; they are embedded within the design of AI systems, shaping their decision-making processes in ways that perpetuate social hierarchies. In *The Inconceivable Idea of the Sun*, the algorithmic biases embedded within the governance systems function as a form of digital casteism, where access to resources and opportunities is determined by one's position within a rigid, AI-enforced hierarchy. Just as traditional caste systems divide people into rigid categories of social worth, the digital caste system in Menon's world evaluates individuals based on their digital footprint, including their economic productivity, biometrics, and social behaviour. Those who fall outside the system's expectations are marginalized, excluded, and rendered expendable.

This exclusionary mechanism extends beyond individuals to entire populations, as seen in Menon's portrayal of climate refugees. In stories like 'The Calculus of Solitude', displaced individuals are not recognized as human beings with rights but are reduced to data points in an algorithmic system that determines their worth based on economic output or potential. As Achille Mbembe contends in his concept of necropolitics, the ability to decide who is allowed to live and who is condemned to die has become a function of state and corporate control (Mbembe, 2019, p. 42). In Menon's world, this control is exercised through the algorithmic determination of who deserves access to survival resources, such as water, food, and shelter.

The role of AI in reinforcing systems of exclusion is further compounded by the surveillance infrastructure that underpins digital casteism. As surveillance technologies advance, they increasingly penetrate all aspects of life, including workplaces, public spaces, and even private homes. Surveillance cameras, biometric data collection, and digital monitoring tools are used not only for security purposes but also to track individuals' behaviour and assign them a social or economic value. In *The Inconceivable Idea of the Sun*, the algorithmic surveillance of individuals becomes ubiquitous, as citizens are constantly monitored to ensure compliance with social and

economic norms. Those who fail to meet these norms are penalized or excluded from essential services.

This constant surveillance creates an environment of fear and conformity, where individuals are conditioned to behave in accordance with the expectations of the system. George Orwell famously argued in *1984* that surveillance is not just about observing people; it is about controlling them (Orwell, 34). The knowledge that one is always being watched alters behaviour, limiting freedom and autonomy. In Menon's dystopia, AI surveillance operates in a similarly insidious way, creating a society in which individuals are no longer free to make choices for themselves but must instead comply with algorithmic decisions that dictate every aspect of their lives.

The consequences of this erosion of privacy and agency are profound. As Zuboff argues, surveillance capitalism, of which AI is a crucial component, undermines democratic processes by concentrating power in the hands of a few corporations and state actors (Zuboff, 2019, p. 122). The control over individuals' data gives these entities unprecedented power to shape public opinion, influence behaviour, and determine the fate of entire populations. This concentration of power, coupled with the exclusionary logic embedded in AI systems, creates a world in which only a select few benefit from the wealth generated by human data, while the majority is left to survive in increasingly precarious conditions.

Moreover, the consequences of AI-driven exclusion are not confined to the digital realm. As AI systems become more integrated into decision-making processes across various sectors, including healthcare, education, and employment, the effects of algorithmic bias and exclusion extend to real-world outcomes. Those who are deemed unworthy or unprofitable by AI systems face systemic disenfranchisement in critical areas of life, from healthcare access to job opportunities. This reinforces existing social inequalities and marginalizes entire populations, creating a vicious cycle of exclusion and poverty.

The final consequence of AI as a mechanism of control is the profound sense of alienation it creates. As human agency is replaced by algorithmic decision-making, individuals begin to feel disconnected from the systems that govern their lives. The human capacity for judgment, empathy, and compassion is sidelined in favour of cold, calculating efficiency. In Menon's fiction, this alienation is palpable, as individuals are reduced to mere data points, unable to influence the systems that control their existence. The erosion of human agency, combined with the constant surveillance and exclusionary practices of AI, creates a society in which individuals are not just controlled but dehumanized.

AI serves as a powerful mechanism of control, surveillance, and exclusion, fundamentally altering the way human beings interact with societal structures. In Menon's dystopian world, AI-driven governance exacerbates existing inequalities, reinforcing digital caste systems and eroding human agency. The widespread use of AI for surveillance and exclusion not only perpetuates social hierarchies but also concentrates power in the hands of a few, undermining democratic principles and human rights. As we move further into an age dominated by AI, it is crucial to critically

examine the implications of these technologies and their potential to reinforce systems of control, exclusion, and oppression.

Corporate Climate Governance: Privatization of Resources and Eco-Apartheid

Anil Menon's *The Inconceivable Idea of the Sun* presents a speculative vision of a world where corporations govern not only economies but also life itself through the algorithmic control of essential natural resources. As climate crises exacerbate scarcity, Menon imagines a future where water, food, and even air become commodities regulated through corporate AI systems, thus enacting a form of eco-apartheid. These stories do not merely warn of future dystopias; they extrapolate current trajectories of neoliberal climate governance, making visible the consequences of techno-capitalism's increasing dominion over planetary survival. This section explores how Menon uses speculative fiction to critique the privatization of survival, tracing connections between AI-governed resource distribution and the reproduction of casteist, classist, and corporate hierarchies in a climate-challenged world.

In the story 'The Ruin', one of the most haunting stories in the collection, Menon imagines a near-future society where water is no longer a public resource but a corporate asset, access to which is mediated through biometric authentication. Climate refugees, displaced from submerged coastal cities and parched hinterlands, queue at biometric kiosks where an algorithm decides who is worthy of water based on productivity scores and profitability models. The story's protagonist, a former professor turned manual labourer, is denied water after the algorithm determines he is no longer "bio-efficient." In this moment, Menon lays bare the dehumanizing logic of algorithmic exclusion: "He had worked for years, but now the machine said his pulse was too slow, his hydration too low. He was unfit for extraction. Unfit to drink" (Menon, 2023, p. 58). Here, survival is determined not by need but by data, echoing Shoshana Zuboff's warning that "surveillance capitalism does not merely observe behaviour; it modifies and governs it" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 98).

Menon's dystopia powerfully resonates with real-world struggles over water privatization, particularly in South Asia, where corporate entities increasingly extract and monopolize groundwater resources. Scholars such as Vandana Shiva have long critiqued this trend as a form of "ecological imperialism" that reinforces global inequities and class divisions. As Shiva puts it, "Water is not a commodity to be bought and sold. It is a common, and privatizing it is a form of violence against people and the planet" (Shiva, 2002, p. 112). In 'The Ruin', this violence is internalized through digital systems that no longer require state sanction or visible policing - the algorithm enforces scarcity, and the scarcity, in turn, justifies corporate control.

This vision of algorithmically managed eco-apartheid deepens in the story 'Into the Night,' where even breathable air is privatized. Urban elites live in sealed towers regulated by oxygen subscriptions, while the lower classes breathe in contaminated air that slowly erodes their lungs and labouring capacities. The AI governing these towers calculates oxygen allocation based on a person's past productivity and future economic potential. "Your breath is measured," a character remarks, "not by how much

you need it, but by how much you matter to the system" (Menon, 2023, p. 60). The slow violence of climate collapse is thus technologically accelerated, as access to clean air becomes a function of corporate worthiness rather than a universal right.

Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" is particularly relevant in interpreting Menon's fictionalized air apartheid. Nixon defines slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction dispersed across time and space" (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). In Menon's work, the invisibility of this violence is amplified by the façade of neutral algorithms. The oppression is not shouted but whispered through machine logic. The mechanisms of exclusion are no longer wielded through weapons or laws but through code, turning corporations into faceless sovereigns who decide who breathes and who suffocates.

The commodification of food operates on a similar logic in the story "How Not to Tell the Ramayana", where AI-driven nutritional systems allocate food based on one's "contribution index". The elite receive personalized gourmet meals delivered by drones, while the working classes are subjected to "minimal caloric rations" determined by biometric surveillance. The story deliberately draws parallels with religious mythology, suggesting that the new gods of this world are not divine but digital-algorithmic deities that punish or reward based on calculable value. The protagonist, a low-level technician, tries to hack the system to increase his rations but is caught and labelled as 'nutritionally unworthy'. He does not of starvation per se, but to algorithmic designation.

This scenario echoes Virginia Eubanks's analysis of 'digital welfare systems' in the contemporary U.S., where algorithmic errors and biases frequently result in the denial of basic needs. "The systems we think of as neutral," Eubanks argues, "often reproduce the same structural inequalities they claim to transcend. Automated systems are not post-political; they are deeply ideological" (Eubanks, 2018, p. 74). Menon's depiction of food rationing through productivity metrics captures this ideology in its most extreme form, portraying a world where hunger is not accidental but algorithmically preordained.

These stories illustrate how climate-induced scarcity does not simply create new forms of inequality - it magnifies and digitizes existing structures of exclusion. In South Asia, particularly in India, digital identity systems like Aadhaar have already been linked to cases of starvation when access to rations was denied due to authentication failures. Menon extrapolates this into a dystopian future where the failure is no longer a glitch but a feature: exclusion is the point. As Reetika Khera points out, "When access to welfare is contingent on digital verification, the state essentially outsources eligibility to a machine. And the machine is not answerable to those it excludes" (Khera, 2018, p. 59).

In the story 'The Man Without Quintessence,' Menon brings all these elements together. The story follows a man attempting to cross into a climate-secure zone. He is stopped at a border where AI systems evaluate his biometric data, genetic predispositions, and economic forecast. He fails the test - not because he poses a threat, but because the algorithm predicts he will be unproductive in five years. The

story ends with his body lying next to a heap of others who were similarly denied entry. The border official, an AI avatar, offers no apology: "We regret your redundancy" (Menon, 2023, p. 70). This chilling phrase encapsulates Menon's central critique that in a world governed by corporate AI, humanity itself becomes a deprecated concept.

This speculative scenario reflects growing anxieties around AI-driven border control systems already being piloted in the European Union and the United States. These systems use predictive analytics to determine the "risk level" of migrants, often relying on opaque datasets that reproduce racial and economic biases. Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics - where the state determines who lives and who dies - becomes hyper-relevant here, albeit displaced onto non-state actors. "In the necropolitical order," Mbembe writes, "sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (Mbembe, 2019, 27). Menon's AI avatars exercise this sovereignty without emotion or accountability, extending the reach of necropolitics through corporate infrastructure.

In totality, Menon's stories do not merely offer cautionary tales; they function as speculative diagnostics of a world where techno-capitalism and climate change form a feedback loop of exclusion. The privatization of water, food, and air is not presented as a future possibility but as an inevitability in a world where data governs need, and algorithms replace ethics. Through vivid, often devastating portrayals of algorithmic injustice, Menon invites readers to rethink the very foundations of climate governance. His fiction compels readers to ask: What happens when survival is no longer a right but a subscription? Who designs the systems that decide who lives, and who are they designed for?

By embedding his narratives in the everyday mechanics of exclusion—food lines, air quotas, biometric checks—Menon de-spectacularizes the apocalypse. It is not a world of sudden cataclysm, but of gradual disappearance, where the poor vanish not in explosions but in Excel sheets. In doing so, *the Inconceivable Idea of the Sun* becomes not just a work of speculative fiction, but a political intervention, demanding that people confront the corporate capture of climate futures before it becomes irrevocable.

Conclusion

In *The Inconceivable Idea of the Sun*, Anil Menon crafts a visionary landscape that is less a fictional future than a speculative mirror of the present. Through a mosaic of dystopian vignettes, Menon dismantles the comfortable illusion that technological advancement and ecological innovation necessarily lead to collective progress. Instead, what he reveals is a world where caste hierarchies are not merely preserved but reprogrammed into the algorithms that govern everyday life; where artificial intelligence no longer serves human needs but becomes a tool for systemic exclusion; and where the very air we breathe is transmuted into a commodified metric of human worth. His fiction is not just speculative - it is diagnostic. It probes the structures of contemporary power and projects their consequences forward, into worlds where

social division, state retreat, and ecological collapse intertwine under the logics of AI and corporate governance.

The central argument of this paper has been that Menon's stories must be read as trenchant critiques of the intersecting regimes of digital casteism, techno-authoritarian control, and eco-apartheid — regimes that are not only technologically enabled but politically and historically situated. In doing so, Menon's fiction resists the dominant narrative of AI as a neutral or benevolent force. Instead, his stories illuminate how algorithmic technologies, when embedded in existing casteist and capitalist infrastructures, become instruments of oppression. In this speculative future, technology does not level the playing field — it digitizes the rules of exclusion.

The first section of this paper demonstrated how Menon reimagines caste in a digital idiom. In stories like 'The Ruin' and 'How Not to Tell the Ramayana', characters are denied access to services, resources, and dignity based on their algorithmic invisibility or undesirability. Caste becomes a code, not a name, not a family, but a digital footprint or the absence of one. These refigurations recall what Ruha Benjamin describes as the "New Jim Code", the use of ostensibly neutral algorithms to reproduce and legitimize historical forms of inequality (Benjamin, 2019). In Menon's world, as in ours, technology is not born in a vacuum; it emerges from a world already stratified by caste, class, race, and power. The consequences are profound: those who fall outside the digital order are not merely disadvantaged; they are erased, made unthinkable. The stories dramatize a future where being undocumented, whether due to caste location, migration status, or ecological displacement, is a death sentence, not because of active violence but because of total infrastructural neglect.

The second section explored how AI supplants not just human labour, but human judgment, empathy, and responsibility. Menon constructs a chilling tableau of governance outsourced to automated systems, where machines determine who may cross borders, eat, and live. The figure of the algorithm becomes a stand-in for the state, but one stripped of deliberative processes, ethical reasoning, or human accountability. This is not merely speculative excess. It mirrors real-world developments in biometric governance, predictive policing, and automated welfare distribution — trends evident in systems like India's Aadhaar or China's social credit framework. As Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics reminds us, sovereignty is increasingly defined by the power to determine whose lives are grievable and whose deaths are permissible (Mbembe, 2019, p. 101). In Menon's speculative archive, the AI is not simply an instrument — it is the necropolitical sovereign. Its logic is cold, efficient, and inescapable. The terrifying truth is not that it makes mistakes, but that it does exactly what it was designed to do: reproduce inequality under the guise of neutrality.

The third section turned to Menon's portrayal of eco-apartheid, a future where the climate crisis becomes a new frontier for capitalist accumulation. In 'Into the Night', the right to breathe is no longer biological but economic: "Your breath is measured," a character observes, "not by how much you need it, but by how much you matter to the system" (Menon, 2023, p. 202). This line encapsulates the brutal inversion of moral

logic in Menon's world, where access to necessities is conditioned on datafied metrics of productivity, desirability, or profitability. Vandana Shiva's critique of corporate control over seeds and water — "a war against the poor, against life, against democracy" (Shiva, 2002, p. 20) — finds a harrowing fictional counterpart in Menon's speculative eco-capitalism. In his stories, the climate catastrophe does not usher in a collective reckoning; it deepens the fissures of inequality, turning natural resources into private capital and displaced people into biometric waste. AI systems are not used to mitigate crises; they are deployed to manage populations, to secure borders, and to determine who qualifies for a share in a shrinking ecological commons.

The convergence of these themes — digital casteism, algorithmic control, and ecological apartheid — leads us to a sobering realization. Menon is not offering three separate critiques. He is outlining a singular, integrated system of techno-feudal governance. In this system, caste logic, data surveillance, and corporate extraction are not accidental overlaps but structural reinforcements. The dispossessed are rendered disposable not merely through violence or poverty, but through the bureaucratic indifference of the algorithm. In such a world, caste becomes code, citizenship becomes a password, and survival becomes a subscription.

This paper's key findings underscore this convergence. First, Menon's fiction reveals how caste, often assumed to be pre-modern or traditional, adapts seamlessly to digital architectures, thereby cautioning against narratives that position technology as inherently progressive. Second, AI in his stories functions as a tool of control rather than liberation, displacing human moral responsibility while enforcing algorithmic exclusions. Third, the climate crisis, far from being a unifying force, is shown to be an accelerant of inequality, as corporate entities privatize air, water, and land under the guise of sustainability. Fourth, Menon's stories illustrate how speculative fiction can act as a mode of political resistance — unsettling dominant imaginaries and opening space for critique. Finally, and most importantly, Menon's narratives warn us that the future is not a neutral space to be discovered, but a battleground shaped by decisions made in the present — decisions about who gets to matter, who gets to speak, and who gets to survive.

What makes Menon's work particularly powerful is that he does not merely project a catastrophic future; he reveals the logics already at work in the present. The caste-like hierarchies of digital access, the opaque rule of algorithms in governance, and the commodification of nature under global capitalism — all these are not future threats, but present realities in embryonic form. His stories urge us to ask: What kinds of futures are we building with our technologies? Whose voices are being encoded into the algorithms that make decisions? And what becomes of those whose lives cannot be translated into data?

Yet, for all its dystopian clarity, Menon's fiction is not devoid of possibility. In the interstices of oppression, he hints at the persistence of resistance — the refusal to be categorized, the hacking of digital borders, the memory of older solidarities not governed by metrics. These glimpses are brief, but they matter. They remind us, as Amitav Ghosh has written, that the climate crisis is also a crisis of imagination, one that

demands we think beyond both apocalypse and technofix (Ghosh, 2016, p. 20). Speculative fiction, in Menon's hands, becomes a form of speculative justice — a call to reimagine what it means to live ethically in an era defined by ecological collapse and technological domination.

In the end, *The Inconceivable Idea of the Sun* is not merely a portrait of a dystopian future. It is a provocation to confront the dystopian elements already present. If AI is to be part of the future, then its codes must be rewritten - not just in language, but in ethics, in politics, and care. If the climate crisis is to be survivable, then survival must be redefined - not as a privilege for the profitable, but as a right for the collective. And if fiction is to matter in this struggle, then it must do what Menon's work so masterfully does: illuminate the darkness, not to succumb to it, but to show us the way through.

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