

Correlation Between Displacement and Dehumanization in Contemporary Bangladeshi Short Stories from *Our Many Longings*

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Abstract

In an increasingly globalized socio-political and economic system, large populations are often displaced due to political, economic, or environmental reasons. Most of the displaced individuals face severe human rights violations, resulting in a process of dehumanization. Many refugees and migrants are forced to cope with challenges like hunger, slavery, physical torture, sexual violence, genocide, random detention, and human trafficking, leaving them powerless. Such circumstances often take away the dignity of a human being, putting the displaced in a process of dehumanization. *Our Many Longings: Contemporary Short Fiction from Bangladesh*, edited by Sohana Manzoor, is a collection of short stories that depicts the enigma of displaced people. Through a close examination of the three stories in *Our Many Longings*, this paper investigates how the displaced people gradually lose their identity, leading to dehumanization, which is the denial of all the positive human qualities of an individual. The paper also uses Philip Zimbardo's *The Lucifer Effect* to analyze whether dehumanization necessarily transforms an individual into an evil being.

Keywords: displacement, dehumanization, trauma, violence, evil

Our Many Longings: Contemporary Short Fiction from Bangladesh is a compilation of twelve short stories in English and English translations from Bangla by Bangladeshi authors. These stories depict a wide range of life experiences of individuals primarily of Bangladeshi descent, spanning the period of the country's liberation war, the aftermath of the war, and the more globalized modern



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world. Many of the characters sketched in the stories represent war trauma, migration issues, forced displacement, and diasporic identity. The authors' consummate projection of Bangladesh through the characters from different times and locations helps to initiate discussions on the psychological impact of displacement and trauma on individuals. The loss of identity, dual identity, violence, and sexual assault can be some of the after-effects of displacement and dislocation, which are directly linked with dehumanizing mechanisms. The short stories from *Our Many Longings*, "The Green Passport," "Nuru," and "Torso" encompass historical events like the 1947 Partition and the Liberation War of 1971, and their impacts on individuals. This paper intentionally highlights these stories as they intricately intertwine the two key concepts: violence rooted in displacement and the mechanisms of dehumanization.

Unlike voluntary migration, which is driven by choice and factors such as economic opportunity, displacement refers to the forced movement of people from one geographical location to another due to external circumstances, including conflict, violence, persecution, or natural disasters. As mentioned by Livia Hazer and Gustaf Gredebäck according to the UNHCR report 2021, more than 100 million people in the world are displaced forcefully and the number is only expected to be doubled (1). Displacement can be both long-term and short-term. On the other hand, dehumanization happens when one group of people considers another group to be inferior or lesser humans and sanctifies the inhuman treatment towards the "other" group and violates their human rights. Michelle Maiese has defined dehumanization as a psychological process that underlines identity politics and self/other dichotomy. According to Haslam, "Dehumanization is arguably most often mentioned in relation to ethnicity, race, and related topics such as immigration and genocide" (252). He points out that, "dehumanization occurs whenever individuals or outgroups are ascribed lesser degrees of the two forms of humanness than the self or ingroup" (Haslam 261). He also conceptualizes the two types of dehumanization: animalistic dehumanization and mechanistic dehumanization (258). For Helen Fein, dehumanization includes all those stereotypes, metaphors, and forms of defamation and symbolic degradation spread by large-scale propaganda operations that designate the victims as foreign and inferior- whether as sub- or non-human (as insects, parasites, germs, or viruses), or else as superhuman (as satanic, omnipotent figures). Mariot claims that, "Dehumanization is one of the main ways by which perpetrators of genocide attempt to legitimize the elimination of a minority group" (105).

To understand the entire process of why and how a person/group transforms into perpetrators, because of displacement, and dismisses the moral boundary, this

paper uses Philip Zimbardo's Lucifer Effect as a theoretical lens and scrutinizes the stories to identify the social factors that might inspire human beings to engage in evil activities resulting in dehumanization. Zimbardo's experimental theory attempts to shift the attention from humans' inherent quality of being evil to the social factors that provoke the "self" to unleash violence by dehumanizing the "other." Since narrative fictions mirror diverse psychological, philosophical, and moral problems of human beings by creating alternative fictional realities, they open up gateways for extensive exploration of how a certain character acts and makes choices within extreme situational forces. Thus, the fictional realities in the selected short stories echo the experimental settings of Zimbardo's "Stanford prison design" and its effects on individuals' choices.

South Asian writers in English, after the 1980s, share a common trend in their writing where they explore the themes of "colonial encounters, the advent of nationalism, the consequences of partition, and nation-building in the nascent decolonized state" (Alam 43). It is further explored by Fakrul Alam that trauma caused by political unrest and violence along with the challenges of the replacement of the oppressive rulers by another set of oppressors is an "easily identifiable" (43) theme. Besides the persisting themes like "religious, class and caste prejudice as well as patriarchal injustice" (43), projecting trauma of being uprooted and issues of diaspora and hybridity are also recurrent in the writing trends from the seventies onward. Thus, in academia, the major bodies of critical studies and research deploy the questions of identity crisis, hybridity, and diasporic conditions from South Asian literature. As an example, Nair explores the complexity of the identity question in case of migration from the perspective of the Indian diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction focusing on how the issue of "home" has become a concern for these migrants. Speculating on Jhumpa Lahiri's two prominent novels *The Namesake* and *The Lowland*, Nair identifies "the feeling of in-betweenness and the psychological trauma faced by the diasporic characters who experience problems like displacement, alienation, feeling of rootlessness, quest for identity and questions of adjustment to the hostland" through Lahiri's fiction (138).

Themes showcasing political unrest, violence and displacement through different historical movements and turning points inevitably raise the question of dehumanization and its psychological after-effects on the victims' minds. But only a handful of studies address the issue. One notable work was undertaken by Navarro-Tejero that studies Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India*, which explores how female bodies are treated "in the discursive articulation of nationalism" (44). Through the narrative, she examines "dehumanizing sexual violence women suffered" (44) during the 1947 Partition because of the newly drawn border

between India and Pakistan. While looking at the sexual violence against women and female body as a symbol “within the dialectics of patriarchal communalism” (45), through the lens of Kristeva’s theory of abjection, she invests some attention on the perpetrator’s point of view. She addresses Ice Candy man’s transformation into a beast after witnessing the sack full of mutilated breasts, possibly of Muslim women. She analyzes this transformation through the lens of a dehumanizing process that uncovers Ice Candy man’s evil instinct against women from the Hindu community.

Narrowing their focus down to Bangladeshi Anglophone literature, Quayum and Hasan introspect how the language politics embedded in the highly nationalistic feelings hindered the projection of Anglophone literary works in the eighties and nineties in Bangladesh. They also explored the changing trends that started early on in the millennia through the emergence of several promising and prolific writers from both home and abroad. These writers share the same national identity, and they have been representing Bangladeshi historical, political, cultural, and social experiences through their writing in the global sphere. They further discuss the research trends based on the Bangladeshi Anglophone literary work considering four research articles that encompass matters like “postcolonial discourse,” “impact of temporal and cultural homelessness or diaspora,” “environmental degradation and risks to human life that stem from pollution migration from rich (polluting) to poor (polluted) countries – all in the name of development under the aegis of neo-liberal globalization,” and “sensitive nationalist issues” (Quayum and Hasan 740-741). Once again, the question of dehumanizing effects on the human psyche remains unexplored in these articles.

However, Biswas and Tripathi in their paper “The Blame Game: War and Violence in Dilruba Z. Ara’s *Blame*” reinvestigate the intensity of violence, rape, and attribution of blame from the perspective of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. They explore the dehumanization of women in forms of rape and murder and their multifaceted roles in the war, following the theory of blame proposed by Bertram F. Malle et al. The story of *Blame* revolves around Laila and Gita, the two female protagonists, and their dehumanization by the Pakistani army and people, even from their own family. The focus of the article is primarily on societal blame, which changes according to perspectives. In the course of the novel, Laila and Gita’s family move around various places to save their lives “like refugees, imprisoned and abandoned in their own country” (Biswas and Tripathi 46). The family members, though victims themselves, victimized other innocent people like Laila and Gita, where blaming is “one of the most accepted forms of moral criticism” (Malle et al. 171), unlike the dehumanizing acts of “attacking, slandering, and vilifying” (Malle et al. 171), which are least acceptable in society.

The article indicates the covert process of dehumanization through the blame game. The overt dehumanization and how it may foster and give rise to evil remains unnoticed in Bangladeshi literary discourses.

Arup Saha explores the effects of displacement as represented in postcolonial novels and identifies that “when the postcolonial people attempt to enter the centre, they face cultural and psychological displacements. These displacements distort the self of the peripheral individual” (327).

Displacement has a long-term effect on human psychology and might hinder the development of children. Hazer and Gredebäck in their review article examine literature in psychological effects on Syrian refugee children aged between 0-18 years and identify the developmental challenges encountered by these children as they grew up. Among many other difficulties they identify, “in families with moderately secure or insecure attachments, a high level of sibling conflict, and a high level of negative parenting practices, children had symptoms of heightened aggression, anxiety, and depression and had difficulties processing traumatic experiences” (Hazer and Gredebäck 11).

As we come to the question of dehumanization, Nicolas Mariot, in his article “On the Role of Dehumanization of Victims in the Perpetration of Mass Killings: Research Notes,” presents a unique view regarding the connection of mass killings to dehumanization, as it questions dehumanization as a mandatory tool for such violence. Mariot accepts dehumanization as one of the main factors in genocide and extreme violence where the perpetrators intend to “legitimize the elimination of a minority group” (4). He contemplates the degrading conditions of victims which involves acts such as keeping them without food or water, not letting them use toilets, stripping them naked before stripping them of their lives and abandoning their bodies “removing the final traits of their personhood during a massacre” (5). Mariot takes into account Michael Mann’s view that dehumanization helps executioners to overcome their moral inhibitions about taking the lives of defenseless human beings. It is the killer’s defense mechanism for avoiding responsibility, which makes them believe in the righteousness of their actions. While Mariot’s paper closely examines the violence and dehumanization, it does not explore the deeper psychological causes behind such behavior, focusing instead primarily on the war itself rather than the mental and emotional states of the soldiers involved in killing and massacres.

Besides blatant or overt dehumanization, there can be ways of dehumanizing others that imply “subtle and implicit racism,” which is addressed in modern dehumanization research. Using innovative approaches, these studies investigate a “variety of subtle ways in which we can deprive others of full humanity in more “everyday” settings” (Kteily and Bruneau 488).

Thus, addressing the gaps, our research article attempts to further investigate the psychology behind the act of dehumanization committed by people, in relation to displacement, through the short stories “Nuru,” “Torso,” and “The Green Passport,” and how the victims react to the dehumanizing process, focusing on two primary research questions: how do the displaced people lose their identity gradually and fall victim to dehumanization, and does the process of dehumanization necessarily transform the victims into evil beings?

This study employs a qualitative text analysis methodology, using the psychoanalytic theoretical framework of Zimbardo’s Lucifer Effect as its primary theoretical framework. The three stories are selected on the basis of the shared traces of historical and geographical settings and thematic resemblance. An exclusive psychological dimension related to the act of violence both from doers and receivers’ end is available in all the stories. Moreover, the interconnections of the stories to the concept of dislocation made the choice of the texts possible. The stories are studied and analyzed based on the compare-contrast and cause-effect method. To understand the socio-psychological dimension that controls and influences the internal workings of evil actions and choices of human kind, the Lucifer Effect framework is chosen as the experimental approach to shed light on the factors that guard the evil instincts of every normal individual. This approach identifies how those factors become dysfunctional in the shifts of situations, environments, and self-identification:

People can become evil when they are enmeshed in situations where the cognitive controls that usually guide their behaviour in socially desirable and personally acceptable ways are blocked, suspended, or distorted. The suspension of cognitive control has multiple consequences, among them the suspension of: conscience, self-awareness, sense of personal responsibility, obligation, commitment, liability, morality, guilt, shame, fear, and analysis of one’s action is cost-benefit calculations. (Zimbardo 305)

Zimbardo, an American psychologist, posits that evil is not genetic or innate, but rather a product of outer factors like surroundings, society, and politics. In his analysis of the process of human transformation from good to evil, external processes serve as focal points. He relies on specific literary (*Lord of the Flies* by William Golding) and historical (the incident of Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq in 2003) examples of violence and aggression to provide a foundation to his theory, the Lucifer Effect. He ran a test at Stanford University in 1971, which is called the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE).

To gain a clear understanding of evil, it is necessary to examine the process

of dehumanization. According to Zimbardo, “Evil consists in intentionally behaving in ways that harm, abuse, demean, dehumanize, or destroy innocent others – or using one’s authority and systematic power to encourage or permit others to do so on your behalf” (5). He further states, “Dehumanization occurs whenever some human beings consider other human beings to be excluded from the moral order of being a human person” (307).

Being evil is not something inherent; rather, people can learn to become evil regardless of their “genetic inheritance, personality, or family legacy” (7). Often, the intention of doing evil is less important, and the process of reducing evil unleashes greater evil. To do evil things, people must go through certain processes. One is to create “the enemy” in the mind. To destroy certain opposition, the people in power spread “hostile imagination” (11) in the minds of the people who become victimizers over time. Such propaganda stereotypes and dehumanizes others. War generates cruelty and barbaric behavior against anyone considered “the Enemy, as the dehumanized, demonic Other” (17).

Another measure for doing evil things is deindividuation. People engage in destructive behavior when they work in a group and their individual identity is hidden. Situations where people feel anonymous reduce their sense for personal accountability, so the potential for evil actions increases. Moreover, if the situation or people in power gives them agency to engage in antisocial or violent behavior, people lose all sense of morality and embark on cruel actions.

The most important way of engaging in evil is moral disengagement as human beings. People often tarnish the identity of others to make them less of a human being, and it is easier to treat them brutally as they view them as objects. Their pain can, thus, be disregarded and justified by blaming those others for the consequences. There are other ways of disengagement such as using euphemistic language to sanitize the reality, minimizing any direct link between the cruel actions and their outcome, creating the moral justification for the cruelty, distorting the negative impacts, and so on.

This study applies Zimbardo’s framework to analyze the subtle character changes brought about by displacement and encountering dehumanizing situations in the selected stories. The study also considers the blurring of the victim-victimizer binary, recognizing the situational construction of these roles. The three selected short stories illustrate the act of violence of the oppressor group/individual unleashing the evil upon the other group participating in either “blatant dehumanization” or “subtle dehumanization” (Kteily and Bruneau 488). Displacement from home, deindividuation, authorization, and outgroup enemy image projection are the common catalysts in all three stories that help to lay bare the socio-psychological influences that provoke the evil actions.

The short story “Nuru” by Hasan Al Zayed is centered on an evil act of the protagonist Nuru, a displaced individual who once brutally beat another displaced, hunger-stricken woman. The site of the displaced homeless immigrants taking shelter in a park of Washington DC reminds the narrator of the time when the people of a newborn Bangladesh were struggling with poverty, hunger, joblessness, and insecurities. The flood of 1988, which serves as the backdrop of the story, left a huge number of people homeless and displaced. These people came to Dhaka in search of a job or food:

Nuru Bhai came to the city when he was still an adolescent. He was trying to escape the dreadful flood that swallowed his ancestral home and took in his father. He followed those who came to the city at the wake of the famine, in search of food and life, and settled down near the stairwell. (Zayed 220)

This illustrates how Nuru was displaced from his home due to a natural disaster and was living in Dhaka under dehumanizing conditions without proper food, shelter, and work, at the mercy of the local people. Nuru’s insecurity as a displaced person is symbolized through his *paaion*, a stick to “goad cattle home” (Zayed 213) which he would carry all the time, ending up using it on another victim of the flood.

As a stairwell resident himself, Nuru became like a member of the narrator’s family, taking on trivial tasks like a caretaker for the home. When a woman, possibly another displaced flood victim, came to the building area, almost naked and hungry, demanding food, the people there reacted shamefully. Nuru, as a displaced person himself, should have understood her situation better but he behaved erratically, beating her with his stick. He later started behaving rudely with other displaced individuals: “He, with his *paaion*, assaulted her with all the brute force anguish of his young body He became irascible and restless, fretting over everything, even the smallest of things. He could be heard arguing with other occupants of the stairwell” (222). For Nuru, multiple social factors can be traced in light of the Lucifer Effect that provoked him to act so brutally. One main reason is he did not have any fixed responsibility or identity: he remained at the stairwell as a parasite and followed all the instructions of the host family. Living in the shadow of others, he gradually might have lost his own purpose of living, although at the beginning it was mentioned that he used to be a craftsman, making beautiful things out of bamboo. The day the woman intruded into the colony and threatened the residents with her horrific appearance and desperate cry for food, Nuru was asked to take care of the matter. According to Zimbardo, if people in power allocate agency to engage in violent behavior, people lose sense of moral strictures and engage in cruel actions. In Nuru’s case, his own

displacement and vulnerability resulted in his disengagement with other victims where he only had to mechanically follow the instructions of his host/employer. The harshness he had to face because of his migration from his home also made him crude and competitive for a better position.

In the short story “The Green Passport,” Shaheen Akhtar, translated by Arifa Ghani Rahman, encapsulates rather a complex situation and vision of Rahmatullah, a 1971 war criminal, trodden with age and caught in a vacuum where he cannot own or disown the country he lives in. During the communal riots in Bihar, India in 1946, Rahmatullah’s father, the great grandfather of Ahmed, had been killed: “The shop was looted during the riot of 1946. Great-grandfather’s body had rotted among the sacks of sweetmeats. He had been stuffed into one of those sacks and buried in the family graveyard” (Akhtar 31). This incident triggered the migration of their family from India to East Pakistan. Their displacement made them angry or frustrated and, in some aspects, insensitive and often cruel.

The depiction of Old Delhi during the time of Partition uncovers the dehumanizing condition of people: “Old Delhi. 1947. Even the dogs wouldn’t take a bite out of the human corpses” (Akhtar 32). Rahmatullah surely carried the trauma and angst throughout his life and, being a “stranded Pakistani,” spent his entire life fighting the cause for Pakistan, yet was betrayed by the newly emerged state as Pakistan was not ready to accept the Biharis as Pakistani citizens. During 1971, his son was trained as Al Shams and as he died during the war, Rahmatullah considers his son a martyr. This infuriates his granddaughter Kaniz Fatima: “Who put a dummy wooden rifle in his son’s hands? Who had him trained? Who made him a part of Al-Shams?” (Akhtar 34). She accuses his grandfather and his family members because, living in East Pakistan, they could not accept it as their own land and took terrible measures like letting their son be a puppet of the then rulers, which made their lives more miserable.

Dislocated and dehumanized, several members of Rahmatullah’s family unleashed their rage at the betrayal, against the Bengalis, because the latter rejected those of Pakistani origin:

Rahmatullah’s wife had tucked her dupatta around her waist and, from behind the scene, had supplied the knives, swords, and bombs during the Bengali-Bihari riots. Kaniz Fatima’s mother spoke of only of one thing: “If any Bengali lies foaming at the mouth and dying at your doorstep, swear to Allah that none of you will give him a drop of water or a handful of alms.” (Akhtar 34)

At this point, Rahmatullah reminisces about when even the women of his family were so engrossed in enmity against the Bengalis that they assisted in

dehumanizing activities themselves. The root cause of such behavior is their own trauma of brutal treatment by the Hindus during the communal riots of 1946 in their original homeland of Chhapra, Bihar. They thought if they did not claim this new territory, they would be uprooted again from their “home”: “When we saw that Pakistan was breaking in two ... we thought if we didn’t make the right moves, our clans would be wiped out” (Akhtar 38). Their deeds were based on survival instincts and the fear of being displaced. Additionally, despite all these years of living in Bangladesh, the family suffers humiliation as they are not accepted by the locals because of their language differences. As evidence, Ahmed, the grandson of Rahmatullah, reiterates his memory of visiting India: “No one insulted me for my Urdu tongue or called me ‘Bhaira!’ ... I felt like a king in his castle ... I have found my own place, Dada” (Akhtar 32). Ahmed tries to get over the displacement by going back to his roots whereas his sister Kaniz dreams of adopting the Bangladeshi identity and getting past the dark memories of her family. Through the paradoxical desires of Rahmatullah’s two grandchildren, the pangs of displaced refugees can be traced. The author’s deliberate blurring of the boundary between traitor and martyr leaves the question open once again of whether victims become victimizers themselves? The answer is, possibly, yes.

Rahmatullah and his family’s displacement made them act cruel and they did the same dehumanizing things with other Bengalis which they themselves suffered as they feared being victims of the same situation again in Bangladesh: “We would have been killed in India as Muslims. And we’d be killed as refugees in Pakistan’s Sindh or Punjab” (37). This again shows the floating condition of refugees. It indicates the instability such people have to face. Like Nuru, Rahmatullah’s own insecurity and displacement made him engage in the inhuman acts like shoving “the Bangaillas off their seats in the train,” kicking “them in the marketplace, in the factories” and during the war, acting “as friends of the Pakistan Army and slit[ting] their throats” (Akhtar 37). Rahmatullah acted with hostility as he could never consider Bengalis as part of his own group, a mindset cultivated by the ruling party of West Pakistan, which spread antagonistic thinking among marginal figures like him.

Afsan Chowdhury’s “Torso,” translated by Shamsad Mortuza, set in 1971, captures a nightmarish dehumanizing event experienced by Malati, a Hindu woman, mother of two children, whose husband was killed by Pakistani soldiers during the 1971 Liberation War. She struggled to cremate the severed head and torso of her dead husband as she wanted to pay the last tribute to her partner following the Hindu rituals as a sign of love. But the process of dehumanization enacted by the perpetrators becomes evident. The gruesome image of genocide, committed by the Pakistani Army, is visible as Kanai reports to Malati, “all the

bodies are piled up near the PTI Office. It has become a bazaar; people are coming to get bodies of their own family members. You still have time to get yours” (Chowdhury 60).

Through the enigma of Shankar and Malati, the story unlocks the extreme barbarity of the Pakistani Army soldiers who themselves were commanded to leave their own land and fight miles away because of political issues. Any soldier fighting in a war zone is also marked as displaced and whose individual identity is violated under the military identity as it happens in case of mechanistic dehumanization. Soldiers are trained to be inert and machine-like. As a result, they often reach such levels of cruelty that they torture and kill other human beings in inhumane ways: “The cremation site had been burnt down. The city now belonged to a different group of people. Outsiders had come with their guns, with hope of change of power” (Chowdhury 65).

Malati’s husband, Shankar Das, was killed by the Pakistani military in 1971 during the fight between Bengalis and Pakistanis. When Kanai brings the news, he reports, “They were even taking away girls of Bimala’s age. When the soldiers get tired of fighting, they need to rest with the girls, you see!” (64). It is evident that due to living in a warzone far away from home, the displaced soldiers’ mentality has deteriorated to such an extent that they were raping young children for their entertainment. The portrayal of the barbarity that took place in East Bengal by the Pakistani Army evidently lays bare the dehumanizing acts of the Army. Such massacres were enabled and authorized by those in positions of power. Their anonymity made it easier to commit violence against Bengalis, especially the Hindu minority.

Shanker is dehumanized twice, first when the Pakistani Army severed his head from his torso and, second, when his dead body was searched by a group of people who wanted to confirm if the dead body was of a Hindu or a Muslim. The group’s actual identity is not mentioned clearly but the dialogue and presence of a rifle indicate that they might be members of the Pakistani Army who actively participated in genocide. Though no physical torture was deployed, their verbal insult and inspection left Malati and the children shuddering in fear and profound shock. With extreme disrespect towards the corpse of a human, they said, “No, we’d like to see his willy. We need to see if he had been circumcised or not?” (67). Then they dragged the dead body out of the sack carried by Malati who was in search of a funeral pyre:

By then two of the men had pulled the body out of the bag. The hustle caused the head of Shankar to roll down and come to the feet of Malati outside the range of the torch light. (Chowdhury 67)

This is peak inhumanity when people do not honor the dead body of a person. In 1971, many people were killed in the name of religion. The soldiers here wanted to confirm the religion of the dead body. They removed the body from the sack to examine it, showing no concern even as the head rolled away. They were even laughing at the distressed family, ignoring their mental condition, thus dehumanizing them. This group, on the basis of religious identity, othered the Hindus and sanctioned the act of violence against them as the ruling people again successfully projected the hostile image of the religiously different group in the minds of pro-Pakistanis. Interestingly, Malati's unequivocal affection even towards the severed head of Shankar, and later, Malati's determination to return the torso of the Muslim man to the PTI office as a note of gratitude (as the circumscribed torso saved Malati and the children from being the targeted victims due to their Hindu identity) contrast the brutal acts of the victimizers.

A comparative analysis of the three short stories from Sohana Manzoor's *Our Many Longings* reveals recurring thematic patterns, which we coded and interpreted through Zimbardo's Lucifer Effect framework. Textual moments were examined and grouped under four analytical categories: crisis of identity, instability and insecurity, authorization, and deindividuation. Each of these categories corresponds to mechanisms of moral disengagement and dehumanization as outlined by Zimbardo.

A key theme in the three short stories is the crisis of identity, which influences character motivations and conflicts. In "Nuru," the protagonist's feelings of alienation and his struggle to assert agency are central to his quest for a sense of self. Similarly, in "The Green Passport," Rahmatullah and his family experience deep grief over their lost identity, and this frustration shows through hostility toward others. In "Torso," the Pakistani Army perpetrators fail to see the Hindu minority as part of their ingroup, which allows them to justify committing atrocities in the name of defending their national identity. Therefore, the characters' unstable or threatened identities emerge as a major factor shaping their actions.

The characters in these short stories also demonstrate the profound psychological impact of instability and insecurity. For example, Nuru exhibits inner turmoil in response to his precarious environment, while Rahmatullah and Ahmed express dissatisfaction with their lives, prompting Ahmed to migrate to India in search of belonging. Displacement plays a key role in provoking the sense of instability and insecurity in these characters. Similarly, Malati's family experiences displacement, paralleling the mobility of the Pakistani Army perpetrators. The soldiers' involvement in atrocities, such as tormenting civilians and assaulting women, can be understood as a consequence of their instability and sense of

dislocation. This psychological and social instability fosters moral disengagement, leading individuals to commit acts of violence and degrade others.

The concept of authorization is a recurring theme across the texts. In “Nuru,” the protagonist feels empowered enough to confront the hungry woman, while in “Torso,” the Pakistani Army is formally sanctioned to execute orders, committing atrocities against civilians. Similarly, in “The Green Passport,” the Biharis are supported by the Pakistani authorities during the riots, which enables them to engage in inhumane acts against the Bengali population. In each case, formal or perceived authorization provides individuals with the social and institutional backing to participate in morally harmful actions.

The theme of deindividuation is similarly illustrated in group behavior of the Biharis in “The Green Passport” and the Pakistani soldiers in “Torso,” where collective actions lead to reduction in personal accountability, which, in turn, facilitates immoral actions.

This coding process explicitly links textual evidence with theoretical categories, thereby clarifying how Zimbardo’s framework illuminates the psychological and social dimensions of dehumanization in these stories.

This study acknowledges two main limitations. First, applying an experimental psychology framework such as Zimbardo’s Lucifer Effect to literary narratives inevitably involves a degree of abstraction. Unlike controlled experiments, fiction does not generate empirical data; instead, it presents imagined realities that reflect, distort, or symbolically represent social and psychological processes. While this may reduce the precision of analysis, it also opens up interpretive possibilities to explore how displacement and dehumanization are culturally imagined and narrated.

Second, emphasizing situational forces risks the unintended impression of justifying or excusing acts of violence. To address this, we underline Zimbardo’s own caveat: identifying mechanisms of moral disengagement is not meant to legitimize cruelty but to expose how ordinary individuals may be drawn into it. By foregrounding these dynamics in fiction, our study does not seek to generalize psychological claims but rather to open a dialogue about the complex intersections of displacement, dehumanization, and moral choice.

This paper has examined the socio-psychological dimensions of displacement and dehumanization in Bangladeshi short fiction, drawing on Philip Zimbardo’s Lucifer Effect as a guiding framework. Through the stories “Nuru,” “The Green Passport,” and “Torso” in Manzoor’s collection, *Our Many Longings*, the study has shown how characters who experience displacement are vulnerable

to dehumanization and, in certain cases, may themselves participate in dehumanizing practices. At the same time, these narratives underscore the blurred lines between victim and perpetrator, demonstrating how situational forces, insecurity, and authorization can provoke destructive behavior.

Importantly, the analysis highlights variation in outcomes: while some displaced figures act with hostility and violence, others, like Malati in “Torso,” resist cruelty and embody empathy even in the face of profound trauma. This indicates that displacement and dehumanization do not deterministically lead to evil but interact with broader political, social, and cultural conditions.

By applying an experimental psychology framework to literary narratives, the study does not claim to produce empirical proof. Rather, it contributes to an interdisciplinary dialogue, using fiction as a space to reflect on the mechanisms of moral disengagement, hostile imagination, and the fragility of human dignity under displacement. In doing so, the paper underscores the importance of understanding literature not only as an artistic expression but also as a site where the psychological and social consequences of displacement and dehumanization are imaginatively explored.

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