TECHNOPHILISM OR TECHNOPHOBIA: A TECHNOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ASIMOV'S SELECT STORIES

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Abstract: This paper claims that the future of this world would be in the hands of "artilects". The humanity has to reap the consequences of its choice for making godlike machines. In the nearby future the human beings would bifurcate into two main groups based on their perspective on technology. They are "technophilists" (people who support the advanced machines and "technophobics" (people who opposes the advanced technology). Here one can find that how these things have already affected the subject matter of literature and how it obtains a refracted image in literature.

Keywords: Cyberprep, Post human, Technophobics and Technophilists.

Introduction: A literature can be called as the record of human experience, and the result of what the people have always been impelled to write down their impressions of life. It is a reflection and refraction of life, which reflects the life and it also changes from the monotonous direction of life. One can find many examples for this refracted image of literature in Gothic Fiction, Apocalyptic Literature, Science Fiction, etc. The term "Science fiction" means the novels and short stories that represent the imagined reality which is entirely different form the nature and functioning from the real world. The post-modern form of science fiction is "cyberpunk fiction". It is associated with the writers like William Gibson, Bruce Sterling and Neal Stephenson.

"It centres on the impact of new technologies such as computers and virtual reality and with propagating popular images of cyberspace, cyborgs, artificial life forms and so on"

(Bell 4). Like many other literary genres it also has subdivisions like steam punk, biopunk and cyberprep, the latter one gives a clean and rosy view of the future which is contrasted to the cyberpunk's grim and dirty dystopian or apocalyptic view about the future. The word 'robot' brings to human being's mind, a mechanical being, more or less human in shape. Common in science fiction, robots are generally depicted as working in the service of humanity, but often escaping the control of their human masters and doing them harm. The word robot comes from the Czech writer Karel Capek's 1921 play 'R.U.R.' (which stands for "Rossum's Universal Robots"), in which mechanical beings manufactured to be slaves for humanity rise up in rebellion and kill their creators. Although writers like Eando Binder and Lester Del Rey had already written stories about benevolent, almost human robots, it would be Isaac Asimov who would set the criteria for most future robot stories. Asimov started writing robotic stories by propounding three laws. They are: 1 – A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

2 – A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the first law. 3 – A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the first (or) second law. (Asimov 8)Asimov's short story collection I, Robot shares its title with Eando Binder's short story "I, Robot". Asimov wants to entitle his collection as Mind and Iron. I, Robot is a collection of nine short stories published in different magazines at different periods of time. But the stories are interwoven together, as the protagonist of this story Susan Calvin tells these incidents to a reporter, who narrates these incidents to the readers, in the 21st century. Technocriticism is the brain child of critical thinkers like Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) and theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965). They try to evaluate the effects of technological advance on the human beings condition and try to bring a critical appraisal of its direction. Unlike the Neo-Luddite view which is against the technology in favour of the romanticised past it speaks about what human beings could do to mitigate the dehumanising act of the technological innovation. It acts as an opposition party in the age of blind obedience to the technological innovation, which stresses on the principle that "What can be done should be done!"(Terlizzese web). It affirms the "imago dei" that human beings are the distinct creation from the rest of the nature. They are given the stewardship and responsibility to look after the rest of the creation. But human beings enjoy their freedom without knowing their responsibility. Technocriticism acts in a mediating position between two extremes, that is between technophobia and technophilism or what Hugo de Garis calls as Cosmists Vs Terrans.   The story "Robbie" is a good example for "cyberprep", as it gives a rosy picture about the technological innovation. It shows how a robot could be a useful one. In this story a robot works as a house maid. It is portrayed as a harmless one. Well, what have the neighbours to do with it? Now look. A robot is infinitely more to be trusted than a human nursemaid. Robbie was constructed for

only one purpose really – to be the companion of a little child. His entire "mentality" has been created for the purpose. He just can't help being faithful and loving and kind. He's a machine – made so. That's more than you can say for humans. (Asimov 20) This shows how human beings started to believe and become dependent on technologies. In this story, George Weston represents "cosmits" view that the technological innovation is indispensable in the modern world. While Grace Weston represents "terrans" view that technological advancement will bring harm to the human beings in one way or the other. She explains her point by saying that the robot in the house prevents the child from socializing with others. Her point goes hand in hand with the idea of technocriticism that is the technocritics must do something to mitigate the dehumanizing act of the technological innovation. This is the case today with television, cell phones and other modern equipments. This also shows how human beings are so dependent on the modern technology. For example, the kind of life led by Gloria would be the best example for this. This also serves as an example for the concept called "Post human thought". Another story which supports the idea of technophilism is "Evidence". It reflects the technophilists idea

"Technology is praised as a cure all for societal faults . . . while technology is lionized and can do no wrong." (Terlizzese web). In this story a rosy picture of an humanoid rule is given. The artilect Stephen Byerley is shown as the unbiased Mayor. Dr. Susan Calvin speaks about robot in the following way

"I like them considerably better than I do human beings. If a robot can be created capable of being a civil executive, I think he'd make the best one possible. By the laws of Robotics, he'd be incapable of harming humans, incapable of tyranny, of corruption, of stupidity, of prejudice"

(Asimov 218). Thus the unbiased and unprejudiced rule would be given by the machines for the welfare and the development of human beings is shown very clearly. The technophobic perspective is also attacked here, as Susan says

"You share a prejudice against robots which is quite unreasoning. He was a very good Mayor; five years later he did become Regional Co-ordinator. And when the Regions of Earth formed their Federation in 2044, he became the first World Co-ordinator. By that time it was the Machines that were running the world anyway"

(Asimov 220). The story, "The Evitable Conflict" is a continuation of the story "Evidence" but this story gives an apocalyptic vision about the technological innovation. It acts as an example of what Hugo de Garis calls as "Giga death", though it does not bring it till the end of the story it shows the helpless situations faced by human beings. Human beings are not able to assess the activities of "the Brain" but they can understand one thing that is "the machines, from now on, are inevitable!" (Asimov 249). Here in this story one can find the moral neutrality, that is the technology can do no harm, it only just try to protect the human beings from themselves by bringing out a rule for itself from the given three rules. The self evolved rule or what Asimov call as Zeroth law is that

"No machines may harm humanity; or, through inaction, allow humanity to come to harm"

(Asimov 247). Thus the moral neutrality is maintained towards technology. And so should I say, and so should the Machines say. Their first care, therefore, is to preserve themselves, for us. And so they are quietly taking care of the only elements left that threaten them. It is not the "Society for Humanity" which is shaking the boat so that the Machines may be destroyed. You have been looking at the reverse of the picture. Say rather that the Machine is shaking the boat – very slightly – just enough to shake loose those few which cling to the side for purpose the Machines consider harmful to Humanity. (Asimov 247). Thus the cause for the war that may come in the nearby future between artilect and human beings is vividly portrayed in this picture. These stories can also be analyzed with Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle as the underlying thought. There is always the uncertainty factor in every technology and there may come a time when the humans will lose control over the technology they have created. As Derrida says, the human beings who are the centre at first comes to the margin and the robots which are in the margin moves to the centre at the end of the text. While speaking about the advancement of technology, Alvin Toffler in his Future Shock says

"Apart from actual changes in the social structure, how will a proposed new technology affect the value system of the society" (Toffler 439).

He then speaks about the kind of artificial life the people started to live because of the advanced technology. The people forgot their interdependence with nature and started to exploit it, so the students organize "environmental teachins" (Toffler 430). He also speaks about a group of students from Paris voicing out for the "death to the technocrats!" (Toffler 431). Even Ted Kaczynski represents this view in his desire to murder computer scientists in efforts to stall development. Alvin Toffler also says that it is difficult to stop the technology from this world,

"Worse yet, reckless attempts to halt technology will produce results quite as destructive as reckless attempts to advance it"

(Toffler 431). Technocritics stand for something that is called as the mediating position between two

extremes. Toffler in his Future Shock suggests a way to avoid these problems. He suggests that before unleashing a new technology into the world, it should be tested and analysed well. So that only tested technologies would be introduced into this world. Even "Light Greens" a group of environmentalists speaks not against technology (Barry 248). This shows that the environmentalists themselves understood that it is hard for humanity to live without the aid of technology. One should stand for intermediate technology- a term popularized by Schumacher. Human beings need not be uncivilized without technology, at the same time, high technology will also bring catastrophic effect on this biosphere.

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