

Human Relationship in the Technological Era with Special Reference to Isaac Asimov's Select Fiction: A Posthumanistic Perspective.

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Abstract

This present study claims that the future of human relationship would undergo a radical change because of science and technology. This evolutionary process has its impact in several human relationships like marriage, family, friendship, etc. Here one can find how Isaac Asimov depicts the human relationship in the technologically advanced posthuman society.

KEYWORDS: Relationship, science, technology, marriage, family, friendship

Literature is always known for its wonderful attribute of reflecting the 'spirit of the age' or what is popularly labelled as Zeitgeist. A sub genre of literature, which is produced during and after the period of industrial revolution and world wars, gives a gruesome description of science and technology. Later, few writers start to give a beautiful depiction about technology. The works with such portraiture is popularly called as 'Science Fiction'. The term 'Science Fiction' is defined in Oxford English Dictionary as an "imaginative fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or spectacular environmental changes, frequently set in the future or on other planets and involving space or time travel".

Posthumanism can be fully apprehended from Peter Mahon's explanation as "humans + tools" (Mahon 2). The evolution of human beings can be easily traced with the tools they use. The primitive human beings started to use stone and fire, which defines them and their civilization. Later humanity has undergone tremendous changes because of tools which have evolved into machines. One can find the rapid growth of evolutionary process in industrial civilization, agrarian revolutions, etc. With the process of evolution one can observe the impact of tools or machines on the characteristics and behaviour of a person which defines the interpersonal relationship with the fellow human beings.

Most of the scholars focus on the scientific concepts and technological artifacts that are predicted by authors in their works. Here the researcher is going to analyse the human relationship which acts as a kind of background in the select fictions of Isaac Asimov and how the author portrays the impact of technology on human relationship.

In the novel *The Naked Sun*, Asimov depicts that in techno culture because of advanced science and technology people will give much importance for hygiene. The extreme hygiene steps they follow affect the cordial relationship with the fellow human beings as they find it unbearable to be with another human being in a same room imagining that same air would be used for respiratory process. This eccentric behaviour leads people to abhor marriage and copulation. That makes Dr. Delmarre invent artificial insemination in order to aid their characteristics. As it is explained in the novel *The Naked Sun*, through the character Klorissa that "Dr. Delmarre used to say the time would come when unfertilized ova would be stored in banks at liquid-air temperatures and utilized for artificial insemination" (NS 168).

The sanitary practices people follow helps them to live longer. The long life also has the negative effect of emotional detachment, which is depicted in the novel *Robots and Empire* through the character Gladia, who states, “long life had something to do with it, too. How could one make an emotional attachment that wouldn’t turn slowly sour as the multi-decades passed; or if one died, how could another bear the loss for multi-decades? One learned, then, not to make emotional attachments, but to stand off, to insulate oneself” (RE 267).

Asimov also explicates that because of human beings exposure to mechanical devices they themselves started to behave like machines. Elijah Baley in the novel *The Caves of Steel* proposes his lady love in a mechanical manner by showing contingent for getting into couples’ apartment to Jessie and asks “Will you fix it so I can get out of Bachelor’s, Jessie? I don’t like it there” (43). The entire scene is depicted as agreement or contract signing meeting in which human emotions are not entertained.

The libidinal instinct that is hidden behind the social institution called marriage is sex. It is one of the reasons that unite people in the name of marriage. Asimov predicts that because of humanoids people will cease to find human partners and they would feel complacent and happy with the android partners. Asimov through the character Gladia explains this point in *The Robots of Dawn*. Gladia asserts that,

The robots we have on Solaria, or on Earth – or on Aurora, except for Jander and Daneel – are not designed to give any but the most primitive sexual satisfaction. They might be used as masturbation devices, perhaps, as a mechanical vibrator might be, but nothing much more. When the new human form robot becomes widespread, so will human-robot sex become widespread.’ (RD 170)

The same idea is explained by Michael Hauskeller in the book *Sex and The Posthuman Condition* who claims that, William James once briefly discussed, in one of the footnotes to his book *The Meaning of Truth* (James 1909, 189), the possibility and desirability of a sexual companion that acted exactly like a real human lover would, but that did not feel anything at all. James called this fantasy an “automatic sweetheart”. Today, it seems, automatic sweethearts have already become reality. They are called sex robots or simply “sexbots”. (12)

Again Gladia asserts that Robot JanderPanell is her husband and elucidates her attachment with Jander in the following words.

‘But then I meet Jander and learned to use him. He was not an Auroran man. His only aim, his only possible aim, was to please me. He gave and I took and, for the first time, I experienced sex as it should be experienced. Do you understand that? Can you imagine what it must be like suddenly to know that you are not mad, or distorted, or perverted, or even simply wrong – but to know that you are a woman and have a satisfying sex partner?’ (RD 420)

David Levy in his book *Love + Sex with Robots* lists out multifarious reasons that drive human beings to be in relationship with robots. He asserts that Including the novelty and the excitement of the experience, the wish to have a willing lover available whenever desired, a possible replacement for a lost mate—a partner who dumped us. And psychiatrists will no doubt prescribe the use of robots to assist their patients in the recovery process— after a relationship breakup, for example—since such robots could be well trained for the task, providing live-in therapy, including sexual relations, and benefits that will certainly exceed those from Prozac and similar drugs. (105)

One might argue that humanoids would be passive and may not be emotionally attached and satisfying as human beings. Howard Stern, a famous American personality, writes his experience after copulating with a sexbot.

Best sex I ever had! I swear to God! This RealDoll feels better than a real woman! She's fantastic! I love her! This RealDoll is for real, I swear! Better than a woman! My wife isn't as good as that! May God take away all my ratings if I'm lying! I'll take a lie detector test! I swear on the life of my children! I did it and it was fulfilling! I did it and I'm proud of it! It was great! It was the best sex I ever had! ... It was fabulous!
I could fall in love with that thing!

(Levy 175)

Thus technology is so successful in getting into the day to day life of human beings and separating them from their fellow people. Human beings cannot be called as social animals anymore because of such advanced technology which makes them independent. So human beings must know how to use technology minimally this is the only way to safeguard the social institution called marriage which in turn would secure the family life and to cherish their relationship with fellow human beings.

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