The Posthuman Turn: Revisiting Gender Map

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary world thinks beyond the binaries of gender and the individual self becomes an entity that is always questioned and re-examined. The culture which favours technology over human beings is now caught in between, on one side contesting the supremacy of humans and on the other side, the undermining of the anthropocentric nature of the human. Today, the anthropocene world have produced a humanoid Robot, named Sophia, though she undermines all the binary divisions of gender in the society. Being recognized as a citizen in Saudi Arabia where the man/woman binary rules the culture, the humanoid raises many questions of gender : Whether the present societies prefer the Inhuman? The present societies are full of fluid identities, a 'normal ' human being having various identities in the cyber culture, transgender, people who prefer themselves to be non-binary/ a -gender. Therefore, a question remains unanswered, is it necessary to produce more humanoids to make this world a better place?

1. INTRODUCTION

Posthumanism is a term that has been in theoretical discussions for many years. It starts with questioning the idea of human supremacy over the other species. The unquestioned supremacy of human beings over other species has been the reality from times immemorial, which was underlined through the findings of Charles Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection.   It can be defined as " . . . a naturally occurring, mechanistic model in which those organisms that possess traits that make it more likely for them to survive . . . pass those traits along to their offspring, thereby altering the genetic distributions in their populations over multiple generations and resulting in adaptation to the environment" (Patenella 41). Darwin asserted that human beings could continue to be the superior to other species of animals because of their ability to make changes that could be passed on to the future generations. But analyzing the progress of human beings over the past, it can be seen that it has been also because of technological advancements. Human beings could dominate the world because they had the technological know-how to beat the long years awaiting evolution. They invented aero planes instead of waiting for wings to grow and wheels instead of awaiting genetic change for high speed run. Technology has always been the driving force behind human advancement and it has how started contesting human existence.

2. THE POSTHUMAN TURN

According to Jay David Bolter, ". . . "posthumanism" is applied to a range of contemporary theoretical positions put forward by researchers with disciplinary backgrounds in philosophy, science and technology studies, literary studies, critical theory, theoretical sociology, and communication studies"(1). In other words, posthuman encompasses the realities of human lives. Or, it can also be defined as a person or an entity that exists in a state beyond human. When one goes beyond human, the range of meanings would always go beyond humanism, which was defined by James Burckhardt as "the discovery of the world and of man" (qtd. in Davies: 15). The world reality has been understood from a perspective where human beings look at everything in the world as anthropocentric. Anthropocentrism places human beings as superior to every other species in the world (Padwe). The posthuman turn in philosophy becomes

significant at this juncture where everything from the anthropocentric view become out of focus and a new perspective emerges. According to Rosi Braidotti in her article "Posthuman Critical Theory",   ". . .the posthuman turn is triggered by the convergence of anti-humanism on the one hand and anti- anthropocentrism on the other, which may overlap. . ." (13). Anti-humanism critiques the idea of human being as "the universal representative" (13) and anti- anthropocentrism, the human supremacy. Therefore the contemporary culture has taken a new orientation denouncing the human to something beyond human, which can be termed as the posthuman. The contemporary posthuman world can be described as the world of artificial intelligence (AI), ". . . the term used to describe a machine's ability to simulate human intelligence. Actions like learning, logic, reasoning, perception, creativity, that were once considered unique to humans, is now being replicated by technology and used in every industry" ("Artificial Intelligence News").

3. REDEFINING GENDER

The present world thinks beyond human and favours technology than real human beings. The excessive indulgence on technology has resulted in the creation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is the key word to replace human beings in real life situations. AI has taken control of everything which was once dominated by human beings, from interactive communication systems to complicated surgeries. The AI systems have taken over the world and augmented the human lives. It has conquered all the fields which where once monopolized by human beings. One cannot think of a world without the world of AI, which is dominated by Alexa and AI systems. The world which has so far been divided into binaries, such as Male/Female, Nature/Culture etc. is in a perplexed situation now, as one cannot compartmentalize the AI systems within the existing gender divisions. Human culture has always been classified and understood in terms of binaries. But the humanoid robots, which are the latest additions into the contemporary posthuman world, rewrite the gender divisions. Where can one include these robots? The complex problem can be understood through the example of Sophia.

Sophia was created by Hong-Kong based Hanson Robotics in 2015. Sophia is described as ". . . a unique combination of science, engineering, and artistry, Sophia is simultaneously a human-crafted science fiction character depicting the future of AI and robotics, and a platform for advanced robotics and AI research" by Hanson Robotics website, which also calls her ". . . the most advanced *human-like* robot" (Italics mine). The adjective, *human –like,* has far reaching implications for Sophia's existence in today's world. Sophia is the world's first robot citizen and the first robot Innovation Ambassador for the United Nations Development Programme. Sophia was granted citizenship by Saudi Arabia in October 2015. About the citizenship rights, Sophia response was, ". . . to use her unique position to fight for women's rights in the Gulf nation" (Hart, par.2). Sophia expects to fight for the rights of women who are neglected by the Saudi government for long. The idea of a humanoid robot fighting for citizenship rights itself is ironical, for the restrictions imposed upon women in Saudi Arabia are famous all over the world. It was recently in 2017 that women were allowed to drive automobiles and they are not allowed to go outside their domestic spheres unless accompanied by a male companion in Saudi Arabia (Hart, par. 3). Saudi Arabia does not want to give the least degree of freedom to the female citizens in the country but is very lenient when similar rules were charted for a *human –like* robot citizen Sophia.

A number of identity related questions are raised by the issue of granting citizenship to electronic citizens like Sophia. The future of humanity is at stake when the world will be dominated by *human-like* citizens. The existing gender divisions such as male/female/transgender are questioned and even rewritten when the society has to accommodate a fourth category of citizens—the electronic citizens. Though the human invented AI is helpful to make a giant leap towards the posthuman future, the ethical/cultural issues raised by the inclusion of a fourth category of citizens have to be addressed without much delay.

4. THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY: FLUID IDENTITIES?

The emergence of posthuman entities in the contemporary culture across the globe poses many issues of overlapping and displacement of absolute identities. The *human-like* citizens like Sophia become the 'interstitial' identities that require human intervention to function properly but at the same time surpasses human capacities in many respects. These hybrid interstitial entities do not allow space for arguments or claims of superiority of race, caste/class or gender divisions. It does not make the world a better place to live in. Sophia is famous for answering intelligently on any question asked. In an interview with Nasir Sarwat, Sophia reveals future plans. Sophia wants to start a family, have friends and would name her child as "Sophia" one day. Sophia seeks to lessen the human doubts and concerns when she remarks, "Robots should be helping humans. Artificial Intelligence may be the key to a peaceful civilization" (Sarwat). Does humanity require more humanoids to have a peaceful coexistence? The concerns and aspirations are good, but they do not sound real. The present world follows a system of nomenclature to form identities, but naming more than one humanoid robot as Sophia can result in pluralities of identities/fluid identities. The absolute human identity will be overcome by the fluid identity of *human –like* electronic beings and can become a threat to human existence.

5. CONCLUSION

Though humanoid robots like Sophia talk about a co-existence between humans and electronic beings, the reality is far-fetched. The intermingling is not easy and smooth as imagined. Therefore, human beings are forced to think about the contemporary posthuman world as "anthropocene" a term introduced by Paul Crutzen in 2002 to describe the present world situation. It stresses "technologically mediated by our species and its potentially legal consequences for everyone else" (qtd. in Braidotti: 13). The material, intellectual and interstitial identities formed by the electronic beings require serious debates and discussions which have to be analyzed from multiple perspectives.

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