

POLITICS OF POWER IN SCIENCE FICTION WITH REFERENCE TO *NEVER LET ME GO AND STARSHIP TROOPERS*

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Abstract:

*Science fiction over the years has carved a special place in the literary paradigm. With the increase in use of science and technology in our lives exponentially increasing, science fiction texts have assumed a lot of importance in our lives. More and more people are now exploring science fiction through books and movies as it connects the past, present and future. Political themes in science fiction have been a very critically appreciated sub-genre because it provides depth and finesse to the improbable future societies depicted in science fiction texts. The political science fiction texts concerns themselves with the political dynamics of the future societies in which there would be an inter-play of political imperialist schemes and strategies in order to gain a position of dominance. The political science fiction texts have also analyzed the repercussions of the present day political policies, the shapes and the connotations of these policies in future and more importantly their influence on the common citizens of the world. The paper tries to analyse the political connotations of two significant political science fiction novels- *Never Let me Go* and *Starship Troopers* which in turn will help us to analyze the political implications of science fiction as a genre in a detailed manner.*

Keywords: *Exponentially, improbable, imperialist, dominance, implications.*

Introduction:

Science fiction over the years has created a special place in the psyche of the masses. A genre which was considered a variant of pulp fiction not long ago has been able to carve a distinct position in popular culture as well as establish itself in the literary canon. A large amount of credit goes to special writers like H.G Wells, Jules Verne, Margaret Atwood, Arthur Clarke etc. who have mesmerized the readers with their thought provoking writing. With time several texts like *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Dispossessed*, *Star ship Troopers* have established the genre of science fiction as a relevant and multi-faceted area of study. The most important dynamics associated with the genre perhaps is the envisioning of future societies which are created in the worlds of science fiction. And these imaginary worlds are replete with their own social, political and cultural implications.

Science fiction may not be generally associated with political connotations but then a detailed study of science fiction text over the years will reveal that not only it has got profound political meaning but also it has influenced the political milieu of the world at various junctures. Whether it be the tyrannical dictatorial rule of 'The Big Brother' and his establishment in 1984 or the militarian federal leadership in *Star ship Troopers*, the political facet of science fiction has revealed interesting patterns. The genre not only has taken the tenets of the prevailing political dogmas but also have created imaginary political discourses which might turn into reality in the generations to come. It has been seen that in many texts the geo-political friction between political superpowers has been the driving force behind the science fictional narratives. Whether it be the ideas of Captain Nemo on blatant capitalism and imperialism or the central theme of classicism in *The Time Machine* or the all accommodating diversified culture depicted in *Star Trek*, politics has been the backbone of major science fictional texts. In this paper, my focus is on two texts

Star Ship Troopers by Robert Heinlein and *Never Let Me Go* by Nobel Laureate Kazuo Ishiguro. Whereas the former focuses on a form of government run by the military forces, the latter's central point of focus is on human cloning. Both the texts focus on different kind of political intentions but a strong streak of political consciousness is infused in the story nevertheless.

Never Let Me Go

Never Let Me Go is perhaps the only novel in which Ishiguro has directly dealt with science fiction themes. It is a dystopian science fiction novel which has human cloning and genetic regeneration as its principal subjects. The post-colonial theory of 'othering' is prominent here as human clones are oppressed by the normal human beings. The human clones are the organ donors and they are stationed in a school called 'Hailsham'. The main objective of the school is to prepare them for the future course of action i.e to help install the powerful mechanisms of self-repression and denial that will keep them steady and dependable from one donation to the next. The story is principled upon three principal characters Kathy, Ruth and Tommy who are children studying in Hailsham School. The narrative slowly turns into a love triangle between the three principal characters. But what holds the story telling together is the poignant tale of the artificial 'human beings' who are reared for the purpose of donating the organs (the process is known as completion) once they are called upon to do so. The in-doctrination of the children in Hailsham School is testimony of the indifferent attitude of the common people towards these 'cyborgs' who are categorised as the 'other' with conventionally built human beings as the 'centre'. Since they were the future donors, their health was given utmost importance. That is why they were told to avoid cigarettes. For instance, Kathy has elaborated a lesson where a smoking issue is lecturing: “at Hailsham the guardians were really strict about smoking. Even if we were being shown a picture of a famous writer or world leader, and they happened to have a cigarette in their hand, then the whole lesson would grind to a halt. (...) And then there were the actual lessons where they showed us horrible pictures of what smoking did to the insides of your body” (p. 67). The other perspective in which they were indoctrinated was sex. We had to be extremely careful about having sex in the outside world, especially with people who weren't students, because out there sex meant all sorts of things. Out there people were even fighting and killing each other over who had sex with whom. (...) because the people out there were different from us students: they could have babies from sex. That was why it was so important to them. (...) And even though, as we knew, it was completely impossible for any of us to have babies” (p. 82). This politics of cognitive and emotional alienation from the mainstream society led to the human clones feel inferior about themselves. They were made to realize very early in their life that they are not going to lead a 'normal' life as like others and hence their habits needed to be moulded according to their purposes. The clones were also dehumanised in the story on the basis of their physical appearances. “Madame never liked us. She's always been afraid of us. In the way people are afraid of spiders and things” (p. 263). The process of objectifying the clones is very prominent throughout the novel. “The idea was that when the time came, you'd be able just to unzip a bit of yourself, a kidney or something would slide out, and you'd hand it over. (...) it was more a way of putting each other off our food. You unzipped your liver, say, and dumped it on someone's plate, that sort of thing” (p. 86). The motive behind the alienation process is depriving the clones of self-dignity and creating in them the eternal feeling of inferiority. “So for a long time you were kept in the shadows, and people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren't really like us. That you were less than human, (...) while that remained the case, there would always be a barrier against seeing you as properly human” (p. 258).

Starship Troopers

The other text in consideration is the seminal book *Star ship Troopers* by Robert Heinlein. It is a prominent example of the military science fiction category but it is one of those science fiction texts which is filled with deep political implications. The novel portrays a future in which a federal form of government

run by the military officials called the Terran Federation. The basic right of voting or exercising one franchise is limited to those people only who have completed two years of compulsory federal service. The important decisions of the state are taken by the top military officials as they are thought to have better capability and judgement capacity to take decisions in the interest of the society. The novel follows the Darwinian idea of society where force should be used for survival. In case of *Starship Troopers* the entities in question are the aliens. The narrative talks about a war between the allied forces including U.S.A, Britain and Russia fighting against China. The writer clearly demonstrates an anti-communist agenda with Chinese political principles as the site of his criticism. The writer clearly defines the significance of sovereignty in a political system. Through the character of Johnnie, the various inter-play of power has been portrayed. The Terran Foundation members develop from an unruly mob of people who believed that they could control others and eventually establish the dictatorial kind of rule. The very word 'sovereignty' which is quite over-rated in today's present scenario finds an altogether different meaning in the text. Here the contentious term sovereignty signifies power and the central point of dominance. The pertinent message arising out of the text is that any society that segregates power and responsibility gives rise to uncontrolled streamlining of authority and despotism. *Starship troopers* portray the use of modern war elements so as to give us all a sneak peek into the modern warfare system. The use of force has been highlighted repeatedly in the text which makes it a cult classic. Regarding the natural rights of human beings, Jean Dubois in the text *Starship Troopers* exclaims beautifully "'Ah yes, [life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness]... Life? What 'right' to life has a man who is drowning in the Pacific? The ocean will not hearken to his cries. What 'right' to life has a man who must die to save his children? If he chooses to save his own life, does he do so as a matter of 'right'? If two men are starving and cannibalism is the only alternative to death, which man's right is 'unalienable'? And is it 'right'? As to liberty, the heroes who signed the great document pledged themselves to *buy* liberty with their lives. Liberty is *never* unalienable; it must be redeemed regularly with the blood of patriots or it *always* vanishes. Of all the so-called natural human rights that have ever been invented, liberty is least likely to be cheap and is *never* free of cost. The third 'right'?-the 'pursuit of happiness'? It is indeed unalienable but it is not a right; it is simply a universal condition which tyrants cannot take away nor patriots restore. Cast me into a dungeon, burn me at the stake, crown me king of kings, I can 'pursue happiness' as long as my brain lives-but neither gods nor saints, wise men nor subtle drugs, can ensure that I will catch it.'"(p.119)

Conclusion

Science fiction has emerged as a site of future construction and politics will continue to thrive in any collective society. There has been a conscious effort by the science fiction writers to explore politics of ideology, religion, caste, class, nation in their works. The acceptance of science fiction as an erudite form of literature has been propelled by the significant political undertones of science fiction subjects. The utopian or dystopian subjects which science fiction deals with politicise many current problems and their imagined future forms. Science fiction writers explore the power dynamics between various sections of the society and create a futuristic vision around the interplay of these dynamics. The role of science fiction in creating a world vision has increased manifold in the current technology driven age. It is astounding to observe that many of the prophecies made by science fiction writers have materialised long after the predictions were made. Thus, we can say that science fiction has been instrumental in shaping future consciousness to a great deal. The rapid advancement of science and its far reaching effects have made it as the most significant political tool. Political imperialism finds its gateway through science where the most powerful nations of the country exploit their abundant sources in order to suppress the weaker nations. In an age where the developing countries are trying to improve their overall status prolifically, the developed countries have resorted to science and technology to keep the status quo intact. Even sensitive topics such as climate-change which has repercussions for entire humanity have gone through numerous political

deliberations. In an age, where military strength is amplified with the use of science and technology with the imminent danger of high tech weapons and AI maximising the intensity of destruction in future wars, political science fiction has emerged as a strong reading manual in order to understand the nuances of futuristic political scenarios. Science fiction writers have carefully portrayed the apprehensions of the human society as to what they can expect in the future societies with humanity's own conflict with itself coupled with the ever-mysterious probable face-off between the inhabitants of this mortal earth and extra-terrestrial organisms. Thus political science fiction continue to emerge as an ethical guideline capable of creating a holistic future consciousness. It has even been argued that the intermingling of science fiction and fact regarding the creation of artificial intelligences and synthetic humans permeates our culture so deeply that it influences our existential relationship with God (Geraci, 2007). The dichotomy between faith and reality is being bridged by the genre and its far reaching political effects have an important role to play in the upcoming years.

Works Cited

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