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Psychological androgyny in the world of Ursula K. Le Guin

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Abstract---Literature reflects life and Science Fiction is an experimentation that creates awareness about the conditions of the current society by projecting the near future. Predictions have been an undividable combination of Science Fiction literature. The technological advancements have led the human beings to evolve as technical beings. Though the writers at first never wanted to predict the scientific inventions eventually SF writers imbibed science in literature and the impact of science on literary prospect was unavoidable. The process of evolution started in literary writing and literature popularized science through many novels. Science fiction novels emerged as the offspring of this evolution. It depicted the expression of scientific advancements of the present and also the possible future world. The predictions of SF writers were reasonable as they had relevancy to the real life situations and inventions. The SF authors let their imaginary utopia reveal the hidden desires of the author to have a better future. The pages of the utopian society implicitly replicate the contemporary sociological issues and envision a favourable society. The conventional traits of the human beings evolve as a consequence of space exploration and identification of ethnic race other than human beings in alien planets of Science Fiction world. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin visualizes a society where people are not biased by gender and androgynous nature of the people intensify the need of a genderless society. The research deals with the psychological perception of gender in the novels of Ursula K Le Guin and its relevance in real life.

Keywords---science fiction, gender issues, psychology androgynous society.

Introduction

Human beings have assigned different roles, systems of manners and ethics, and even different emotions to men and women respectively. The differences among the human beings are highly based on the biological distinction of sex. It insists on the societal distinction of human beings as male and female. Women were anticipated to adopt a humble behaviour and a moral code of sexual purity and prevented from having strong desires and opinions opposing men. This prevented the access of women to the public in various fields like Education, Employment, politics and even domestic freedom was detained to a certain level. Women were denied education until the late 19th century and even if they had it was not related to science but only arts and other cultural elegance.

Literature had less women writers in the beginning of the 19th century. Ursula K. Le Guin is one among the few writers of Science Fiction, who won both the prestigious Hugo and Nebula award for her debut novel, "*The Left Hand of Darkness*". She is a great Science Fiction writer and also influenced by feminist writers like Virginia Woolf. *The Left Hand of Darkness* was the first book in the genre of Feminist Science Fiction. *The Left Hand of Darkness* experiments androgyny as a theme in science fiction. The SF vividly portrays the impact of gender difference and sex on society and culture.

In *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* the pioneering psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi examines the association between creativity and androgynous in the mindset of men and women. Uprooting gender in the psychological world of human beings leads to prosperous creative thought. The social progress and equality of opportunities are influenced by the perception of gender. If brain and heart of a man and woman are to be examined they do not reveal the concept of gender either by skipping a beat or working faster for a man. It is the society that divides the behavior, ability, expectation and reality with respect to gender.

Psychological androgyny is a much wider concept, referring to a person's ability to be at the same time aggressive and nurturant, sensitive and rigid, dominant and submissive, regardless of gender. A psychologically androgynous person in effect doubles his or her repertoire of responses and can interact with the world in terms of a much richer and varied spectrum of opportunities. It is not surprising that creative individuals are more likely to have not only the strengths of their own gender but those of the other one, too. (65)

The Left Hand of Darkness (1966) is a part of Hainish series set in Hainish Universe. The novel is set in many centuries in the imaginary future (suggested year may be 4870). Interplanetary expansion is said to be started by the first race of humanity on the planet Hain. League of all worlds is formed by the addition of all worlds under one roof of Ekumen. Around 83 worlds are being united under Ekumen and the worlds are served best with peace and prosperity. In the

beginning chapters of the novel, author introduces an envoy, Genly Ai and his mission to convince Gethenians to join Ekumen. Karhide of Gethen is a cold planet with androgynous (ambisexual) citizens. Ai tries to convince King Agraven and Karhidish Prime Minister Estraven. Even though Ai could convince Estraven, his uncertain statements cannot assure about the union. The next day he wakes up to find Estraven is accused of treason. Ai lost his hope to convince Karhidish kingdom as his conversation with the King made it evident. He also sets his journey towards Orgoreyn to pursue his mission. Ai believed that Orgoreyn is technically organized and logical but in vain. He felt the fluctuating treatment even from the commensals of Orgoreyn. Estraven living in Orgoreyn also tries to warn Ai but could not stop his transfer to far northern camp. However Estraven only helps Ai to break free from the camp and together they cross Gobrinn glacier. As the novel resolves, Ai accomplishes his mission by contacting Ekumen and Karhide and Orgoreyn together to join Ekumen. The androgynous nature of Gethenians is reflected through the two interesting states like

Kemmer –a period of fertility to assume male or female attributes based on their interest, Somer –remain neuter for most of the time. The novel depicts the journey of Ai and Estraven together in an unknown planet. The voyage is put to test in a world of androgynous individuals and specifically through the association between Ai and Estraven, a Gethenian politician. The SF received so many controversies for projecting ambisexual Gethenians. The novel is an explorative Science Fiction where the author experiments on the gradual extinction of human liberty and earthly life. The author herself states in an interview, *“It is a thought experiment to explore society without men/women, where all the individuals share biological and emotional back up or make up of both the genders”*

This treatment of sex and gender generated culture shock to the readers but it was well received as a piece of thought experiment by the author. The presence of folk tales, journal writings and Ai’s continuous observation and the information of the report and stories of Gethen are inserted to familiarize the world and its characters. It is not only a SF but also a commendable feminist classic. It is so surprising to encounter weirdly gendered aliens in an eccentric planet. The setting of the novel is the base to persist on the nature of Gethen by not revealing or comparing it with the cultural context of earth. There is no voice of the terrestrial beings in the SF but it is evident that the only certain gender in the novel is Genly Ai. The voice of Genly Ai about the gender distinction essentialism is the voice of any common man in the earth but it is heard in vain. The culture of terran is depicted through Ai whereas the culture of Gethen through Estraven throughout the novel. The afterthoughts of the different atmosphere are heard by the mind speeches of the central characters.

The individuals of Gethen are neither male nor female and their gender is the choice of their being. This affects the societal living of the planet and seem weird for Ai being hailed from earth. The significance of gender differentiation is put to question in an androgynous planet. In the beginning stages of the novel, Ai can’t decipher the way Gethenians see the world and felt so alienated. Even though he was physically amidst the aliens, he could view the world only from the perspective of a human being. The culture shock received by Ai is just the replica of any reader and the *The Left Hand of Darkness* questions the ideas about gender

inequality prevalent in earth. The gender issues in the novel is depicted through the words of Ai “Wiping sweat from his dark forehead the man—man I must say, having said he and his—the man answers.” (1.14)

When Ai describes about Estraven his difficulty in understanding Estraven and how his performance was very feminine. “My landlady, a voluble man, arranged my journey to the East.” (5.1). The confused description of Ai about his land lady reflects the idea of the author that one fine day in the near future the earth will become a place where being a man or woman does not determine the way one lives. Sex cannot be a factor for the society to judge about an individual’s behaviour, character, personality traits and moral values. The author believes and envisions a place that could exist without any present sexual norms and roles for each person based on gender.

SF authors imagine a utopian society to find a peaceful world, with the plausible developments of science which the readers could easily imagine. Campbell’s view on SF is that the legitimacy of SF was not only in the relevance of science and its logic to create conceivable plots, but also in predicting the future with scientific validity. Most of the critics of SF state that the predictions of SF could become real. According to Sheryl Hamilton, SF is widely understood as “a prosocial knowledge with predictive power” (273). Some critics seem to agree that sf has predictive abilities. Elyce Rae Helford argues, “science fiction is about the future, new options and new ways of thinking” (131). Darko Suvin considers twentieth century SF as “a diagnosis, a warning, a call to understanding and action, and—most importantly—a mapping of possible alternatives” (30-31)

Conclusion

The readers often perceive the author’s world in the novel but in SF novels the authors let the readers imagine a reasonable world and make them long for such desirable changes. Ursula K Leguin has projected a genderless society amidst the raising gender issues that prevail in the earth. Thus the reader also would long to live in such a society without being worried about the predetermined gender. The society void of prejudiced gender roles would be without restrictions, identity crisis, domestic violence to women and ensures safety for all human beings. The paper doesnot expect an androgynous society but insists on the androgynous attitude among the human beings.

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