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Prof. K.N. Shelke

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A detailed illustration of a writing desk. A white quill pen is the central focus, resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is tied with a red ribbon and has a red wax seal. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder provides a warm glow. In the foreground, there is a glass inkwell with a quill inside, and a red wax seal with a wooden handle. The entire scene is set on a dark wooden surface.

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With this aim Research Innovator, Multidisciplinary International Research Journal (RIMIRJ) welcomes research articles from the areas like Literatures in English, Hindi and Marathi, literary translations in English from different languages of the world, arts, education, social sciences, cultural studies, pure and applied Sciences, and trade and commerce. The space will also be provided for book reviews, interviews, commentaries, poems and short fiction.

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The Promise and Peril: Science Fiction's Depiction of Technology with special reference to Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* Novels

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Abstract

Isaac Asimov, a true admirer of science, incorporated many probable technological discoveries and its promises as well as perils to human life in his *Foundation* Novels. Due to Science fiction's multidimensionality, he never restricted his predictions into one particular branch of science or one specific time frame. It depicted all scientific elements irrespective of its validity. On science, it included real sciences, quasi-sciences and para-sciences, and on timeframe, it projected past, present and future. Against this backdrop, the paper examines the plausibility of prophesied technologies in science fiction, specifically in Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* Novels, and thereby postulates what changes, be it beneficial or detrimental, it could bring to the science.

Key Words: *Foundation*

When the discoveries after discoveries altered man's coexistence, the bond of science and man began to grow considerably. As the influence of science and technology became unimaginable, scientists and science fiction writers started to anticipate over next discovery which would probably impact on people. Thus, science fiction related its fictional arena into the future science and its implications. Writers began to extrapolate the probable by evaluating the present. Finally, future portrayal became an essential part of the genre.

It was, indeed, the rise of empirical science that encouraged replacing the notion of the arts of prophecy with the science of forecasting. H. G. Wells was one of the first

to call for a science of the future. Economic and technological forecasting has received the greatest attention in this field in recent times. Since World War II, technological forecasting has been developing as a discipline and planning tool with its major consumer as militaries. Swager made a potent comment on the dearth of literature dealing with technological forecasting by claiming that in 1965, one symposium doubled the literature in the field of technological forecasting when three papers were presented to symposium. Prior to that time only three other literature references were available. He indicates a comprehensive bibliography on research and development management published in 1966 was without a single specific reference to technological forecasting. Attention is now, however, being focused more and more technological forecasting. American

Elsevier Publications produces a quarterly periodical, *Technological forecasting: An international Journal* concerned primarily with methodology. A bibliography by Cetron (1969) contains hundreds of citations. The majority of these deal with technological forecasting. Nevertheless he laments:

Technological forecasting has no established epistemology, nor recognized theory or science of methods. At one extreme we find an apparent willingness to assign this function to the very imaginative science fiction witnessed; at the other, a suggested requirement for very scholarly approach (16-17).

The field is, however, growing rapidly. As Helmer points out it is our current technological capability which makes scientific forecasting possible and that is that is also much the cause of its rise:

A concern with the future has, of course, always been implicit in any scientific undertaking and, and, thus, is as old as science itself. It is the system-mindedness our present day, supported by a growing computer-mindedness, that has suddenly made...a systems-synthetic attack on the problems of the future of our society not only feasible, but natural (37).

Types of forecasting techniques are generally classified in five categories: intuitive (based on subjective judgment of experts); trend extrapolation(based on the assumption of the continuation into the future of some discerned past trend); trend correlation (the future status of some phenomenon in terms of a constant

relationship of that phenomenon to some other phenomenon in the past whose future status has already been projected); models (an elaborated version of trend correlation using up to hundreds of estimating equations integrated into a unified forecasting method); and analogy (drawing a plausible parallel between the future and some presumably similar prior events).

Although predictive nature of science fiction became an essential part due to various reasons, almost all authors have attempted it in their fiction. No writers were free from technological forecasting. Isaac Asimov, the polymath from America, was a professor and has written many science text books apart from his masterpiece science fiction. His *Foundation* Novels, comprises seven novels ranging from 1951 to 1988 filled with marvelous predictions about upcoming future worlds.

Robots or manmade man, have been a punctilious brainchild of Isaac Asimov. The concept of manmade man is not anew, but the term in its full sense, a creature with artificial human capacities of inorganic substances, was first introduced by Asimov. Though there are slight overlapping between Robots and modern terminologies like Android, Cyborg, and Humanoid, Asimovian creation fits into every coinage. In Homer's *Iliad*, the demigod Hephaestus uses an automaton which is attending Gods, is the first portrayal of these types (book 18). After years, Hoffman propounded fully fledged Robots in his book *The Sandman* (1814). But, it is Isaac Asimov who popularized Robotic concept in its scientific

manner through his *Robotic* and *Foundation* Novels.

The first robot namely 'Unimate' was molded by the inspiration of Asimov's Robotic laws. Joseph Engelbrg and George Devol, great robotic scientists, stated that Asimov's principles guided them to form basics of robots and thus to world's first robotic company Unimation. When Korea formulated National Robot Guidelines for their robot services, it was influenced by Asimov's theories. Once, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) expressed their gratitude to Asimov, for his robotic laws that helped to make their mission successful.

Asimov incorporated artificial brained robots which could interact with man in his novels. Today, the Shenyang Siasun Robot and Automation Limited invented NAO robot, which talks, observes, listens, responds and even sends information accordingly. This was envisioned by Asimov long back in *Foundation* Novels. As in Asimov stories, now robots are used to safeguard humans, drive cars, risky labors. Moreover, Asimov foresaw the use of robots in Medical fields, domestic works- now it is proven as a possibility in many countries. While Asimov was asked about Robotics' possibility of the year 2000, in an interview, his answer was like this:

They are advancing steadily in all sorts of robotic directions, and I think that assuming that there is no thermonuclear war or that civilization does not meet a serious crisis that it cannot recover from, I think that by the end of the century we will have, at least,

simple robots. That is, objects that are roughly man-shaped that can do certain jobs.

As Asimov observed, humanity has more or less reached on the assumptions he pictured on novels.

Science fiction's treatment of transportation runs the gamut from slight improvements on current systems to near instantaneous, world-wide transportation, from personal flying devices to teleportation through psychic power. The automobile retains its hold in many future societies, albeit, somewhat changed. It is most likely powered by some other source than the fossil-fuel, internal combustion engine: electric, solar, turbine or nuclear motors are favorites.

It is high-end transportation facilities which Asimov extrapolates most after Robots and Space settlements. He attains more or less perfection in predictions that are depicted throughout *Foundation*. He could perfectly envision massive highways with computerized signal systems, driver free operations, automated driving and so on. Chettar Hummin explains Seldon about new facilities: "the taxi is computerized and the computer can overrule me without any trouble". In one more incident, Gaal dornik is astonished to see the highways of Trantor and he says "the vastness contracted and the people became ants in random distribution". Asimov's extrapolation skills reach its zenith in the phase of transportation. Perhaps, the greatest achievement of Asimov's prediction is computer assisted driver free cars. In further future, it may eliminate human errors in motoring and will lead to a crash-free smooth transportation.

Subway systems and high speed trains are seen as fast and efficient people movers in science fiction. Reynolds' train travels at about 800 kilometers an hour although one character remarks: "... we don't make a fetish of speed" (118).

Advances in communication technologies and systems are one of the most surely realizable promises of the future and one which will most surely affect changes in the lifestyles of the people of the future. Many marvels are already in existence, if not yet marketed in large scale. Picture phones, voice dialers, sentinel phones that monitor homes for intruders, phoned financial transactions, portable communicators, and worldwide satellite broadcasters, three dimensional projections, all are current developments that await market demand or some special need to bring into widespread need. The videophone or picture phone is one of the most prevalent devices in science fiction. Forster (1963) envisioned a society whose only intercourse was through the communications:

The clumsy system of public gatherings had long since been abandoned; neither Vashti nor her audience stirred from their rooms. Seated in her arm-chair she spoke, while they in their arm-chairs head her, fairly well, and saw her, fairly well. (88)

Besides creating a society unpracticed in direct communication or experience, Frayn points out other dangers of such a system – its stagnating effect:

The communications system of the inside world will be highly selective. One will the whole see only people one intends to see,

and since one can scarcely intend to see people of those existence one is unaware, one will in effect on is unaware, one will in effect see only people one knows already(35).

Numerous and various technological advances are described in future fiction. Lasers and masers, being relatively new and unexpected scientific breakthroughs appears only in fairly recent science fiction by that nomenclature. The ray gun, of course, is science fiction's forecast of the laser. Lasers are generally used in future fiction essentially as ray guns with a few applications in the roles generally anticipated for lasers and masers. Microminiaturized technology and molecular engineering in which devices are reduced in size is facet of technology that offers a promising future, but little explicit interest was found in this field in the sample except as parts of computers or other machines

Though science fiction has been, more often than not a failure in prophesying the events of future, it has a very decisive role in various aspects of human life; Making people aware of the rapidly changing science field; educating readers through fictional scientificity, and thereby inculcating in them an urge for scientific awareness; and moreover warning of the possible consequences of the existing social, cultural, political, religious and scientific status. Besides, science fiction helps the subject readers widen their outlook and imagination in which can be forecast the probable social and physical calamities or drastic changes that are always witnessed in history.

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