

# Dystopian Future in Contemporary Science Fiction

Prof. Chintan Ambalal Mahida

Assistant Professor in English

Department of English,

Dr.Jivraj Mehta Institute of Technology, Mogar- 388340.

Dist- Anand, Gujarat.

## Abstract :

A sheer balance between fact and fiction on the grounds of science and technology paves the way towards imaginative faculties of human mind. A science fiction is a fine web, interwoven in a manner so that it can entertain at one end and can arouse one's creative imagination at the other. In the twentieth century, Science has entered in general fiction and drama in a variety of ways. Writers like Mary Shelly, H.G.Wells, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein are the pioneers of sci-fi writing. Science fiction is generally a story of future societies in which the impact of science and technology on mankind is a major theme of it. "Utopia" and "Dystopia" are two imaginary worlds which have been added in science fiction as an instrument of great philosophic and social significance. Dystopia in Science fiction presents a negative view of the future of society and humankind. Utopian works typically sketch a future in which technology improves the everyday life of human beings and advances civilization, while dystopian works offer an opposite view. This paper tries to analyze dystopian elements in contemporary sci-fi texts. For that purpose, I have taken some notable dystopian novels such as Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, George Orwell's 1984, Zamayatin's We and Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451. Among all these novels, Brave New World represents ideal example of dystopian world.

## Introduction :

Modern developments in science and technology have changed man's environment and way of life, his conception of the universe and his place in it. This scientific revolution is the most significant change in man's fortune since the birth of Christ. Now science is both a search for truth and also a means of promoting human happiness. It must therefore be considered not merely as a technique, but also as an instrument of great philosophic and social significance. Literature is essentially an interpretation of life, and literary form a technique for its expression. In our century, it must concern itself with science and technology because our lives are now bound up with developments in this field. There have been many writers who have seen in science a legitimate subject for imaginative composition and in literature a means for the interpretation of science in terms of human life.

In the twentieth century, Science has entered in general fiction and drama in a variety of ways. Two specific forms which are based on imaginative treatment of science are 'science fiction' and 'scientific utopias' which become anti-utopias for those writers who believe that science is more likely to be used for evil than for good. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is the earliest example of science fiction. Mrs. Shelley's example was followed and extended by writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, and Nathaniel Hawthorne and, at the turn of the century, H.G.Wells, who is perhaps the great exponent of this type of writing. In the twentieth century this form has become extremely popular. These writers compel

us to think about the moral aspects of man's use of scientific invention. Science fiction has developed and bloomed in the 20th century, as the deep penetration of science and inventions into society created an interest in literature that explored technology's influence on people and society.

A sheer balance between fact and fiction on the grounds of science and technology paves the way towards imaginative faculties of human mind. A science fiction is a fine fabric of a number of elements together interwoven in a manner so that it can entertain at one end and can arouse one's creative imagination at the other. At the same time, it can inform you with an analytical and rational approach and also enable you to foresee the futuristic perspectives. Science Fiction is abbreviated "SF" or "sci-fi", with varying punctuation and capitalization. According to Brain Stableford, "Science fiction as a term is first coined by the Scottish poet William Wilson in A Little Earnest Book upon a Great Old Subject (1851), in response to his reading of Robert Hunt's The Poetry of Science (1848). Wilson wanted to provide a manifesto for a kind of fiction that would dramatise discoveries in science, celebrating the insight.

In general, science fiction is considered to be a genre that explores the question "what if?" It continually investigates moral, philosophical and technological possibilities by creating new and exciting realities. Science fiction is generally considered to attempt an extrapolation into the future of known concepts of science and technology. **Gernsback defines science fiction story as 'a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision.'** (editorial, *Amazing Stories*, 1926) **Science fiction author, Theodore Sturgeon defines science fiction as a story about human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution. Tom Shippey considers Science fiction as 'a high information literature.'** Science fiction has often been concerned with the great hopes people place in science but also with their fear concerning the negative side of technological development. Much science fiction attempts to generate a sense of wonder, or awe, from the setting, circumstances, or ideas presented. Steven Spielberg made sci-fi dystopian movies like "Minority Report" and "Artificial Intelligence" which depicts world ruled by science and technology. Apart from these, many Hollywood film makers have created sci-fi movies where they have depicted strange world which can be categorized as "Utopia" or "Dystopia".

## Utopian Literature vs Dystopian Literature :

Utopia is an ideal community or society possessing a perfect socio-politico-legal system. Utopia can be defined as an ideal or perfect place or state, or any visionary system of political or social perfection. In literature, it refers to a detailed description of a nation or commonwealth ordered according to a system which the author proposes as a better way of life. The word itself was coined by Sir Thomas More in his 1516 book of the same name, (his imaginary perfect island was called Utopia). The roots of the word are from the

Greek "ou" (not) and "topos" (place), thus meaning "no place" or "nowhere", although there are also overtones of "good place" from the homonymous Greek prefix eu meaning "good". Utopian Literature is defined and named after Thomas More's 1516 work *Utopia*. Since then, works such as the preface of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, *Looking Backward*, *News From Nowhere* and *Shangri-La* have followed in describing the perfect place. The perfect place was always slanted to the author's political philosophy. Robert Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* is a libertarian utopia, while William Morris' *News From Nowhere* is a socialist utopia. Utopian ideas also find their place in politics, when people running for office offer optimistic scenarios of what would happen if their ideas were put into place. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948), Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence* (1948), Robert Graves's *Seven Days in New Crete* (1949), Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953), William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) are the finest examples of utopian literature.

Dystopian literature, by contrast, is much more powerful and is taken much more seriously. The term "dystopia" was first used in the late 19th century, though not in its modern form. The first authors to approach literature with a completely pessimistic outlook for the future were called "Cataclysmic" writers. They shared a common fear or distaste for the rapid pace of change, and as a result became defensive against their modern society. Much of their literature contained visions of the apocalyptic end of the world at the hands of men with technology. The world could not get better, they reasoned, only worse. Their work has a distinctly pessimistic tone, which embodied all of the bitterness felt by those left behind by society's rapid pace. Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depict dystopias. Not only are these books read widely in high school classes but many modern day concepts have come from their frightening depictions. The critic Bernard Richards once said 'dystopias are useful; they warn us about what might happen'. This seems fair enough; you can finish a copy of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and breathe a sigh of relief, safe in the knowledge that you don't live in the repressive state of Gilead in which the sole functions of women are as sex-objects and baby-machines. Even if you happen to be a man. If we take this view, the dystopian novel is a comforter to the human psyche; we like to read about death and corruption, as long as we know that it can't happen to us.

#### **Dystopian Future in Contemporary Science Fiction :**

Dystopian literature has been characterized as fiction that presents a negative view of the future of society and humankind. Utopian works typically sketch a future in which technology improves the everyday life of human beings and advances civilization, while dystopian works offer an opposite view. Some common themes found in dystopian fiction include mastery of nature—to the point that it becomes barren, or turns against humankind; technological advances that enslave humans or regiment their lives; the mandatory division of people in society into castes or groups with specialized functions; and a collective loss of memory and history making mankind easier to manipulate psychologically and ultimately leading to dehumanization. Critics have argued that several of the extreme historical circumstances that took place during the twentieth century have been conducive to the flourishing of dystopian fiction. Such critics have noted that some of the finest dystopian works were produced during the Nazi era in Germany, during

the Stalin era in Russia, in response to various wars over the decades, and as a commentary upon various totalitarian regimes. Discussions regarding personal freedom, the role of free will, the value of individual resistance to dictatorships, and the power of technology to transform people's lives are also typical characteristics of dystopian fiction. The characteristic elements of this kind of literature are:

- (1) A hierarchical society where divisions between the upper, middle and lower classes are definitive and unbreakable (Caste system).
- (2) The propaganda and the educational system have the purpose of preserving the Caste system
- (3) The cancellation of individuality
- (4) The presence of symbols presented as commandments of a religious faith, that at the same time summarize and hide the aims of the state
- (5) The constant surveillance by state police agencies
- (6) Back story of a disaster that justifies the dramatic social changes
- (7) A protagonist that doubts of the society
- (8) More advanced technologies.

Scholars consider Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, H. G. Wells, and Yevgeny Zamyatin as four of the most important classic authors in the dystopian genre. Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1904), and Zamyatin's *We* (1924) are regarded as some of the major canon works of twentieth-century dystopian literature. Critics have repeatedly noted the influence of these works on the writing of modern dystopian authors, including Margaret Atwood, Chinua Achebe, Anthony Burgess, Ursula K. Le Guin, Isaac Asimov, Kurt Vonnegut, and Ray Bradbury, among numerous others.

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) depicts famous and widely known dystopia, based on biotechnological developments. Huxley has also written a utopian novel, *Island* (1962), published about 30 years after *Brave New World*. Whereas *Brave New World* portrays a world in which humans have become less-than-human because of biotechnological and socio-scientific techniques, *Island* sketches an idyllic community in which scientific knowledge is used for the enhancement of the quality of human lives. *Brave New World* (1932) is set in a future world in the year 632 After Ford. In *Brave New World*, people are not naturally born and nourished the way we are used to: they are created with the help of cloning and consequently grow up in bottles in the so-called Hatchery. Here, they are bred and conditioned, designed for the tasks which can fulfill in society's goals. This society is divided in castes, from Epsilon semi-morons to Deltas, Gammas, Betas, Alphas. The Deltas and Epsilons are designed for mean labour; they are not very bright but physically strong and resistant to pollution and monotonous work. Others are more intelligent and designed for white-collar work. Arguably the most important character in *Brave New World* is the Savage, a 'natural born', who has grown up in a Reservation between ancient Indian tribes under very harsh and primitive conditions. Genetic engineering is a term that has come into use in recent years as scientists have learned to manipulate RNA and DNA, the proteins in every cell that determine the basic inherited characteristics of life. Huxley didn't use the phrase but he describes genetic engineering when he explains how his new world breeds prescribed numbers of humans artificially for specified qualities.

Brave New World is a warning of the dangers of new and powerful technologies. One major theme of Brave New World is the rigid control of reproduction through technological and medical intervention, including the surgical removal of ovaries, the Bokanovsky Process, and hypnopaedic conditioning. Another is the creation of complicated entertainment machines that generate both harmless leisure and the high levels of consumption and production that are the basis of the World State's stability. Soma is a third example of the kind of medical, biological, and psychological technologies that Brave New World criticizes most sharply. It is important to recognize the distinction between science and technology. Whereas the State talks about progress and science, what it really means is the bettering of technology, not increased scientific exploration and experimentation. The state uses science as a means to build technology that can create a seamless, happy, superficial world through things such as the "feelies." The state censors and limits science, however, since it sees the fundamental basis behind science, the search for truth, as threatening to the State's control. The State's focus on happiness and stability means that it uses the results of scientific research, inasmuch as they contribute to technologies of control, but does not support science itself. Because this is a Dystopian novel of ideas, few of the characters are three-dimensional people who come alive on the page. Most exist to voice ideas in words or to embody them in their behavior. John, Bernard, Helmholtz, and the Controller express ideas through real personalities

The World in Zamyatin's dystopian novel, *We* is not different from Huxley's *Dystopian World*. *We* depicts a society where everyone is assigned a number instead of a name, lives in a city entirely made of glass and cut off from nature, and maintains a their daily routine according to mathematical equations. The protagonist, D-503, falls in love with I-330 and begins to lose faith in a society. *We* is an exploration of the individual vs. the social order, a celebration of the importance of imagination, and ultimately, a warning regarding the dehumanizing consequences of imagination's destruction. Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* is about a fireman whose only job is to burn books, in a hedonistic future America devoid of critical thinking or literature. The main character, Guy Montag, falls in love with a societal outcast and begins to question his societies values, eventually leading him to steal and hide books. George Orwell's *1984* describes his prophetic vision of the future in relentless detail. Dystopian world of 1984 depicts a bleak future (now past) England where all power is in the hands of the shadowy figure of Big Brother, and all citizens are watched constantly by the television screens in their homes. The main character, Winston Smith, is an employees of the Ministry of Truth, whose job is to distribute all information as well as tracking down and destroying references to events or people who have fallen afoul of the party apparatus. Winston falls in love with a fellow worker, Julia, entering into a forbidden relationship and eventually falling afoul of the state apparatus. *1984* is about life in a world where no personal freedoms exist.

#### Conclusions :

Grace Palley said, "All fiction is a lie, but at the heart of that lie is a truth." This quote directly applies to any Science fiction. Science Fiction deals with events that did happen, may have happened, or have not yet happened to a certain degree. Science fiction is an incubator for imaginative minds to create visions that help us to glimpse not only the future, but also something about ourselves in the

present. Science fiction is generally about future technology and its effects on mankind.

The term "utopia" originated in the early 1500s as an idea created by Sir Thomas More and refers to a society where perfection and stability have been attained. The 'anti-utopias' or 'dystopias' take place in societies where the people live in constant fear and control of their governing body, live meaningless lives and have very little hope for any amount of change to take place. While dystopian literature really didn't come into the mainstream until the 20th century, the 19th also held a few stories of significant importance to the emergence of the genre. Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1904), and Zamyatin's *We* (1924) are regarded as some of the major canon works of twentieth-century dystopian literature. Dystopian literature is a potent vehicle for criticizing existing social conditions and political systems. The lessons learned from dystopian science fiction books are not specifically meant to instill fear, instead they are mainly geared to enlighten and perhaps jolt readers into action. Hopefully, one will take away from these sci-fi books a desire to pay closer attention to the often overlooked, but greatly important issues of the day; this is the common thread of all dystopian fiction.

#### References

- (1)Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York : HarperCollins, 2010.
- (2)Eastwood,W, ed. *Science and Literature : The Literary Relations of Science and Technology An Anthology*. London : Macmillan and Co. Ltd,1957.
- (3)Scholes, Robert and Eric S. Rabkin. *Science fiction : History,Science,Vision*. London : Oxford University Press, 1977.
- (4)Shippey,Tom, ed. *Fictional Space : Essays on Contemporary Science fictions*. England: Basil Blackwell,1991.
- (5)Stableford ,Brian. *Science fact and fiction An Encyclopedia*. New York : Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2006.
- (6)Wynne, Marion ,ed. *Bloomsbury Guide to English Literature*. London : Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd.,1989
- (7)Greenblatt, Stephen. (2004) *Will in the World*. W.W. Norton and Company, New York, London.