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TOWARDS A GENDERLESS SOCIETY

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The question of gender, gender identities and gender roles has always been of interest to the artists, anthropologists and sociologists. The oft discoursed subject is the gender binary- the Masculine and the Feminine. This paper seeks to hypothesize how the fast development of science and technology would serve to remove all gendered differences and would go to the extent of creating a society where gender would become obsolete.

Postgenderism is a theory which extrapolates that technology will erode the biological, psychological and social role of gender future where bodies and personalities will no longer be constrained and circumscribed by gendered traits. The dyadic gender roles and sexual dimorphisms which hitherto are detrimental to the progress of individuals and society will cease to exist with the application of neuro-technology, biotechnology and other reproductive technologies.

The gender binary has shaped the human condition causing us to see the world through basic binary categories- right from metaphysics to our linguistics. Biological gender dimorphism proved to be the most basic power dynamic in society allowing men to coerce women with their stronger bodies and dominance driven behavior.

Today, with the emergent human potentials and Enlightenment, the gender binary concept seems out of place. Transgenderism, Queer theory, LGBT Rights, Alternative sexualities and their rights have all been included in the mainstream society. The heritage of patriarchal power, culture and thought has been slowly dismantled and steadily the concept of sex and gender is undergoing a radical change. With Law and the Forces like the Police the determinative power of male physical coercion has reduced. Post industrial production, contraception and abortion have eliminated most of the rationale for gendered social roles in work and the family, thus liberating women. This decline of the patriarchy and dyadic gender is advantageous for men as well as women. It is said that gendered brains and social roles have led men to have shorter life expectancies. Men are thus prone to take greater health risks, to die in combat and work in dangerous occupations. It is seen that men are likely to have more accidents than females across their entire lifespan; for every girl that is injured on a playground, four boys are likewise injured.

Postgenderism confronts the limits of a social constructionist account of gender and sexuality and proposes that the transcending of gender by social and political means can be completed and complemented by technological means. Gendered occupational achievement is a case in point. Patriarchal culture contributes to differences in boys' and girls' educational access, career aspirations, wage and social status advantage that men enjoy in employment. The gendered occupational stratification is also the inevitable result of the greater burden of childbearing on women, who are impaired in the workforce by pregnancy, childbirth and child care. However the technological progress is ameliorating these gender differences, by blurring and erosion of biological sex. The emerging technologies will enable individuals to access all human potentials and experiences regardless of their sex or gender.

The Antecedents of the Postgender Theory

The Feminists dominant position on nature-nurture was “social constructionism”. Patriarchal attitudes and behaviors, gendered differences in abilities and interests and sexual preferences were all the result of culturally specific patriarchal and heterosexist socialization. Since the 1970s the influence of genetics, hormones and a biologically gendered brain on gendered beliefs and behavior has been increasingly acknowledged. The 1980s saw the emergence of eco feminism which took a 180 degree turn from radical social constructionism to biological gender essentialism- an acknowledgement of the inescapability of a biological basis for sex, gender and sexual preference. The eco feminists thus celebrated the gender binary. Thus in the eco feminist narrative women’s role in reproduction made them more nurturant, while the male brain just wanted violence and destruction. In reaction to eco feminism, Donna Haraway, a postgender theorist emerged in 1984 with the argument that technological transgression would liberate both men and women from the gender binary. She argued that in the eroding boundary between human beings and machines, in the integration of women and machines into a new liberatory androgynous archetype

Gender nonconformists and hermaphrodites, roles and images have shaped our cultural trajectory toward a post gender future. Androgynous, cross-dressing, castrated and homosexual people have had socially sanctioned roles all over the world as the ‘third sex’. Transgenderism /Transgender Identity is a relative new branch of feminist theory. Transgender theory is a unique experiences of transgenders. Transgenderism challenged the radical concept that examines the essential nature of biology and gender as well as the social construction of sexuality and culture. It also challenged the fundamental aspects of gender and shifts the basic paradigm of the world as a place occupied by two genders to a concept of gender identities as potentially fluid. The concept of the ‘other’ or the ‘third gender’ has been accepted all over the world, though it should be noted that the acceptance is in various degrees in different parts of the world.

The androgynous had the highest self-esteem, psychological well-being and emotional intelligence. The inner spiritual being had both male and female attributes, or was androgynous and becoming androgynous was spiritually superior to ordinary gendered life. The stage was thus set for the a post genderist movement. The medicalization of gender variance legitimated sex re-assignment but was very expensive and it imposed rigid expectations on the transgendered. The transitioning of the transgendered into one of the gender binary was soon to break down. The “gender queer” politics emerged which changed all gender binaries.

The beginning of the 21st Century saw post humanist and trans humanist discourses about using the technologies to transcend the limitations of the human body and addressed the transcending of gender. The trans humans were thus able to transcend the limitations of biological sex, and assumed cybernetic or virtual forms.

The role of machinery and technology in facilitating a Post-Gender Society is another important milestone. It should be recalled how industrialization made class and gender egalitarianism more possible. The intergration of women into the industrial jobs during the World War II demonstrated women’s equal capacity in performing the jobs which hitherto were done by the men. Now with the emergence of biotechnology, genetic engineering and cyberspace the concept of post gendered society is getting more and more concrete.

A very significant technology that will erode the gender binary is the virtualization of sex. Electronically mediated sex and porn, phone sex, video interactive sex, sex in virtual worlds, the use of sex toys and teledildonics is designed to suit the individual wants. The growing sophistication of robotics to detect human emotion, anticipate human desires and simulate human response is another mode of virtualization of sex. Therapies will address the gendering of the brain by the use of neurochemicals. Sexual desire in men and women can be controlled and stimulated by the use of drugs. Assisted pregnancy, contraception, surrogacy are other means by which the gender binary is shaken up. The concept of a genderless society seems to be very utopian in nature. Literature has very variedly drawn up such themes and characters. Though these science fiction has an overdose of the fantasy, the depiction of such characters and plots that tell of a post gendered society has had a very good reception.

Examples of science fiction that tell the story of a ‘genderless’ people are many. To cite a few; Joan Scionczewski’s A Door into Ocean tells the story of a humanoid race that has only one sex. The Left Hand of

Darkness (1969) by Ursula K Le Guin tells the story of Gently Ai, a native of Terra, who is sent to the planet Gethen to join Ekumen. But the Gethenians are androgynous in nature, neither male nor female but capable of being both and neither. Ai himself shifts from the male to the androgynous over the course of the novel. A prominent theme in the novel is social relations where gender is irrelevant.

Films which are necessarily extended literature, too, has tried with portraying stories that tell of creatures that cannot be called 'male' or 'female' or even human. Steven Spielberg's *Extra Terrestrial* (1982) tells the story of an alien that is left behind on Earth and is saved by young Elliot who decides to keep him hidden. While the task force hunts for it, Elliot and his siblings form an emotional bond with their new friend. Spielberg in fact experimented with such weird but interesting characters in almost all his films and these were very well received.

The Movie *Splice* (2009) Directed by Vincenzo Natali tells the story of a couple who attempt to introduce human DNA into their work of splicing animal genes.

The crux of post gender theory is that gender is an arbitrary and unnecessary limitation on human potential, and through the application of neurotechnology, biotechnology and reproductive technologies, the biological and psychological gendering would be eliminated. Greater biological fluidity and psychological androgyny will permit future persons to explore varied aspects of the Male and the Female. Thus bodies and personalities in the post gender future no longer be constrained and circumscribed by gendered traits, but enriched by their use in the palette of diverse self expression.

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