

CONSEQUENCES OF TECHNOLOGY IN RAY BRADBURY'S *THE FLYING MACHINE*

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Abstract:

The recent technological advancement leads human life into a new dimension of living. The aid of technology and science made irresistible outcome that create an impact in the life style of human beings. Though this new combination of technology and human create much beautiful platform for the future of man's life, it is essential to enquire the consequences it will create in the future, if one fails to keep the virtue. It is not enough to increase the number of inventions, but it is important for humans to be responsible for what they have created. Ray Bradbury's one of the best short stories *The Flying Machine*, depicts the story of a man who invents flying machine for humans to make life better. This story is a good example which depicts the consequences of technology and how it is crucial to be responsible for the invention one made. This paper gives an insight on how a combination of innocent invention and the knowledge of evil could distort human destiny.

Key Words: Technological advancement, Transhumanism, Artificial Intelligence, Fear of destruction

Every age of human comes over drastic developments in the evolution of human. Once human invents fire, then the life style of the human itself changes. Such kind of change happens in each generation at certain period. The most recent development which creates a tremendous change in the life of human beings is technology. Every invention that arrives in this world comes with the motive to aid human life. Likewise, technology is the recent invention which helps the life of human mentally as well as physically for their betterment. Marshal McLuhan in his *The Medium is the Massage*, emphasises that "All media are extensions of some human faculty- psychic or physical. The wheel ...is an extension of the foot. The book is an extension of the eye. Clothing, an extension of the skin..." (26-39).

This technological advancement creates a new rhythm in human life and that rhythm shapes peoples' life to a next level. The aim of technology is to make the human life better by upgrading the existed state. It is impossible for human to move one hundred kilo meters per hour, but it is

possible through the help of car. This upgradation of human with the aid of technology leads to a new era of human life. At the same time when this life becomes prominent, it leads to reanalyse the definition of the existence of human in this modern world. It is important to note that the experience human gains from an action and the perception he gets through those interactions with several living organisms and environment can influence human life. Thus “What is natural to the human is, therefore, the product of natureculture in which materials (bodies, both human and non-human), immaterial (information, data, memories) and the hybrid dynamics – flows, processes – linking these constitute the human even as the human is an instantiation of this hybridization” (Nayar 21).

To explore this idea it is essential to see Ray Bradbury's short story *The Flying Machine* which is published in 1953. Ray Bradbury is a versatile writer whose works always bring the most sensational ideas that renovating the world. In *The Flying Machine*, he explores how human's desire to upgrade themselves brings the chance of creating a disaster. The story is set in 400 A.D, China where an unnamed man creates wings for human to fly in the sky. This denotes the desire of human to make his life better and even more beautiful. This is clearly visible in the words of the creator of flying machine who says “I gather my courage, Excellency, and leaped from the cliff. I flew! (168). Here this leap represents the advancement of human life with the help of technology which brings lot of new beautiful path to human life. This process is considered as transhumanism. Transhumanists sees that human body has limitations. It can be perfect by the help of technology. Pramod Nayar illustrates the idea of Nick Bostrom about transhumanism by stating “It [transhumanism] holds that current human nature is improvable through the use of applied science and other rational methods, which may make it possible to increase human health-span, extend our intellectual and physical capacities, and give us increased control over our own mental states and moods” (16-17).

When the emperor Yuvan who had seen this invention, agrees the beauty of this invention, but at the same time he sees the beauty that already exists in this world. When Yuvan's servant tells him to look up on the sky to see the flying machine, he sees not only the man with the flying machine, but a beautiful mountains and land with natural resources that is surrounded by the Great Wall of China. When the Emperor sees the flying man in the sky,

The Emperor did not move. Instead he looked at the Great Wall of China now taking shape out of the farthest mist in the green hills, that splendid snake of stones which writhed with majesty across the entire land. That wonderful wall which had protected them for a timeless time from enemy hordes and preserved peace for years without number. He saw the town, nestled to itself by a river and a road and a hill, beginning to waken. (Bradbury 168)

Suddenly the Emperor orders to destroy the machine and kill the inventor. It astonishes the flyer. When he asks for the reason, the Emperor shows a machine created by him which turns into a beautiful miniature metal garden where trees and birds becomes a part like how it is in the real

world. The flyer claims that he also invents such kind of beauty with his invention. He describes how it would be when he sees everything from the top of the sky. He says,

I have found beauty. I have flown on the morning wind. I have looked down on all the sleeping houses and gardens. I have smelled the sea and even seen it, beyond the hills, from my high place. And I have soared like a bird; oh I cannot say how beautiful it is up there, in the sky, with the wind about me, the wind blowing me here like a feather, there like a fan, the way the sky smells in the morning! And how free one feels! That is beautiful, Emperor, that is beautiful, too! (169)

The answer which is given by the Emperor is somewhat interesting and thought provoking. Emperor exclaims “when one must lose a little beauty if one is to keep what little beauty one already has. (169). He further states that he does not afraid of the flyer but afraid of another man who can build a flying machine as same as this man but with much more evil in heart, can drop a huge disastrous stone on the top of the Great Wall of China. Then the entire beauty that exists now will be demolished. He emphasises, “Some other man who, seeing you, will build a thing of bright papers and bamboo like this. But the other man will have an evil face and an evil heart, and the beauty will be gone. It is this man I fear.” (169). Such kind of destruction will not be rectified easily.

What the Emperor afraid in the short story has happened after the advancement of technology in 20th century. The most relevant example is the aircraft launches two destructive atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War. Research finds that the impact of those bomb blasts lasts till and it leads to the growth of several biological illnesses in the people. Though humans have the wisdom to invent such advanced scientific aids they sometimes fail to project the limitations and their responsibility to set ethical boundaries for the usage of technology. In *Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* Masao Tomonaga illustrates the visit of Barrack Obama to Japan in 2016 at Peace Memorial Park where the president of America addresses the people of Japan for the first time after the bomb blast. In his speech “Obama asserted that the human wisdom of science had created the nuclear bombs, but humanity had not yet succeeded in creating the ethical wisdom to abandon nuclear weapons.”

In the end of the story, the Emperor orders to destroy the flying machine and kills the inventor. This decision may seem harsh, but the Emperor justifies his action by saying “What is the life of one man against those of a million others? I must take solace from that thought.” (Bradbury 170). This action can be seen in different way. Though the king stops the process of this new advanced life, it seems temporary because today’s world is the example of the new techno world. Technological advancement in this world has surpassed the condition what is seen in the short story.

The advancement of technology becomes an irresistible form of modern living. It is unreal to claim that technology should be eradicated. It is witnessed that many advancement in technology

pushes the leap of human development to the next level. It becomes a part of human living system and gives many benefits to the human life. At the same time the action of the emperor denotes that an invention should not be taken for granted without understanding the consequences and not simply because it provides a better life.

Artificial intelligence is the recent invention which plays tremendous role in the digital world. Many fields like digital marketing, mobiles, software applications, business, and motor fields include artificial intelligence as a key feature of their performance. Inventors bring artificial intelligence to the lime light of the society in order to aid human and make the living condition better. At the same time it has the probability to create more danger in future. Yuval Noah Harari, an Isreal writer and historian states that data is the powerful source, which many corporations as well as government seeks to obtain. He fears that this may lead to digital dictatorship. In *The Hindu Business Line* he states, "All of these sophisticated technologies like AI & ML are produced in a few countries and can be used to exploit the rest of the world. It's a big challenge for countries all over the world – how to prevent both these dangers. Don't concentrate too much digital dictatorship. Also, don't allow too much data to be concentrated outside to become data colony."

In this short story, the Emperor represents the power of the country. Though the inventors explore many inventions in order to uplift the human conditions, it has to be seen in every aspect not only as the betterment of the present state but also to sustain peace for the future world.

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