

ANTHROPOLOGICAL SPECULATIONS IN R. J. SAWYER'S *QUINTAGLIO ASCENSION TRILOGY*

*Dr. Salama Isak Maner **

Abstract :

Science Fiction is a significant sub genre of the popular literature. It expresses the realistic speculation about possible future which is based on thorough knowledge of the real world. The present paper focuses on the new world created by R. J. Sawyer in his *Quintaglio Ascension Trilogy* is based on the real anthropological theories. The present paper divided into three parts. The first part deals with the theory of anthropology. The second part analyses the story and third part concludes with successful attempt of the writer to parallel universe as a 'critical utopia'.

Keywords: Anthropology, Parallel Universe, Science Fiction, Critical Utopia, Realistic Speculation

Introduction :

Science Fiction as a significant sub genre of the popular literature uses the scientific theories in the literary imagination in order to create a possible new world. Imagination in Science Fiction has objectivity and logicity with certain limits. However, the writer enjoys the liberty and uses his own new probable scientific, social and cultural theories while creating the new world. The present paper intends to investigate the entanglements between the scientific theories of anthropology and parallel universe of R. J. Sawyer with special reference to *Quintaglio Ascension Trilogy*.

Science Fiction deals with the realistic speculation about possible future

in scientific way which is based on the thorough knowledge of the real world. Eugene Thacker defines Science Fiction and to highlight the techniques of writing Science Fiction in his article, 'The Science Fiction of Techno-Science: The Politics of Simulation and a Challenge for New Media Art' (2001),

Science Fiction names a contemporary mode in which the techniques of extrapolation and speculation are utilized in a narrative form, to construct near-future, far-future or fantastic worlds in which science, technology and society intersect (Thacker 156).

He concentrates more on the techniques of 'extrapolation' and

* Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vivekanand College, Kolhapur (Autonomous)

‘speculation’ to create the settings like near future, far future and a fantastic world.

Science Fiction is deeply rooted in the futuristic thinking. The writer uses realistic speculation to create a futuristic new world with innovative planet, environment, territory, creatures, socio-political structure along with religion, culture, scientific outlook and technological advancement. The new world created by R. J. Sawyer is based on the real anthropological theories.

Anthropology and Social Fiction :

The eminent anthropologist, Leon E. Stover explains Science Fiction’s relationship to anthropology in his article ‘Anthropology and Science Fiction (1973), “Anthropological science fiction enjoys philosophical luxury of providing answers to the question ‘What is Man?’ while anthropology the science is still learning how to frame it.” (Stover 472)

Anthropology deals with the inquiries of social sciences, natural sciences and humanities. *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary New 7th Edition* defines anthropology as, “the study of the human race especially of its origins, development, customs and beliefs” (Hornby 55). The term anthropology originally belongs to the ancient Greek language which is related to the man and discourse. It deals with the behaviour of the people, their traits, differences and

variations between groups of people and the ancestors of the human. Generally, there are four fields of anthropology as cultural anthropology, social anthropology, archeology and biology or physical anthropology. It also studies social and cultural values, differences, origins and roots etc.

Scholars of anthropology and sociology like Gerhard Lenski, Patric Noland and Jean Lenski have contributed to sociology of religion, societal inequality and evolutionary theory in their book *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology* (1970). They define the human society, “human societies are autonomous groups – groups that are not subject to the political authority or control of any larger, more inclusive group. In short, human society is a politically autonomous group of people that engage in a broad range of co-operative activities” (Lenski *et. al.* 9).

Anthropologists classify different societies on the basis of collecting their livelihoods and its distribution among them. They place societies in three broad categories: Pre Industrial, Industrial and Post Industrial.

Lenski mentions the three stages of Pre Industrial society such as ‘Hunter gatherer societies’, ‘Horticultural Societies’ and ‘Agrarian Societies’. The members of hunter gatherer society are mainly

involved in collecting the edible wild plants and hunting the wild animals as their basic food. These are nomadic tribes always moving from one place to another for food collection. Generally, all the members of these tribes have equal status and the leader only performs his role in special events. Family is the main social unit which is formed by marriage. These families' carryout social functions like reproduction and education.

The hunter gatherer societies are quite small the number of members ranges from minimum of 6 to 30, they are totally relied for food on hunting and gathering because the large number of members cannot be provided with sufficient food. The slow rate of growth of population is due to high infant mortality rate, nomadic lifestyle and insufficient food supply. The members of hunter gatherer society are tightly bonded with each other because kinship plays a vital role as organizing principle. Economy of this society is very simple because they cannot store food in large quantity and they have to rely on the fresh food. There is lack of technology. Hunting and protecting are the main occupations of male and gathering vegetables, nourishing the children and maintaining the households are the occupations of female.

As conscious human beings, the hunter gatherer has also tried to explain

the surrounding nature and the problems faced by them. They believe that the spirits inhabit in the nature like rocks, plants, lakes, clouds, other inanimate things, as well as animals therefore, their religion is known as 'animism'. These spirits constantly interfere in the life of the individual and the mass that sometimes help them and at other times disturbs also. Education in the hunter gatherer society is informal in which the children imitate the elders and they experiment the learned knowledge. Practical experimental knowledge is the base of education in this society in which father has the responsibility to prepare his son for hunting and protecting the self and community while mother has to train her daughter in the household works.

After accumulating substantial knowledge about hundreds of edible plants and the way of their growing, the hunter gatherer societies gradually shifted towards simple agriculture.

The new inventions had changed human society drastically. In this regards Lenski quote the famous philosopher Francis Bacon, "Three inventions had changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world – the mariner compass, the printing press and gun powder" (Lenski *et. al.* 240). With these explorations, Renaissance is recognized as the great age of explorations. It

outrightly changed the commerce, economy, culture and spirit of quest for knowledge and wealth.

The human society shifts from purely agrarian towards the industrial society which took about 200 years. The change takes place gradually from industrial society to post-industrial society it is data-transmission system powered by information technology.

Anthropological Speculations in R. J. Sawyer's *Quintaglio Ascension Trilogy*:

Anthropological developments are based on the empirical research and it has concrete evidences and shows certain chronological developmental stages. The Science Fiction of R. J. Sawyer does not show exact anthropological developmental stages as the future world created in his novels is the combination of realistic world and future possibilities. Hence, a development of the society projected in this trilogy is different than given in the anthropological theories. Present paper tries to focus only on the major developmental stages of society in anthropological references and puts forth the parallel model created by writer in his trilogy.

Robert James Sawyer is one of the Canada's most successful prolific Science Fiction writers who born in Ottawa,

Canada on April 29, 1960. He took bachelors degree in Applied Arts and Technology. He won all three of the top international awards for Science Fiction, Nebula Award for *Terminal Experiment* (1995), Hugo Award for *Hominids* (2003) and John Campbell Memorial Award for *Mindscan* (2006). He wrote 23 novels, 3 trilogies and 3 short stories. He delivered many lectures on science fiction writing.

Quintaglio Ascension Trilogy includes three novels such as *Far-Seer*, *Fossil Hunter* and *Foreigner* in which the action of the story starts in first novel and gradually develops in the next two novels to explain the Quintaglio world. It is the story of an innovative new world created by the writer out of his imagination. Quintaglios are the imaginary animals which are shown to be evolved from the tyrannosaurs by genetic conversion. They live on the moon-like planet which resemblance with earth by environment. Though Quintaglios are the savage animals having cruelty at the core; they are highly civilized, social and having scientific outlook. They have every essential traits of an ideal human society like social structure, religion, political set-up and culture.

The story of the Quintaglio world unfolds with the life story of the protagonist, Afsan. He is an ideal

Quintaglio living in the small village and selected as an assistant astrologer in the royal court and privileged for the holy pilgrimage to see the Face of God as it was compulsory for every adult Quintaglio. He belongs to the sect Lubalite, who are the great hunters and rationalist. His mentor, Tak-Saleed orders not to use 'Far-Seer', a telescope to observe the Face of God, a hypothetical truth. In spite of that Afsan uses the Far-Seer to discover the truth. Afsan persuaded the sailors on their pilgrimage to sail in the East to prove his hypothesis that the moon on which they live is round like a ball and the water which surrounds their territory is not the river but a vast lake in the historic voyage. He further tries to explain that their moon is spiraling towards the gas giant (Face of God) and in future it will doom because of the heavy gravitational force of the gas giant and cause the earthquakes, volcanoes and land sliding. It is experienced in the past with sufficient evidence of the frequent earthquakes. He tries to convey the truth to the emperor and the court and pleads that the future of Quintaglios is in danger and suggests that they should prefer to quit their moon in the near future. As the invented truth by Afsan is against the sacred scroll, he is declared as demon and made blind by the royal priest. However, the blind Afsan tries to spread the truth among the Lubalites

and gathered them to fight against the court and the emperor. In the bloody battle, the priest is killed and the defeated emperor is restored the throne by Lubalites. Afsan is appointed as the royal advisor. Wab-Novato, an inventor of Far-Seer and female partner of Afsan and their son Toroca, a geologist tries to save Quintaglio race by exodus.

Toroca's expedition to South Pole and the collection of different species proved very useful regarding his search of evolution theory. He found that the Wing fingers, the equatorial bird migrated to the South Pole before long past period. It went under biological change according to the needs of the divers and they turned from flying the air to swimming in the water. But he also noted that the process of natural selection cannot be applied to the development of amphibians from the fish. They find the great alien starship half buried under the rocks within which they found the mummified remains of an extraterrestrial and various creatures that are extinct. From the survey they come to know that the life began somewhere else and transformed on their moon. Using the information obtained from the study of the alien starship and the survey, they try to prepare their own starship.

Studies on the giant blue artifact had made it apparent that was an alien starship and that those being brought dinosaurs

and other creatures to this world from another, millions of years ago. It explained why species in the Quintaglios fossil record appear suddenly rather than gradually. Toroca said, "Evolution accounts for all the diversity of life. We used to think the Bookmark marked the point of creation but it does nothing of the kind. It merely marks the point of arrival. Life originated elsewhere, evolution elsewhere." (*Fossil Hunter* 299) He further noted that, "But in any event a huge time ago by our own standards although quite recently in terms of the overall age of this world our ancestors were – were – deposited were transplanted by those astonishing beings who built this ship." (*Fossil Hunter* 299)

The evolution theory used by the writer here may be based on the theory of Darwin. But the theory was not used as it is. It was altered. It was found by Toroca that the species developed gradually in some cases but the fossil record proves that the life began on their moon which was arrived from other alien planet sent by the aliens.

This paper discusses anthropological development of imagined world and also studies the race, its origin, development, customs and beliefs. It highlights the society with its element such as type, infrastructure, the institution and systems. Hence, it is quite logical to discuss the prerequisite of the new world such as territory, environment, origin of the race,

geological and geographical details of the society.

The idea of imagining a new world starts from imagining a planet which is the Quintaglio moon. It revolves around the Face of God, a gas giant planet and both of them revolve around the sun. Their territory is surrounded by water and the environment on their moon is like on earth where there are rivers, forest, creature, birds, the changing seasons, eight provinces and Capital with perfect map. Afsan, the protagonist describes his village:

The River was, Afsan reflected for the thousandth time, like no river he had ever seen inland, nothing like the Kreeb, upon whose north side his Pack of Carno roamed. The Kreeb, which formed part of the border between the provinces of Arj'toolar and Fra'toolar, was a meandering channel of water. But this river – the River – spread from horizon to horizon. That made sense: It had to be immense for Land to float upon it. (*Far-Seer* 21)

Quintaglios are the genetically transformed species from tyrannosaurs which are ancient habitants of planet, Crucible. The most civilized and technologically advanced race Jijaki, the resident of planet Crucible has spread different species all over the universe

sending the spacecrafts on the different planets where there is environment essential for life before 65 million years. Watcher, an imaginary supreme power explains the happening –

No, the dinosaurs I had favored most, partly because they'd already had a long and successful history as a group, were tyrannosaurs: large, slope-backed carnivores with great heads and giant teeth. Only one problem: for almost the entire lifetime of this group, their forelimbs had been diminishing until now they were withered and all but useless, with just two clawed fingers on the end of each hand. (*Fossil Hunter* 199)

As an individual, Quintaglios are the wild animals who are the natural hunters with powerful jaws and pointed nails. Basically, they reflect all the traits of tyrannosaurs with strong bodily features essential for the hunting race. They are not forest dwellers but living in civilized society and they are emotional, conscious, intellectual having social and cultural identity. They have their own country with specific geographical place and boundaries. The territory has a map and every social setup with eight provinces, a centralized administrative system governed by the emperor, a religion, a language, a social structure and socio-political and

individual issues. It is necessary to study their society with all its aspects in order to understand the imaginative creation of the writer because it is a full-fledged society with all its possible dimensions.

The Quintaglio society highlights anthropological development as it belongs to the pre-industrial social setup in food production. Though Quintaglios have the skill and capacity to hunt individually, every individual is not involved in hunting for personal need. They live in a civilized society where division of labor is in practice. As sufficient food is available in the nearby forest, they developed a civilized society with a deep structure and many social systems essential for such society. Quintaglios are shown as savage at core and have 'dagamant' means 'territorial bloodlust'. Toroca is only the exception who comments, "The veneer of civilization gone melted away under the fires of instinct. Claws would have propped from their sheaths vision clouded over rational thought drowned out by the range boiling up within-" (*Fossil Hunter* 19) Dagamant is the instinct of the hunting race, Quintaglio. In their world it is inevitable to ask permission to enter in other's territory each time. If someone crosses the boundary line, the other will attack to kill the first in which they never think of extremities. The only end of such fight is

the death of one among the two. Mokleb, the psychiatrist comments,

I suspect our suppressed memories of the culling manifest themselves most in the territorial challenge. When we end up in a fight with another, we don't behave sensibly or logically or instinctively. Instead, our minds, our traumatized minds, cause us to fight uncontrollably until we or our opponent is dead (*Foreigner* 233).

Alongwith these savage individual characteristics, they are civilized because they have language, social life, interpersonal relationships, administration and culture.

Quintaglios have the well developed and politically stable society. Though their social set-up is pre-industrial that is hunter gatherer, unlike it they have stable centralized political system. They have a defined state with a particular territory surrounded by sea and perfect map of the state with its boundaries, cities, ports, major provinces, capital, rivers, mountains and other such minute details. It is the state of eight provinces such as Jam'toolar, Fra'toolar, Arj'toolar, Chu'toolar, Mar'toolar, Kev'toolar, Edz'toolar and Capital on the sea shore. The eight provinces are governed by the governors, mostly related to the family of the emperor. These provinces are the parts

of the central power, the head of which is the emperor. Quintaglio state is named as empire and the empress Len-Lends rules the empire when the action starts in the novel. The administrative system is well defined where the emperor has the divine right to rule. The emperor can not apply his decisions without approval of royal religious priest as the religious power suppresses the administrative power. The renowned experts of all walks of life are appointed by the emperor as the courtiers to advice. The royal court and the emperor implement the law and order of the state. The state has a royal religion, Larks and the religious norms, sayings in the Holy Scripture and the doctrine are the final words for each and every citizen alongwith the emperor. The royal chief priest Det-Yenalb is the head of the religious authority.

Afsan discovers the scientific truth like Galileo, but finally, the royal priest using conspiracy proves Afsan as demon and gouge out his eyes by the divine dagger. Though, emperor Dybo understands that Afsan's pleading is true which he has experienced alongwith him at the time of pilgrimage. He is helpless before the religious power and blindly accepts the decision of the priest. When Afsan opens the truth of his invention in the court, he wants to suggest that Dybo, the emperor was also present at that time but Dybo keeps mum before the Master

of faith Yenalb. It is mentioned, "Afsan moved his head so that there could be no doubt in anyone's mind: He was looking directly at Dybo. "Don't you?" Dybo said nothing. Yenalb pointed at Afsan, "I say again, you are mistaken" (*Far-Seer* 249). This shows that the religious power dominates the administrative power in the empire of Quintaglio.

Conclusions:

The new world created in this trilogy is highly imaginative regarding the creatures, Quintaglio. The writer makes believe the readers that the savage and hunting animals can also live in the civilized society with rich culture and scientific outlook. It is the hunter-gatherer society with very simple economy, limited requirements, solo lifestyle but following the social discipline. Educationally, they are advanced because they have deep knowledge of Astrophysics, Physics, Chemistry, Medicine and Geology. Politically, they are well settled and abide by the rules and regulations of the administration. It is not perfect ideal society but have some social problems like power politics and intrigues which make the society realistic. The creation of the socio-political panorama of the Quintaglio world seems the successful efforts of the writer to create 'critical utopia' defined by Tom Moylan in his book *Demands and Impossible: Science Fiction and Utopian Imagination* (2014). Moylan, described the attempt, "It focuses on the continuing presence of difference and

imperfection within the utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternative" (Moylan 11).

References:

A) Primary Sources :

Fossil Hunter, New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1993. Print.

Foreigner, New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1994. Print.

Sawyer, R. J., *Far-seer*, New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1992. Print.

B) Secondary Sources :

Hornby, A. S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Sally Wehmeier 7th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print

Lenski, Gerhard., Patric Noland and Jean Lenski. *Human Society: An Introduction to Macro Sociology*. United State of America: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1970. Print.

Moylan, Tom. "Critical utopia" *Demands and Impossible: Science Fiction and Utopian Imagination* observes. Ed. Raffaella Baccolini. New York: Peter Lang, 2014. Print

Stover, Leon E. "Anthropology and Science Fiction" *Current Anthropology*. Vol. 14, No. 4, (Oct., 1973): 471-474. Print.

Thacker, Eugene. "The Science Fiction of Techno-Science: The Politics of Simulation and a Challenge for New Media Art." *Leonardo*. 34.2 (2001): 155-158. Print. "Science fiction." *Encyclopædia Britannica*: Sterling Bruce. 1st ed. 2008. Print.

