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## A BRIEF STUDY OF EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENCE FICTION

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### **Abstract:**

*Science fiction i.e. sci-fi is a popular trend of writing fiction based on speculative fiction. It consists of horror, supernatural, heroic stories and many other creations of imagination. It has paved the way to the speculative fiction which exists in the virtual world. Virtual reality is one of the important facets of science fiction. This paper throws light on the development and some of the important works and also the writers of science fiction.*

**Key words:** *Science fiction, Speculative fiction, Virtual world, Parallel universe, aliens etc.*

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### **Introduction**

Science fiction alternately called as sci-fi is a trend of writing fiction based on speculations. It presupposes “what if” thinking and takes us in the world of virtual reality. Virtual universe/ life is one of the important aspects of science fiction. Exact definition of science fiction is unavailable as there is no consensus among the scholars of the science fiction. But some of the experts have tried to define science fiction.

Isaac Asimov defines, “*Science fiction can be defined as that branch of literature which deals with the reaction of human beings to changes in science and technology.*”<sup>1</sup>

Robert A. Heinlein defines, “*It is a realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method.*”<sup>2</sup>

Above definitions relate science fiction with human reaction to the changes in science and technology. Science and technology are ever changing and the writers of science fiction get the novel ideas from it and write the speculative fiction. It also imagines the possible future events and it is also based on the solid knowledge of the happenings in the world. It has thorough understanding of the

nature and significance of scientific method.

Science fiction is broadly classified in to hard science fiction and soft science fiction. Stories based on physics, mathematic, astronomy and engineering are identified as hard science fiction and Botany, Zoology, Social Science and mycology constitute soft science fiction.

Regarding the origin, history and development of science fiction there are two schools of thoughts which differ tremendously from each other. The first school believes that the roots of science fiction can be found in the ancient Sumerian mythology (2150–2000 BCE). According to the second school, science fiction emerged in the 17th and early 19th centuries as this period witnessed scientific revolution and many scientific discoveries in astronomy, physics and mathematics.

Historically, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD) and *Beowulf* (8th–11th centuries AD) have the fantastical and science fiction elements in them. *Epic of Gilgamesh* is one more book in which science fiction elements are evident. *One Thousand and One Nights (Arabian Nights, 8th–10th century CE)* also carries the elements of science fiction. In Japan, “Urashima Tarō” is an early tale describing travelling forward in time in future. Moreover, during the 10th-century Japanese

narrative *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* is also considered proto-science fiction. In medieval Europe science fiction themes are found in chivalric romances where the hero of the story travels in time and performs so many impossible actions.

The nineteenth century witnessed a transition from the former traditions. In this period Mary Shelly is given the credit of writing the first science fiction book i.e. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Her another futuristic novel, *The Last Man*, is also treated as the first true science fiction novel. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) is an important futuristic science fiction novel which focuses on the trends like reproducing technology and social engineering. Furthermore, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) is also one more futuristic and speculative adventure romance.

Doris Lessing, a Nobel laureate, has the credit of writing five science fiction novels *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (1979-1983). In it, she focuses on the evolution of different societies over a great period of time. She opined, "*I believe that all novels ... deal with character, and that it is to express character—not to preach doctrines [or] sing songs... that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved. ... The great novelists have brought us to see whatever they wish us to see through some character. Otherwise, they would not be novelists, but poets, historians, or pamphleteers.*"<sup>3</sup>Jules Verne is also known for his adventure stories like *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864), *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869). In the later nineteenth century the scientific romances H.G.Wells were very popular. His *Last and First Men* (1930), *Odd John* (1935), *Star Maker* (1937), and *Sirius* (1944) contain considerable science fiction elements in it. In France, J.-H. Rosny aîné is regarded as the father of French science fiction. Rudyard Kipling also contributed a lot in the development of the genre by writing *Aerial Board of Control stories* and *The Army of a Dream*. George Bernard

Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* (1921) is also an example of science fiction. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (1948) is an excellent example of social science fiction in dystopian mode.

The New Wave science fiction writers in 1960's contributed a lot for the development of science fiction. The writers like Frank Herbert, Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K. Le Guin, Norman Spinrad, and Theodore Sturgeon, John Brunner, Roger Zelazny, Harlan Ellison, Isaac Asimov, John Brunner, J.G. Ballard and Robert A. Heinlein explored language and society of their time in literature. They experimented with the style and form of storytelling in fiction. They also focused on the contemporary political issues in their writings. They also tried their hand on future history in their stories. Social and biological changes were also dealt with very scrupulously by the New Wave writers. They also inspired science fiction films of their time. Some writers like Philip K. Dick dealt with the metaphysics of mind in their successive novels. All these factors unanimously paved the way for the development of a new genre i.e. cyberpunk literature.

With the rise of computer technology in the 1980s, a drastic change came in to the imaginative science fiction writing. The application of computer technology in each and every domain of human life saw a new change in fiction writing that was recognized as cyberpunk literature. It is a form of writing science fiction in dystopian form and ill effects of advancement in the field of science and technology could be easily seen in these works.

It focused prominently on the high tech and low life. This type of fiction was full of hackers, code breaking, realistic sword fighting, artificial intelligence, mathematics, philosophy, aliens, parallel universe, habitation on the fictional planet and like. The writers like William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, and Neil Stephenson tried their hand in this new trend of writing. In Japan, the cyberpunk works in the name of Magna and Anime were produced on a large scale during 1980s. Most of the cyberpunk stories were adapted by screen play writers and made

in to the movies. Many video games were developed on the themes of cyberpunk orientations.

Steampunk is one more development of science fiction which took its inspiration from the steam engine power. It is also one more sub-genre of science fiction. The issues like environmental conservation, biotechnology, nanotechnology found its way in cyberpunk and steampunk fiction in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The roots of the cyberpunk literature are found in New Wave writers of the 1960s. The setting of a cyberpunk novel is an imaginary future land.

Science fiction is popularized on global scale by some writers of different countries. The writers from America, china, Japan, Russia, India practised fictional/ fantastic stories dealing with science fiction elements. In China, science fiction was popularized by the writers like Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei. They translated the works of the authors during the late-Qing dynasty. Liang Qichao also translated Jules Verne's *Two Years' Vacation* in to Chinese. Lu Xun became popular by translating Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* and *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* in to Chinese and H.G. Wells' classic stories. In India, science fiction was popularized by the writers like Samit Basu, Mynampati Bhaskar, Rimi B. Chatterjee, Indrapramit Das, Sukanya Datta, Amitav Ghosh, Georgina Kamsika, Laxman Londhe, Gokulananda Mahapatra, Anil Menon, Premendra Mitra, Bal Phondke, Satyajit Ray, Vandana Singh, Kumudini Mohapatra, Jayant Narlikar and others. All these writers wrote science fiction in English, Marathi, Bengali, Kannada and other regional languages. They wrote the stories based on fantasy and dealt with the futuristic elements in their writings. Some of the writers wrote fantastic tales for the entertainment of children. These writers presented the scientific ideas and the new technology through their works.

The modern masters of science fiction include Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Ray Bradbury, Ursula K. Le Guin, Neal Stephenson, Joanna Russ, Kim Stanley

Robinson, Orson Scott Card, Roger Zelazny, and R.A. Lafferty. In the works of Arthur C. Clarke we come across with space travel and future exploration. He was awarded the popular Nebula and Hugo Awards for his works. Robert Heinlein was an aeronautical engineer and naval officer. He is known for his scientific accuracy in his works. He tried his hand in fiction as well as non-fiction with same ease. Ursula K. Le Guin is known for her speculative science fiction stories. She also wrote science fiction stories for children. She was the winner of Nebula and Hugo awards for her best novels. She dealt with the gender and sexuality on a fictional planet in her famous novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Her *The Word for World is Forest* explores the themes of colonialism and militarism. She also wrote short stories on speculative fiction. The next writer in this trend is Neal Stephenson who is an American writer. He is known for his speculative fiction having dealt with themes like parallel universe, robotics, imaginary planet, aliens, alternate history, mathematics, philosophy and so on. His *Snow Crash* (1992) is a novel written in the late cyberpunk or post-cyberpunk tradition dealing

with computer viruses and other high-tech themes. Stephenson's next solo novel, *The Diamond Age: or A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer* (1995), introduced many of today's real-world technological discoveries. Later on he wrote his next speculative fiction *Anathem* (2008) which is set in an earth like world that deals with metaphysics and Ancient Greek philosophy. In June 2019, his next novel *Fall; or, Dodge in Hell* was published. It is a near-future novel that explores mind uploading into the cloud.

Joanna Russ is one more name in this tradition. She is popularly known as radical feminist and known as a science fiction writer in 1960s in America. She is known for her best work *The Female Man* which is written in utopian tradition. Feminist science fiction again a sub-genre in science fiction and she was the practitioner of the same. Her writing is characterized by humour and irony. Her

notable novels include *Picnic on Paradise* (1968), *And Chaos Died* (1970), *The Female Man* (1975), *We Who Are About To...* (1977), *The Two of Them* (1978) and *On Strike Against God: A Lesbian Love Story* (1980). Another writer in this trend is Kim Stanley Robinson who has 22 science fiction novels to his credit. His novels include ecological, cultural, and political themes in which he has shown the scientist as the heroes of the novels.

Robert Markley has argued that Robinson "*views science as the model for a utopian politics... Even in Robinson's novels that don't seem to be sci-fi, like Shaman, the inductive method, the collective search for greater knowledge about the world that can be put to use for the good for all, is front and center*"<sup>7</sup>. Another important figure in modern science fiction is Orson Scott Card. He is famous for *Ender's Game* (1985) and its sequel *Speaker for the Dead* (1986). He was highly influenced by classic literature and popular fantasy fiction. He was winner of the Locus Fantasy Award.

The emergence and development of science fiction has gone through different phases. Science fiction saw a drastic change in its themes and presentations during these phases. The new development in the field of science and technology has brought about tremendous changes in human life. These changes influenced the writers of science fiction of every time and science fiction flourished with course of time.

The progress in science and technology affected human life, society and culture. The world is enjoying the fruits of innovations of technology and also experiencing the destruction which are evident from the two World Wars. With the growth of science and technology, there is a tremendous scope for the more innovative ideas and we will see much more novel ideas, sub genres and techniques in future in science fiction writing.

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