

## **REINTERPRETING CITIZENSHIP IN THE POSTHUMAN ERA**

DEBIKA SAHA

What is meant by the term ‘human? Is the term refers to the Cartesian subject as the Cogito or the sociopolitical animal as citizen of a particular state in a particular country? A tendency is always there to assert this ‘humanness’ as a kind of given fact. But the issue that haunts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is it possible to tie this concept fixedly? In fact due to the rise of technological advancement and global economic upheavals, the concept of the human has changed a lot. The last decades witnessed so many turns in the intellectual arena like the postmodern and post feminism. We are now in the posthuman era and the question of citizenship faces a big challenge. The debates regarding the nature of the robotics, prosthetic technologies and neuroscience occupies the global scene. Following Habermas, it may be remarked that the posthuman provokes elation but also anxiety about the possibility of a series of de-centering of Protagoras ‘Man’; the measure of all things.

The nature-culture dualism which rests on the distinction between the given and the constructed now faces threat. Due to the technological advancement, the boundaries between nature and cultures have been displaced. The Spinozistic concept of living matter occupies the scene. In this changing scenario the present paper tries to analyze the nature of citizenship against the backdrop of posthumanism.

The term “citizen” traverses a long way from Greek city-states to the present evolving cyborg society. Traditionally the concept of citizenship is tied with membership in a state but sometimes, due to the weakening of the state and the erosion of state legitimacy, the process of citizenship get arrested. Instead of this so-called citizenship, there is a call for “cultural citizenship”. This concept expands the individual’s rights and obligations to include economic and cultural dimensions as well as freedom and equality in the political process. Due to the globalization of human culture, the concept of citizenship has faced a novel turn. In place of Leonardo da Vinci’s ‘Vitruvian Man’, an ideal of bodily perfection, cyborgs are taken their entry. The social fabric is occupied with the cyborgs. Chris Gray defines cyborg as ‘a self-regulating organism that combines the natural and artificial together in one system.’<sup>1</sup> ‘The Vitruvian Man has gone cybernetic. All technologies can be said to have a strong bio-political effect upon the embodied subject they intersect with. Thus

cyborgs include not only the glamorous bodies of high-tech, jet-fighter pilots, athletes or film stars, but also the anonymous masses of the underpaid, digital proletariat who fuel the technological driven global autonomy without ever accessing it themselves.’<sup>2</sup>

New ethical claims are emerging due to the changed vision of posthuman subjectivity. A kind of extended and relational self keeps the techno-hype in control by a sustainable ethics of transformations. The concept of evolution is re-fabricated in a non-deterministic manner. The post human is closer to animals and the technological mediation. The micro-politics of relations get more attention. The focus is on the force and autonomy of affect. “Transversality actualizes an ethics based on the primacy of the relation, of interdependence, which values non-human or a-personal Life. This is what I call post-human politics”<sup>3</sup>

The above view of Braidotti’s posthuman politics differs from Agamben’s view of biopolitics. Before delving in to the analysis of Braidotti and Agamben, it is better to go back to Michel Foucault’s view of biopolitics<sup>4</sup>. It is Foucault who first uses this concept to distinguish one of those ruptures in western thought and practices that he tried to understand in many texts. The concept of biopolitics stands in an intimate relationship with the concept of power. According to Foucault, the entry to the modern age can be characterized by a rupture in the way power is exercised within the nation state. At present this concept is one of the most widely used within the cultural and social sciences as they try to analyze various societal aspects taking place in the wake of evolving cyborg society.

A kind of dehumanizing force is working behind the terror of global war; a kind of shadow war is always haunting the people all over the world. Biopolitics under the conditions of advanced and global neoliberal capitalism becomes gradually deadly and turns towards politics. In support of this point we may cite the return of the question of euthanasia and the institutionalization of ‘death studies’ and ‘extinction studies’. But against this trend, Braidotti’s biopolitics works as a positive life force that needs to be embraced and on which new forms of planetary politics and ethics may be founded. This aspect is known as ‘life beyond death’. She reminds us to focus on the ‘zoe-life beyond the ego-bound human’. Her posthuman politics is a call against the bio-thanatopolitical tendencies of the present which constitutes a kind of challenge of our time. This politics is grounded in lived experience, and the

experience of difference in particular, with an emphasis on embodiment and materiality. This standpoint is ethical as it argues for recognition of these material lived embodied differences in the face of a new global 'ecosophy'. There is a demand to include all humans and nonhumans in this new ecologies as the 21<sup>st</sup> century is facing continuous threats to the environment and biodiversity. The politics of the posthuman works from a different angle as it embraces new possibilities for posthuman subjectivities that will resist the 'inhuman aspects of our era'.

As the world is now facing new cultural wave, so there are suggestions from experts like Manfred Clynes, world famous pianist and Nathan Kline, famous psychiatrist that the humans could be modified with implants and drugs so that they could exit in space without using spaceship. Cyborgs are increasing throughout contemporary culture and with their new membership; they are redefining many of the basic political concepts of human existence. Since Aristotle the concept of 'body politic' plays an important role. This idea is well developed in the Leviathan of Thomas Hobbes. He showed that the king's living body was a model for the nation-state, the body politic. This body politic is now mapped by not by king's body but by cyborg. Now contemporary political community consist of advanced human-machine systems and the world economy is dominated by big multinational who depend on their own hypercomputerization.

This new domination is possible due to the uprising of technoscience. N.Katharine Hylas explains how posthumanism might rephrase the best parts of humanism, by showing that posthumanism is both a social construction of what it means to be human in the present as well as the technological construction of a new type of techno-bio body in the near future through cyborgization.

A different interpretation of this post-modern politics is given by Donna Haraway. She uses the image of the cyborg to call not for a single dominating worldview but for many voices. There are two crucial arguments that the cyborg imagery offers: the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that fails to interpret most of the reality. taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology and this means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others and in communication with all of our parts.

With the help of this science and technology, the cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tool to ourselves. This technoscience is political and socially constructed. It cannot be explained through one voice but it can be communicated with a range of voices. Post humanity is not about making an authentic culture or an organic community but about multiple viabilities. Long back when Marx imagined being able, in a post capitalist utopia to “fish in the morning, rare cattle in the afternoon and criticize in the evening, just as I wish without ever becoming fisherman, farmer or critic”<sup>5</sup> he imagined a world in which the division of labour would neither divide people from themselves nor from each other; a world of practices without identities. Marx raises the question of surplus value which later Foucault reinterprets as surplus life. “Naturality” of biological life is a kind of shadow cast by technologies of bio power, much like the Marxist idea that economic “laws of nature” form the shadow cast by capitalist forms of production. There is a chance to turn from an industrial economy to a bio economy in which surplus value is directly extracted from human and nonhuman biological life rather than from labour power. What comes after human is not another stage of evolution but a difference in kind. The posthuman is changing its dimensions, not by getting smaller or larger, but by being rhythmized across different set of relations.

And this range of voices creates cyborg democracy and cyborg citizenship. Here we may mention the view of Jacqueline Rose, who in her recent book ‘The question of Identity & Identification: Conversations with Jacqueline Rose’ raises this point. The question of identity and identification is very important not only in relation to feminism but also to other aspects. In this changing scenario we need to be endlessly vigilated in ascribing any identity. It is good to have an identity but it is better to have more than one, a kind of ‘wardrobes of identities’. This question of identity leads one to the issue of citizenship. Chris Hables Grey explores in this connection the problem of how to encourage and secure cyborged people’s political participation. To Grey, the issue of citizenship, regardless of gender, race, and class, is that of “competent participation in what some philosophers call a discourse community”.<sup>6</sup> Here the issue of citizenship is associated with the question of rights. So Grey proposes his *Cyborg Bill of Rights* which is composed of ten amendments

including “Freedom of Electronic Speech”, ”Right of Electronic Privacy”, “Right to Life” and “Freedom of Family, Sexuality, and Gender”. He argues that “we need active citizens and new political technologies to protect our rights from the relentless changes that cyborgian technoscience is producing”. His point of view upholds that it is necessary to actively participate in politics and constructs ourselves as cyborg in order to liberate and empower us. And in this empowerment, the Web, the media or networks may help us, but these ways have their limits too.

There is no doubt that a kind of technological optimism plays a role here but at the same times it fails to show how we, the cyborg can intervene real politik where relentless cyborg technologies shackle and control us. A kind of new body politics is developing in accordance with technological evolution but the interpretations that are being developed are not always clear. In conclusion it may be pointed out that we are now entering into a novel path, a kind of cultural evolution leads us to a new world but it will take some time more to settle in this changed world.

#### References:

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