

## Gene Enhancement: A Possibility Of Happy Gene In Richard Powers's Generosity

K. Roshan Goldwin<sup>1</sup>, Dr. R. Ajith<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract:

*Leading a happy life is the ultimate of all living beings in the world. Various researches find that happiness is determined by both biological and psychological outcome. As the rapid development of technology in medical field helps to cure numerous illnesses, genetic engineering brings new standard to the field of science. Though genetic engineering helps to cure several inherited diseases, cure is not the final destination of the process. Mans' desire to move forward lead to enhance human beings physically and mentally. This leads to work on the experiment of making people happy through genetic enhancement. Richard Powers is one of the prominent writers in contemporary United States of America. This paper tries to analyse the possibilities and alternates on making happy gene through genetic engineering. This is portrayed through the novel of Richard Powers's Generosity.*

**Key Words:** Happy gene, Genetic engineering, Human enhancement, Posthuman.

### Introduction

Everyone in this world wants to be happy. Happiness is a sensation which sticks to all living beings and helps to lead the life. Being happy becomes a challenging one in this modern technological world. World is filled with various challenges where people seek happiness as their ultimate aim. Humans always need more. People are not satisfied with what is already existed. They always need bigger and better environment. World is comprised of three irresolvable issues like disease, poverty and war. After the advancement of technology and modern science the above issues may not be fully rectified but can be manageable because of the recent developments in technology and science. This achievement made people to move on to even bigger leap. Thus humans start to work on daring goals like immortality, happiness and divinity.

There is always a difference between cure and enhancement. Upgrading technology and science to cure the mental and physical problems that has existed in human body and nowadays it starts to working on the enhancement of human to attain the above stated goals such as immortality, happiness and divinity. When it comes to happiness, a practice which helps not only to cure the illness but also enhance the condition of human is genetic engineering. Genetic engineering is a new vital practise helps to cure many inherited diseases in human body. Jayashree Das and other authors state in Redesigning nature: to be or not to be? "the technique holds the potential to erase genetic defects from family pedigrees plagued by inherited diseases, treat cancer in unprecedented ways and grow human organs in animals" (1346).

As genetic engineering helps to cure inherited illness in human body, practising this technique for enhancement purpose seems a next leap of human evolution. This

---

<sup>1</sup>Reg.No: 21212234011014, PhD Research Scholar (Full-Time), PG & Research Department of English, V.O.Chidambaram College, Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu. (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, V.O.Chidambaram College, Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu. (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.)

experiment is dealt in *Generosity*, a thought provoking novel of Richard Powers. Richard Powers is a versatile writer whose works often depicts the effects of technology and modern science. His novel *Generosity* illustrates a quest of attaining happy gene. A central character named Thassa, an Algerian refugee, continues her studies in America. Meanwhile her teacher named Russell Stone finds Thassa extremely happy in all occasion. This creates an interest to investigate Thassa and her background. When he searches information about her family and country, it astonishes him. Thassa's life is bit hard in her homeland. Her parents suffer from various problems. Her father dies and her mother is affected by jaundice and tumour. Even the environment in Kabyle seems trouble for her. Powers remarks:

The killers are many and generous. They massacre for any reason, even on one another's behalf. The Islamic Salvation Front, the Islamic Salvation Army, the Armed Islamic Group, the Islamic Armed Movement, the National Democratic Rally, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat: new charters by the week. Devout versus secular, traditionalist versus Western, Arab versus Kabyle ... Whole villages disappear under cover of dark. Neighbors kill neighbors over old score, then trick out the corpse to make it look political. (*Generosity* 30)

When Russell further searches for information about Thassa's land he finds "ten years of organized bloodbath have reduced a country the size of western Europe to a walking corpse. And Thassa has emerged from the land glowing like a blessed-out mystic" (38). This confuses Russell because he couldn't believe how a girl from such background can be this much happy. This leads more curiosity on Thassa from not only Russell but also from various organisations as the news spread through media.

When media spread the news of Thassa who has an immense happiness, Thomas Kurton, a scientist deliberately wants to work on Thassa's gene. He has his own company named Trucyte. Thomas Kurton has an enormous interest in enhancing human being. Even he has done his PhD on transgenic cows which produce protein in the milk that can cure diseases. He also "formed his first biotech company soon after he got his first academic job" (23). Kurton also helps "to develop a technique called rapid gene signature reading. Using it, he has produced three landmark association studies, isolating complexes of gene correlated with susceptibility to anxiety, childhood hyperactivity, and depression..." (24).

When Kurton is interviewed by Tonia Schiff, the host of a television program, Kurton's aim to reach beyond human limits is depicted. He tells, "we've been remarking ourselves for ten thousand years. Every moment of our lives, we do something that some previous incarnation of humanity would consider godly. We simply can't know our upper limits. All we can do is keep exploring them" (25). Though there are many critics criticises Kurton for being a destroyer of morality, he believes that his research will help people to reach beyond the limit of humans. "Is Thomas Kurton the villain in a morality fable gone terribly wrong? Or is he the hero of a noble experiment that's just about to pay off? No matter how the future judges him, he's already helping the present to spin... Over the Limit (22-23).

The determination to break the limit of humans made Kurton to work on Thassa's gene in order to create happy gene. Kurton believes that genetic engineering is the next level of advanced technology and computer programming. Kurton also declares the benefits of genetic engineering where "a healthy middle-class Chicago suburban couple who used preimplantation genetic diagnosis to keep their daughter from inheriting the colon cancer that has ravaged her father's family" (109). This technique not only cures but also enhances the human condition. Kurton states that there are many parents ready to invest to change the biological traits of their children through genetic engineering. Researchers call this as designer babies:

A designer baby can be made by isolating cells from an embryo, altering the genetic material and re-implanting it in the womb. Recently, scientists have come across genes that help shape the contours of the face. Once the sequence of the genes controlling the features of the body is known, it would be a straight jump to genes controlling intelligence, and muscle and fat deposition" (Das 1346).

When the practise of modifying gene starts to work on enhancing the living experience of life, happiness comes into the lime light. Happiness is the key to lead the life well. People do everything in order to live their life happy. If genetic engineering helps to uplift the mode of happiness, this will be a biggest breakthrough in the field of development. This fable becomes possible when the researchers found the gene responsible for being happy. Dfarhud and co authors in *Happiness & Health* illustrates "Recently studies have also focused in finding related genes in happiness. First, several genes identified in relation with mood and emotion and then among all mentioned genes, two genes suggested in relation with happiness: 5-HTTLPR and MAOA."

In the novel *Generosity*, when Kurton comes to know about the condition of Thassa, he invites her to do test for their study. After the test, Kurton's company Trucyte reveals the result that they didn't find any happy gene but only some correlations. When Thassa sells her eggs to research company, they have used her eggs for the reproduction of another candidate, they couldn't see much difference in the result except some variations. This is because the function of gene is not completely based on biological factors. It is highly influenced by the environment too.

Yuval Noah Harari in his *Homo Deus* states that the happiness has its own limit. The ceiling of happiness has two main pillars. One is biological, another one is psychological. In biology nothing makes one happy or sad, it is just an unpleasant sensation that creates in a person's body. For instance if a person gets angry, a heat will be produced in his body. The major difference between these sensations is bad sensation lasts longer than pleasant sensations. So if a person adjusts the biological gene function through genetic modification, it may lead him to reach out his limits of his happiness. Harari explains it with a mutated squirrel which can be fulfilled its hunger by eating one nut. He suggests,

That squirrel enjoyed an extremely happy and extremely short life, and that was the end of the rare mutation. For the blissful squirrel would not have bothered to look for more nuts, let alone mates. The rival squirrels, who felt hungry again five minutes after eating a nut, had much better chances of surviving and passing their genes to the next generation. For exactly the same reason, the nuts we humans seek to gather – lucrative jobs, big houses, good-looking partners- seldom satisfy us for long. (43)

Satisfaction is the major key to be happy. Science tries to create happiness through biological manipulation, but it requires altering the fundamental pattern of the life. An unconditional pursuit of pleasure may leads to more misery. "Some 2,300 years ago Epicurus warned his disciples that immoderate pursuit of pleasure is likely to make them miserable rather than happy" (*Homo Deus* 48). Happiness may attain with genetic modifications and treatments in future, but it may cost huge risks in return. By controlling the pursuit of happiness in mind is much more effective and secure for survival. "To attain real happiness, humans need to slow down the pursuit of pleasant sensations, not accelerate it" (48). This is what Thassa does in the novel *Generosity* when he faces troublesome situation in the United States.

When Russell investigates the past of Thassa, he finds it very difficult to survive. When he enquires about this past to Thassa, she tells ""You can't find in life, she tells them, "you have to make yourself!"" (*Generosity* 38). She further tells that when an Algerian sees the miserable of another Algerian, she forgets her sadness. This mental condition of Thassa

shows that her satisfaction on what she has in her life. When she moves to America, she is extremely glad and thankful to her current situation compared to her past. This is seen when she narrates her life on America. Though she tells that she has faced many troubles in her home land, she states, “Nice people, Chicago people. So friendly” (38). She feels happy to be in America even as a refugee.

It doesn't mean that genetic modification cannot surpass this condition. It already breaks the limit of human. This is the stage of progression. In this time, it is important to analyse and evaluate the benefits and risks an invention holds. An aim to go beyond human limits to attain an error free life leads to a different stage of living and it is considered as posthuman condition where the already existed structure of human condition is reconstructed. Kathrine Hayle states in her *How We Became Posthuman*, posthumanist ideology is the reconfiguration of the “human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (2-3). Thus the goal to break the limitations of human should also concern about the lives of all living beings.

### **Work Cited:**

- Das, Jayashree et al. “Redesigning nature: to be or not to be?.” *Current Science*, Vol. 112, No. 7, 10 April 2017. pp. 1346-1350.
- DFarhud, Dariush et al. *Happiness & Health: The Biological Factors- Systematic Review Article*. PubMed Central, 2014.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4449495/>
- Harari, Yuval Noah. *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. Vintage, 2017.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How we Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies, Literature and Informatics*. The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Powers, Richard. *Generosity: An Enhancement*. Picador, 2009.