

# Reframing the Question: *What is Man in Hu-Man?* A Deconstructive Analysis

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**Abstract**—*The primordial concern of this present work is to reinvestigate the discourses which give a philosophical safeguard to the notion of 'Man'. Except a few, in all other societies there is a metaphysical construction of 'Man' which is supposed to believe at the top, superior, the most safest, that somehow centered around the whole social phenomena. These can be justified by the way in which Protagoras claimed "Man is the measure of all things". The present era must be thought in terms of modern human sciences and humanities. Unlike the ancient time, 'Human' became the centre of all social and scientific discourse in the modern world. Man with his inherent potentialities became capable of establishing comprehensive systems of knowledge. But with the development of human sciences, there are many things which have been gradually either ignored or isolated from the core of its discourse. As human sciences are primarily centered on the notion of 'Human'; who is the measure of social and scientific discourse, preserves all the convenience, advantage, right, power; starts to lose it due to the rise of the postmodern thought and its severe critics to all traditional notions. As Habermas claims 'Modernism – an unfinished project', the paper presents 'Man' is a modern abstract construction which is also an incomplete project and therefore it needs to be deconstructed and redefined. Reframing the question "What is Man in Hu-Man" will show the notion of 'Man' or using the word 'Man' in general is problematic within the human discourse. It is problematic in the sense that whether it includes the female part 'woman' in the very definition of 'Human'? Another contradiction lies when we talk about 'human rights' and about the feminist movement. If human rights stand for the protection of all human being's natural and legal rights then what is the need of feminist ideology as it is primarily associated with women empowerment. Here again, the problem lies on the fact that 'human' in 'human rights' and 'man' in 'hu-man' does include women or not? The question also challenges the Modern Human Sciences as to 'what is a human' that it is talking about?*

**Keywords:** *Man, Hu-man, Humanities, Modernism, Postmodernism, political economy, marginalization, social exclusion/inclusion.*

The kind of philosophical investigation that the present work is supposed to do in this piece of writing emerge mainly because there are some basic fundamental questions which often get stuck with greater dissonance. There are many instances of inconsistencies or disagreements in our life which sometime lead us towards a state of doubt or sometime it

confuses us. One of these questions mostly occurs between what we are told, learned from the prevailing system and what we see with our own eyes in the actual state. This bafflement reminds me a Marxist interpretation by Terry Eagleton:

After all, if you do not resist the apparently inevitable, you will never know how inevitable the inevitable was.

The analytic tradition of early 19<sup>th</sup> century laid down a new philosophical movement by picking up linguistic analysis as their core principle clearly visualized the fact that all the philosophical problems arise are mainly because of using inappropriate language. G. E. Moore clearly pointed out it:

In all philosophical studies the difficulties and disagreements of which its history is full, are mainly due to a very simple cause: namely to the attempt to answer questions, without first discovering precisely what question it is which you desire to answer.

This is how they started to shift their philosophical investigation and concentrated on the usages of language with a possibility to remove or minimize the errors, ambiguities occur in the linguistic structure. Especially it was Wittgenstein, who believed in a kind of language game, a play of words which shape the multiple forms of life. In continuity with the analytic tradition, the postmodern era opens up for multiple forms of analysis which are somehow associated with the same linguistic structure and analysis. For example *structural linguistics* developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, *literary critique* by Roland Barthes, and *deconstruction* by Derrida respectively. With the help of these linguistic analyses the present work sets out to revisit to all the discourses which are inevitably associated with defining and too busy to describe what a *Man* is? While human sciences are primarily centered on the notion of man and all its relationships with the society, while humanism as a new discourse promotes man as liberal individual who is absolutely free, one needs to analysis very carefully the fact that as to what extent they refer or signify by using the term *Man*? Reframing the question *what is Man in Hu-man* is one of the most significant question

before going to discuss about women and their other aspects. It is in this reason one needs to investigate the notion of man as to how the term being used, what it refers in an actual state, whether the term justifies itself when we use it to describe the whole humankind in general?

It is, in this light, the paper begins by making plain the scope and justifying inclusions and exclusions. Its subject, as indicated by the title is revisiting to the discourse in which one can able to expose the inconsistencies of philosophers and thinkers and their biasness nature in thoughts. Deconstruction as a method of analysis has more potentiality to excavate unconscious meaning from any existing or prevailing linguistic structure. As it believes - *there is nothing outside the text*. Within this textual world the meaning is possible. Therefore the controversy between Man/Human and then Woman is also a matter of investigation within this linguistic world.

It is believed that man and woman both are the part of animal kingdom. Both compose the larger structure that we use to call human kingdom. Therefore, here, the term 'human' undoubtedly refers every individual being with all biological differences. Accordingly the term may also includes all other individuals such as homosexuals, transgender within the same way or treatment in which the male part is treated and recognized. Theoretically it sounds good but if we observe this phenomenon in our social structure then one can surly end up his observation with greater dissonance. The reason for being disturbed is when we see the actual scenario; it is not like the same as the theories describe them. We may use the term *Man* to represent the whole human kingdom but in practical, it is being employed only and only to refer the *male part* specially. This is not a mere assumption or blind jump for accusing the notion of 'Man' employed by the philosophers, thinkers of human sciences and arts. The paper tries to give justifications for that. It believes that there is a greater mistake when we use the word 'Man' to represent the whole mankind.

Let us revisit to the classical and to the modern philosophical thought regarding the notion of man, just to see how they described it and then went to build up their whole philosophical system, based upon that fundamentals. In a deconstructive analysis one needs to read again and again to find out the unconscious meaning from the gained. Derrida's own description of deconstructive reading is, as he says:

A deconstructive reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of language that he uses. It attempts to make the not-seen accessible to sight. [Derrida, 1976, p. 158-163]

As deconstruction suggests, one must visit to the old doctrines with an attitude of undoing the things systematically, so that one can trace out the biasness of thought. Another well-known description of deconstructive reading given by Barbara Johnson is –

Deconstruction is not synonymous with 'destruction'. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word 'analysis', which etymologically means 'to undo'. The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text. [Johnson, 1985, p. 5]

To justify the claim that the usages of the word 'Man' does not refer every individual being, the present work wishes to pick up three fundamental statements given by three different philosopher to show the contradictions of their statements with the apparent social structure.

1. The first statement is from Protagoras; the founding figure of the Greek Sophist tradition. His philosophical system, especially his epistemology primarily based on one central and popular argument:

*Man* is the measure of all things; of what is, that it is; of what is not, that it is not. [Stace, 1982, p.112]

The above statement says that the individual is a law unto himself in matters of any kind of knowledge. Here the word 'Man' is used to refer any individual whether it is a male or female. If it is the case, then one needs to realize the fact in our social structure whether a woman can be the measure of all things. How can a woman build up her own knowledge system if she is not allowed to go outside to explore the world like the male part does? Whether the female part will be allowed to run the society, the country with her small amount of knowledge? How far she is measure of all things when she is never allowed to explore all the things that Protagoras talks about?

2. The second statement is given by the encyclopedic genius Aristotle. His famous remark on Man; which vehemently shaped human being as the only higher being in the animal kingdom. Aristotle defines:

*Man* as being a rational animal. *Man* is not only a reasoning animal. As the higher being, he contains within himself the faculties of the lower being also. [Stace, 1982, p. 316]

Throughout the course of history man has always been described as many different things. One of the most famous among these is Aristotle's definition of man; he defined *man as being a rational animal*. According to which, rationality is what separates man from all other animals; it is what makes them unique. Aristotle did not stop here by defining man as just a rational being, he also described that man's good life consists in his reasoning. He says:

The proper activity of reason is the *summum bonum*, the good for man. Morality consists in the life of reason. [Stace, 1982, p. 316]

Further, Aristotle in his *Politics*, first called man as "Zoon Politikon" which means:

Man is a political animal by nature. [Stace, 1982, p. 321]

Man is a “political animal.” In this Aristotle means that man lives in a more “polis”. Man becomes man among others, living in a society governed by laws and customs. The man develops his potential and realizes its natural end in a social context. This is the “good life.” This is not an easy life, but a life of virtue is reflected in the highest good (eudemonia), often translated as happiness.<sup>1</sup>

Let us, analysis all the powerful statements which define the status of Man in general. There are three principal term i.e. reason/rationality, political quality and morality. Now apply all these three in our social structure and see how far these work when it comes to define the woman’s status? Do you really think the female part is defined by these connotations? It is notoriously disturbing when they use to define by different terms or phrases such as – emotional, incapable of making decision, object of desire, machines of reproduction and so on.

3. The third essential statement is from the Existentialist Philosophy laid down by Jean-Paul Sartre, who is regarded as one of the influential thinker in the European intellectual world. Sartre comes up with a remarkable utterance to describe human’s existential situation by saying that:

*Man* is condemned to be free. There is no determinism – man is free, man is freedom. We have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that ‘*Man* is condemned to be free. [Sartre, 1948, p. 34]

Followed by the passage Sartre claims human being are neither predetermined nor they have any fixed destiny. The destiny of man is placed within himself. The very precedence of man existence entails his freedom to create his own destiny. He says –

*Man* is the maker of his own destiny; man makes himself. He is not found ready-made; he makes himself by his free choice. [Sartre, 1948, p. 50]

Like the above two statements, the third one promotes absolute freedom of individual. There is no doubt to accept Sartre’s existentialism succeed to open new way for living a life after the two devastating wars. But if we analyze the fundamentals regarding ‘Man’ and his freedom, probably one will find some sort of biasness or androcentric notion in Sartre’s thought. For example – How far a woman is free or can exercise her freedom in our social structure? It is not so long; if one goes few decades back and analysis the structure it will clearly visualize the picture of freedom of woman.

Sartre argues that man makes his own destiny. Man is what, what he chooses. If it is the case, then where it goes all the

choices, freedom, when it comes to a woman. Does Sartre’s ‘man’ include the female part and all their wishes, desires? Even in Sartre’s time or in present, women were not as free as what Sartre said and believed.

Apart from the aspects of woman, do all these statements such as man is rational, political, and absolutely free include or refer the other individuals like, homosexuals, transgender, black individuals, and Dalits. How far the notion of freedom given by Sartre is applicable to these groups of people? If they are equally free and can make themselves according to their own choices as what Sartre strongly claimed, then why they spend their time by fighting, protesting, demanding for their own living rights.

The paper also questions all the human rights agencies and organizations which are supposed to believe work for the protection of human’s legal and natural rights. The humanities and humanism that sets up the possible way of liberal version of individual are also taken up by these deconstructive analyses which leave us in a doubtful state. We can also take up them into philosophical account and can question them, if they are primarily concerned with human’s protection and stand for well being of the individuals irrespective of any biasness, then why there is the need to emerge movement such as feminism and other gender discourses. Why does it require separate effort, to protect the female, homosexuals and all other marginalized subject?

Probably, because we never resist the apparent system in which we are living, acting, and the linguistic structure in which we use language to define, describe the things. It is also significant to note that we just do not use language to define things, with that we also give meaning to them. An object is nothing unless and until we do not describe it. Therefore, objects do not have the problems. They are what they are in itself. The moment we use to describe it by any means of language, there might be possibility to occur problems. And in a linguistic structure, as Wittgenstein suggest, as Derrida suggests – there can be meaning, but there cannot be any fixed or single meaning of a single world.

Therefore, before going to discuss any discourse on women, be it women’s empowerment, their status whatever, we need to analysis first, all the cultural, social, political and all the possible descriptions of ‘Man’ to explore the fact whether these stand only for the male human or include all individuals. Second, it requires deeper analysis to picture any kind of androcentric notion both in the social and linguistic structure. Women are not just socially suppressed, they are also linguistically suppressed. One can refer a ‘woman’ by using the word ‘man’ (man is rational animal), but one cannot refer a ‘male human’ by using the word ‘woman’. In general it seems, *Man* has a gender-neutral meaning of "human", corresponding to Modern English "person" or "someone"; however, *man* began to be used more in reference to "male human" which is somehow problematic and bias.

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.the-philosophy.com/man-political-animal-meaning-aristotle-quote>

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