

Human Future in Maize of Pulsating and Pyromaniac Digital Technology

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Introduction:

Concern and philosophical debate on human future, one of the latest fads or fables is difficult to decipher in the twenty first century. So far debates are largely confined within the corridors of technologists, educationists, futurologists and social scientists. In the past, Vedic scholars in India and Aristotelian thinkers in Europe have raised the issue of human future as a meta physical speculation over several millennia. Speculation ranges from bright human future to dooms day for human beings. Arguments and counter arguments continue while pronouncing that digital technology has qualitatively changed direction of human future. In this brief presentation, I would like to discuss the human future in the age of digital technology.

First, I would like to state that digital technology cannot be penances for all existing social ills within India and elsewhere in the world. I accept the view that digital technology helps to solve human problems and provide means to search new solutions. However, digital technology in no way, control or question the human created problems in areas of environmental degradation, emotional dissonance and tension from social and cultural domination leading to high degree of social conflict, social isolation and social anomie.

I will touch upon few socio-cultural changes that have taken place in the present human condition dictating the future direction due to growing influence and penetration of digital technology.

Meaning of Digital Technology

Broad understanding is that digital technology is having an electronic base and a binary system (0 or 1), Digital technology could be a computer, television, radio, smart phone, mobile phone, I-pad and all equipment that are being used for information processing, storing and transfer in variety of media.

Convergence of digital technology supported by fiber optics has allowed blending and combination of several functions in single equipment. For example, a smart mobile phone can be used as camera, MP3 player and computer in a seamless conjunction with other digital technologies. To-day, digital technology is being used in multiple ways based on the user needs in a variety of situations. Digital technology applications are growing by the hour across the globe in broadcasting, information processing, storage and transfer in a variety of forms. One of the major areas of digital technology applications include education and research having breath taking implications for future teachers and learners in almost all aspects of human Endeavour and in variety of social and business organization and situations.

Digital technology has ability for “convergence of audio-visual and telephone networks through a single cab cabling or ling system” leading to flexibility and enormous cost saving. Within the broad definition, meaning and applications of digital technology. I would like to touch upon three aspects that are impinging upon the human future and leave a wide canvas for speculation and production. In this context, I will touch upon mid-stream introduction of digital technology within the living Indian civilization without any effort of integration and assimilation. Second, I would like to discuss rapid transformation and unprecedented current and future application of digital technology to explore physical phenomena, human health and biology and artificial intelligence. The pulsating and pyromaniac digital technology has no known patterns of human response in cross-cultural prospective and it is discontinuous, uneven and equally destructive. I would like to discuss each of these aspects of digital technology separately keeping the Indian civilization in the centre of the debate.

Adoption of Digital Technology in the Indian Civilization ¹

India is one of the world's oldest and ancient civilizations that evolved and matured over several

millennia. In the process of cultural evolution, it created a sharp divide between small but economically and socially “rich elite ruling class” and a very large but “economically poor and socially deprived” lot, lacking economic and political power and cannot over resources. Historically, while the rich elite have had access to knowledge both oral and written the economically poor were satisfied only with oral knowledge. Advocacy of verbal system of knowledge was concretized in the form of caste system clearly propounded the nature of social hierarchy and social stratification in large part of India. It has also led the foundation of the structural dimension of society that continues uninterrupted in spite of a large number of social and political movements from time to time.

India has a rich web of religious, linguistic and ecological diversity. In the post, Second World War period, most of the British colonies of South Asia achieved independence. Its population more than doubled and linguistic identity and diversity has taken political overtone. Multiple mass migration, due to creation of new nations, famine, flood and political turmoil in the region imposed new fissures in the chronically divided and symmetrical social structure. There has been strife in India and South Asia for maintaining ethnic identities, religious harmony and political independence. Given the linguistic diversity, symbol and non-verbal and oral communication continue to dominate in which there has been little space for digital technology in spite of its obvious advantages. A variety of hybrid verbal languages has evolved and a whole host of near universal symbols and signs are in use for day-to-day communication in the written and oral traditions by social and rich elites. The rich elite have taken full advantage of these signs and symbols and mastered the use of English as a means of communication within the region and in international arena. Convent educated small percentage of rich elite of the past who dominated the history of South Asia, continue to manipulate, assert and dominate educational system economic and contemporary social and democratic political scene. At the same time, a very large number of poor continue to remain oblivious of rights and duties for any improvement in their existing miserable life with the use for digital technology (Agarwal, 2000; 13).

Broadcast and Print Media:

India in less than two decades after 1992 has almost surpassed all countries except Republic of China and

United States of America in use of broadcast and print media having the third largest digital television, radio and newspapers. Almost 150 million households have television in 2012 having a variety of television connections like cable, digital and direct to home (DTH) viewed by free and paid subscribers.

It is estimated that there are more than 800 television channels available in over dozen written and spoken languages for urban and rural viewers. New television channels are going unabated. Same holds true for AM, FM and Community radio mushrooming across India and may touch 1000 radio stations in the near future. In more than 21 languages some 5000 newspapers are published in India. Twitter and Face book are other forms of communication that have further compounded the problems of privacy and anonymity. About 12.4% or 150 million individuals in a population of 1.2 billion are involved in the use of Internet.

In this respect, media reach, access and utilization extremely high taking away a large part of human time. Economic prosperity increased leisure time and growing social isolation have forced individuals regardless of age and sex to devote more time to consume a variety of media. What are some of the implications for human future due to increased exposure to electronic digital media is having capacity to store, replay and transfer beyond national boundaries in variety of ways?

My personal conviction is that these developments will rob individual freedom, privacy and choices. Human beings in the near future will begin to withdraw from digital technology for public participation and social communication. This will take some time to happen as the present excitement instantaneous information seems to be most charming and attractive. Soon it is going to wear out in favor of avoidance of the use of such technologies. Intensity of Internet will not grow exponentially and a small number of individuals will use for variety of purposes including business, education and research. At the same time, high degree of digital technology application will grow in variety of healthcare areas to provide quality healthcare.

My submission is that the floodgate of digital technology while sweeping the Indian civilization and it will remain a technology appendage in an ongoing cultural continuity and social change due to its inner dynamics.

Rapid Transformation:

Privatisation and globalization in conjunction with digital technology have opened up unprecedented degree of immigration of information technology skilled youth across globe to support what has been referred to as digital or communication revolution. First time, in the history of Indian civilization the country has leap forward from unfinished 'industrial revolution' to 'communication revolution'. The communication revolution has unprecedented transformational effects on the youth of India. Several million men and women are today living abroad to support digital technology. First time, these youth are facing strange language, food, religion and host of social patterns of interaction alien to them. It has less to moral, ethical and familial dilemma to them. The family structure, institution of marriage, family responsibilities and whole host of interpersonal networks are under strain creating personal conflicts between self and family, self and community. I suspect that the 'social structure' of the Indian civilization may face some serious social conflicts in future needing re-adjustment and adaptation for survival and continuity.

Digital technology has provided most reliable, inexpensive and instantaneous means of communication through Internet, I-Pad, Skype, Android technology and around the clock mobile phones anywhere and everywhere. There are about 80 million mobile phone users in India today. They are growing by millions and soon India may become world's largest mobile phone user.

Mobile phones like other digital technology have broken the literacy and language barriers for one to one communication. On the face of it, it has provided remarkable connectivity among friends and foes, relatives and neighbors, parents and children, employers and employees and has created time and space neutral communication. Today, young men and women living abroad are in touch with parents, relatives, friends and professional colleagues, if not on an hourly basis at least on daily basis. This interaction in no way should be construed as increased communication and interaction to enhance bonding of family. Increased digital technology for communication in no way ensures improved and mutually satisfying human communication.

One of the features of increased digital technology is growing avoidance and social separation between

children and parents as youth living in other cultures are not willing to have their aging parents to live with them. Same holds true even within India. Due to high degree of urbanization, need to live away from family for job and "present orientation" of life many migrating individuals have begun to avoid, ignore familial contacts and desire to live in neo local family. This situation will continue to grow though I am not predicting that Indian family will become Euro-American family (consisting of men-women and their unmarried and dependent children below 16 to 18 years age). But, future of family will remain in transitional state in which both the young and old will suffer from variety of emotional and economic trauma. This would lead to shifting of family support system to institutional support system and through variety of insurances and alteration in the household establishment between various stages of human life cycle. No longer could the Indian humans claim to live from cradle to crematorium in the same house, creating high degree of insecurity, social isolation and problem of rehabilitation.

The other dimension of digital technology is growing anti-social and criminal tendencies and destructive outlook of life. Studies have indicated growing, hacking, pornography viewing, criminal activities including international terrorism and experimentation with sex. Estimates indicated that 23 percent of the Indian Internet users have been victim of cyber crime and attacks in the past and 74 percent of fear that their social networking account may be hacked.

India is among the fourteen countries across the world where pornographic viewing is banned.

These anti-social activities are being facilitated by anonymity of digital technology and perceived privacy. Antisocial activities are bound to increase to create new socio-psychological dissonance among individuals and community leading to social anomie. As described by Durkheim (1997) (1951) while discussing suicide.

It should be important to mention that given the nature of Indian civilization these problems are going to hit elite and migrants and much less to poor though poor will suffer poverty without digital technology and exploitation.

In near future digital technology will bring about a change in governance and business. Bureaucratic control

of the Government would be replaced by regulatory bodies. It may help evolve fair completion, rational tariff and equitable participation of national and international digital technology suppliers and service provider. However, the rich and technology advance nations will create conditions for poor and low technology nation to remain dependent and exploited by them. Privatization will help big business houses and multinational companies at the cost of small national companies in which digital technology will play important controlling role.

My analyses of the available data so far indicate that the rich is hogging the benefit of digital technology within business, education and outside world accentuated by structural inequalities, most pronounce in the poor and economically backward families and countries. Foregoing descriptive analysis clearly indicates an existing sharply defined structural divide between the small rich elite and economically poor forming the largest chunk of human population in India. Internet access or use in either education or business or social life will not be tempered by this divide. At the end, I argue that the existing Indian civilization having deep social chasm and existing structural impediment will raise its head in globally.

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Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar slammed the Government Agencies involved in the excavation at UNNAO in Uttar Pradesh in search of gold.

"This will promote superstition. No Government Agency should participate in such works, which are based on a dream of sadhu".

-The Hindu, 20.10.13