

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: AN AID TO INTER CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

One of the challenges confronting the contemporary society is: how to cope with the rapid fire technological, economic and geographical changes; as well as changes in the social and development sector. The term 'Change' has in fact become the defining attribute of the closing decades of the 20th century. In this process 'Information' has become power. It has the potential to change perceptions, induce paradigm shift in concepts and theories and transform even the well established and stable systems. The new economy is global. Investment, production, management, market, labour, information and technology are organising across national boundaries. The Information Technology is one of the most significant revolutions in the human history which has brought about a close relation between the many communities, regions and indeed the International boundaries. So my paper would be about how information technology and new media have contributed to many of the decentralising and democratic tendencies in the recent past. How Information Revolution had contributed to the fall of the tyrannical regimes including the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines and the communist rule in East Germany and the former Soviet Union. We are also going to study that how this inter-cultural communication emerged among the various regions and the nations. What all factors contributed in this revolution and what was the requirement for commuting among the nations. How language became an effective tool in the Information revolution. These are the real concepts which are interesting, complicated and even controversial.

Full Paper: As Paul Gilster says in his foreword to John Green's book, 'The New Age of Communications',

"Something protean and profound is happening to our world, whether we call it digital revolution, information super- highway or a grand convergence of the media. (Green 1997:7)"[1]

No adding machine could count the number of words people use each day because conversations are forgotten easily. So to remember we use some technology to start tomorrow's fire. Since the invention of written languages, men have worked to keep a record of worth-while sayings and writings. Early man hacked out in stone the teachings of their leaders, the glories of ancient Egypt were described in hieroglyphics or picture writing on the walls of tombs. In the middle Ages, monks spent their lives copying manuscripts and today's printing presses roll out books, magazines and newspapers. When we commute, why we cease to think exclusively in terms of some particular country or culture or community! Why not to think of the whole world and the culture of the whole world and the joys and sorrows of whole of the community? The sun does not think of lighting a sequestered pond or a lonely valley but his activities do light up these isolated corners because his object is to shed light everywhere.

In the same way, the digital divide is not confined to individuals or a section of a society in a country; it is so widespread that it has given rise to concern all over. One of the challenges confronting the contemporary society is: how to cope with the rapid- fire technological, economic and geopolitical changes; as well as changes in the social and development sector. In the changed world economy, the sources of higher productivity are increasingly dependent on knowledge and information applied to production, and this knowledge and information is increasingly science- based. Communication was never possible without language. Language is supreme among the faculties With which humanity is endowed, not only answering the necessities of mere survival but also serving the delights and consolations of divine philosophy, it could perhaps be argued that literature or the art of using language to apprehend experience imaginatively and to give pleasure by communicating it is supreme among the arts. As language embodies the cultural experience of people, all languages should be adequately developed to serve the complex and diverse requirements of modern communication. Developing nations and multilingual societies need to evolve language policies that promote all national languages even while selecting some, where necessary, for more widespread use in communication, higher education and administration. The provision of simultaneous interpretation and automated translation facilities now under experimentation for cross- cultural communication to bridge linguistic divides should also be envisaged, and the co-operation between neighbouring countries and within region should be encouraged.

The generation of knowledge and the speedy dissemination of information throughout the world brake easy because of the invention of various techniques and the improvement in technology during the long Industrial Revolution, that took place in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries in Europe and the United States in full measures and in other regions of the world in a partial manner. The big changes in the Indian information world started in the late 1970's and culminated in the early 1990's, the period when the process of computerised and offset printing entered into widespread use in almost all leading newspapers and other technology changes were introduced in the electronic media like cinema, radio, telephone, telegraphy, wireless and television. The 20th century saw the fastest modes of telecommunication namely, satellite communication, electronic mail and the Internet. We can say the communication is as old as humanity itself. As the Mac Bride Commission, set up by the UNESCO in 1978, observed in its report in 1980:

ZCommunication maintains and animated life. It is also the motor and expression of social activity and civilisation... The task of communication has become ever more complicated and subtle to contribute to the liberation of mankind from want, oppression and fear and to you it's in community and communion, solidarity and understanding. However, unless some basic structural changes are introduced, the potential benefits of technological and communication development will hardly be put at the disposal of the majority of mankind. (1980:3)"[2]

"The phrase 'Social Communication' was first used in the Vatican document INTER MIRIFICA on December 4, 1963) by POPE PAUL VI. It embraces not only mass media but all instruments or means of communication including public announcements, posters, advertising, audio-tapes, and gramophone records and so on. It stresses human communication- interpersonal, individual as well as group. It stresses the limited meaning of communication as exchange of messages using traditional or modern technical means but avoiding the

intrapersonal aspect. It looks upon the media as God-given instruments to attain the social goal of communitarianism and communion."(Vilanilam; 2005:45)[3]

During the closing decades of the 20th century the media scenario worldwide has undergone complete metamorphosis. The tools, methods and formats of news gathering, presentation and analysis have changed. The media consumers- the newspaper readers, radio audience and television viewers have become more discerning and, therefore, more demanding. Today, the newly emerging civil society, which in several cases is taking global dimensions, has a greater share of media cake, and to that extent, the media has been instrumental in strengthening democratic trends in the world at large.

The Information Revolution is characterised by information becoming the central and the most significant commodity. An interesting offshoot of the Information Revolution is- Informatization of society on the one hand and the commodification of information on the other. The significance of dawn of Information Revolution is underlined by the number of information related terms it has given rise to: Information society, Information Technology, Informatics, Information Industries, Informatization indicators and so on.

The work of hundreds of outstanding people in the world contributed substantially to International communication. Samuel Morse, Alexander Graham Bell, Guglielmo Marconi, Heinrich Hertz, J. C. Bose, Vladimir Zworykin and many others great men contributed to the growth and development of the various means of internationalization and globalisation of communication. Gutenberg's invention revolutionised printing because metallic movable types speeded up printing and led eventually to the democratisation of communication throughout Europe and ultimately in various parts of the world. It also led to the quick and more permanent transmission of ideas and messages pertaining to business and manufacturing industries.

"The concept of Information Society goes back to the Japanese who are generally given credit for coining the Japanese term 'Johoka Shakai' in mid 1960's. The term simply means information society in which the primary activity of a majority of workforce is in the areas of information production, processing and distribution."(Gupta; 2005:51)[4]

The bewildering advances and developments in computerised information systems have brought the industrialised nations to the brink of what some have begun to describe as post-industrial era of the information society.

Within a space of few years, these developments in global media have been joined by an even more revolutionary technology- Internet, which has given rise to new ideology. Some observers of the contemporary society have gone to the extent of saying that Internet is not just a new way to communicate, it is a market place where they can put orders out for bids, it is an order facility for its consumers plus an endlessly updated inventory of those customers liking and disliking. Globalisation is integrated with the development of Information Technology that is radically altering the world's economic boundaries.

It is not only that the offices on two continents can communicate as if they were on the same street; it is the effect that information technology is having on labour migration. Writing in *Virtual States: The Internet and the Boundaries of the Nation-State*, Jerry Everand says:

"Among the process of change being brought about by globalisation and the advent of global communications is the change in the face of the politics. When demonstrators in Russia and Albania hold up placards and banners written in English, it is clear that electronic media and the adoption of English as the Lingua Franca of the electronic media has rewritten the nature of political life at a global level (Everand:51).[5]

The pace of change is so fast that's we have begun to live in what many sociologists and writers on contemporary social trends, call as 24- hour society. We have travelled a long distance from when an international call had to be booked in advance. But no more now, as everyone has a telephone, some mobile phones. STD's have become quite common. Air travel and going abroad for education, work or leisure is becoming frequent.

As quoted from J. V. Vilanilam book ' Mass Communication in India' George Gerbner says: "For the first time in human history, children are born into hems where mass mediated strong tellers reach them in the average of more than Seven hours of day... These stories do not come from families. They came from a small group of distant conglomerates with something to sell. Giant industries discharge their messages into the main stream common consciousness... These changes may enrich our horizon, but they may also homogenise our viewpoints and limit our alternatives. (Vilanilam: 161)[3]

With the ongoing trends of globalisation and opening up of economy, the market forces will be major determining factor in shaping the contours of media. A closer study of the recent trends in media shows that the flippant attitude to matters of serious importance is becoming all too pervasive. Cyber news allows news consumers to understand the meaning of the day's events in a personalised context that makes better sense to them than traditional media do now. Since it can build new communities based on shared interests and concerns and has almost unlimited space to offer levels of reportorial depth, texture and context that are impossible in any other medium; new media can transform it. The pace of globalisation is so fast that during the last 3-4 yrs it's had impact on political, economic, cultural and social aspects of the contemporary society. Indeed, Information Revolution has opened up the whole worlds and we are confronted with a wider and more extensive choice for putting across our point of view. We can say that, it has been instrumental in globalising our economy and trade and has led to cultural homogenisation. The word 'Media' has become relay stations for the most powerful multinational corporations and their forms of popular, profitable culture. Portability of electronic communication technologies has led to the growth of tele-working. A mobile phone, and electronic organiser and a seat at a cafe table, constitute a new work place. Work starts when the phone is switched on. As Internet connections grow, our notions of what is local, national or international will get blurred. Information has become a catalyst for economic development and a key resource for literacy, education and social development. During the past five years or more there has been a flood of writings about information explosion, multi- media revolution and information super highway, in relation to development in Information technology.

The advent of Internet has been so pervasive and all embracing at least in the developed world that it has given rise to new ideology: 'Internetphilia'. Although to some discerning critics, this ideology seems to be over- hyped, accompanied by irrational exuberance, others see in the Internet the cure for a number of ills besetting the contemporary society. It's has the capacity to empower individuals, institutions and countries of socio- economic periphery and also to transform citizens across the globe from orthodox media couch- potatoes to active producers of online information. It is argues that Internet gives rise to a whole new financial environment, a new

economy. It is a digital economy based on abundance rather than scarcity, a market where supply equals demand and prices are set at the lowest optimum level; where oligopolies are avoided owing to low market entry costs; where market dysfunctions are history and diversity is guaranteed.

Following are the examples from the history to show how information revolution brought the change: One is surprised at the number of its photographs and reporters who got Pulitzer Prizes for excellence in reporting ground breaking stories and taking photographs in Vietnam. The first Pulitzer Prize was awarded to Russell Jones for the coverage of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Merriman Smith's coverage which won the 1964 Pulitzer Prize for National reporting has been called the finest example of deadline reporting in the 20th century. The collapse of the soviet system and the Berlin Wall is credited to the proliferation of sources and channels of news. Another one is during the democracy movement in China in 1989, dissenting Chinese students maintained contacts with the outside world through hundreds of fax machines. They succeeded in disseminating the news of military action against the students by the army in Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

The development of global communication technologies has been in consonance with the requirements of capitalism for new markets. According to McQueen:

"The threat to Independence in the late twentieth century from the new electronics could be greater than was colonialism itself...the new media have the power to penetrate more deeply into a receiving culture than any other previous manifestation of western technology. The results could be immense havoc, an intensification of the social contradictions within developing societies today." [6]

The closing decade of the 20th century has witnessed the exponential growth in the ambit and application of communication technologies which have far- reaching relevance to education, it's expansion and quality. The implications of the growth in communication technologies impacting the very nature of learning process and education system are equally far- reaching, necessitating a continuous reassessment with respect to its effectiveness and scope. The traditional roles assigned to school. Classroom and teacher and the expectation of the society in terms of quality of education are changing at a very fast pace. Concepts like the learning society, interactive technologies, collaborative learning, knowledge industries and virtual university are not only transforming the way education is being imparted but is also changing the transmission of education itself.

In his book 'The Death of Distance', Frances Cairn cross points out: The death of the distance as a determinant of the cost of communicating will probably be the single most important force shaping society in the first half of the next century. Technological change has the power to revolutionise the way people live, and this one will be no exception...the death of distance will also gives rise to proliferation of ideas. New ideas and information will travel faster to the remotest corner of the world. (Gupta: 56)[4]

In the realm of international communication a new mass media environment has developed; since the 1990's this new order has brought about profound transformation. According to several media academics, whereas previously most of the media systems were primarily national, in the recent past a global commercial media market has emerged. This has been due to the formation of transnational multi- media conglomerates through various processes and strategies to enable them to consolidate their powerful positions on the global media map. We can name few of them here:

1. News corporation: owned by Rupert Murdoch, it has become a major media producer worldwide and is the biggest English language newspaper publisher in the world. STAR-TV in Asia has emerged as a very major force in Indian television system.
2. Bertelsmann: The Germany based firm controls 10% of all world publishing in English language, is the largest TV and radio firm in Europe. It owns Random House in the United States.
3. Disney: It has established a strong presence in Japan, China, Europe and Latin America. Its ESPN International is broadcast in 21 languages to 155 million households in 182 countries.
4. AT & T: Has holding in satellite, cable and broadcast television and owns stakes in Time Warner, News Corporation and CNBC.

So we can see that International media institutions, news agencies and alternate media organisations all contribute to the pervasiveness of messages leading to an environment of information and entertainment overload. The presence of so many media players also ensures plurality, diversity and alternate channels of information and, therefore, differing opinions and dissenting views can no longer be suppressed. To that extent these media institutions have made a distinct contribution to democratising the information process and making available to the viewers a number of perspectives and experiences.

Will the expert's prediction that today's digital revolution will enable us to read the secrets of life and the primordial archives of our species come true? Or, as Marshall McLuhan and Bruce Powers have said in their work, *Global Village: Transformations in World life and Media in the 21st Century*,

"What may emerge as the most important insight of the 21st century is that man was not designed to live at the speed of light"(1998:8)."[6]

The electronic, digital revolution and the consequent communication revolution is certainly a fact of life in the 21st century. But almost half of the world's population had been left out of this revolution. More than 50 percent of the world's population had never used a telephone, not to speak of more modern instruments of communication such as the Internet. The natural tendency in human beings is to utilise superior knowledge to keep others inferior. There's a great need for developing technologies that are essential to remove the ignorance, poverty and misery of the people of the backward half of the world, who are still struggling to make out an existence at less than a dollar a day or perhaps slightly more than a dollar a day.

As Steve Parker (2002) says, the Internet is:

"An unreal or virtual world called cyberspace. It is an electronic place that exists only as tiny electrical pulses in computer circuits. Cyberspace presents endlessly flexible multimedia for use by advertisers, shoppers, businesses, public services such as libraries, special interest groups...and anyone else."[7]

If we come to Indian context we see vast diversification of communication. India is host to a staggering variety and richness of cultural and communication diversity. In the ancient Indian society religious, philosophical and cultural discourse was characterised by oral communication. Cradle of an ancient civilisation, India had also been a rich repository of traditional forms of communication. For thousands of years Indian religious and social landscape was dotted with saints, scholars and wandering monks, priests and preachers who would move from one place to another and disseminate thoughts and ideas on various aspects of life, religion and social behaviour. Such programmes- religious, cultural and entertainment oriented film based functions- are organised even in foreign countries in which the Indian Diaspora enthusiastically participates. We can see the collaboration of

Indian news agencies and also India as an outstanding destination of the world and finally the influence that the Indian Diaspora enjoys at the international level.

Almost three quarters of a century ago, on 1st June 1921, Mahatma Gandhi expressed his fear of cultural Imperialism when he said:

"I do not want my house to be walked in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."[8]

All India Radio (AIR) maintains links between India and the rest of the world through its external division and with the help of that AIR aims to keep the overseas listeners in touch with the contemporary developments in the country through news, current affairs features and programmes on sports and literature. It has based its correspondents at Washington, Brussels, Dubai, Kathmandu, Dhaka, Colombo and Hong Kong. Several of India's newspapers like 'The Hindu' and 'The Times of India' are well known abroad for their quality coverage.

As R. Mchesney says:

"Can the new technologies serve in the empowerment o the common people and small communities? Can they revitalise democracy by making possible the active participation of all the people and make the elite aware of the real priorities and basic needs? Will they help on restructuring the world for the establishment of small communities that are free to decide their own way of living without hurting other communities and co-operating with others for the benefit of all? Will they help in removing the present situation in which the proliferation of the mass media has made media institutions rich but democracy poor?"(McChesney 1999)[9]

We can conclude by saying that in promoting communication policies, special attention should be given to the use of non-technical language and comprehensible symbols, images and forms to ensure popular understanding of developmental issues and goals. Similarly, development information supplies to the media should be adapted to prevailing news values and practices, which in turn should be encouraged to be more receptive to development needs and problems.

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