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HU 484 Term Paper

Technology in Indian Culture and Effects of Globalisation of Technology and Media



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*An attempt to uncover some prominent
issues regarding effects of technology
and the role it plays in an Indian
context*



Our Aim

To Compare Views On Indian Culture: Several thinkers in twentieth century India have attempted to give some substance to the idea of a composite 'Indian-ness'. Compare the texts : C.R.Rajagopalachari's Our Culture and K.M.Panniker's Essential Features Of Indian Culture with the 'Strengths of Indian Culture' listed in Chapter VII of Technobrat by the students in HU484. What can you bring out about the place of technology in 'Indian' culture through your reading of theses and other texts? What effects, corrupting or otherwise, do you see the rapid globalisation of technology, and especially media, having on our age-old cultural traditions?

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Introduction

To address the question of technology and its place in Indian culture, we first need to address the very basic questions “What is Culture?” and “What is Indian Culture?” The answer to the first may not be as simple as it appears. Even Webster's Dictionary offers many choices: "civilising tradition, folklore, instruction, law, custom, knowledge, arts, sciences, education, mores." The true definition of culture most likely lies in a combination of each of these possibilities: a mixture of the mental, physical, intellectual and creative aspects of a society. As with any mixture, this view bases itself in movement - the interaction of these collective parts to create a nebulous whole called "culture."

Coming to Indian culture, it is only after we have found out the features of Indian culture that make it Indian and distinguish it from other non-Indian cultures, can we aim to understand the role that technology has in our ideas, conceptions, qualities, relationships and courtesies - the Web of Beliefs that we call our **culture**.

Though Indian culture has evolved through the ages and continues to change, there are certain essential aspects, which have remained the same. These are the features of Indian culture that have remained over the ages, starting from the days of Bhimbetka, and coming right up to the (post) modern society we live in today. In what follows, some of these features have been highlighted and how they constitute ‘Indianness’ has been discussed

BASIS OF INDIAN CULTURE

The foremost point to discuss when talking about Indian Culture is the importance of the Vedas behind our original thinking and way of life. Long before we became influenced and possibly polluted by other cultures, our basis were the Vedas. Indeed, if one studies the Vedas and the knowledge given there in , one is spell bound by the timeless and multi-dimensional philosophy of the Vedic literature. It clearly indicates that people at that time were certainly superior to us in their intellectual levels and our feeling of superiority may not be

well - founded. More specific indications of Vedic Science will be given later in the technology section.

Tolerance and acceptance of foreign views

Here goes a Sloka (couplet) from the Atharva Veda (one of the 4 Vedas - treatises on knowledge from ancient India) which embodies the true spirit of humanness written, not today, but four thousand years ago.

*We are the birds of the same nest,
We may wear different skins,
We may speak different languages,
We may believe in different religions,
We may belong to different cultures,
Yet we share the same home - OUR EARTH.

Born on the same planet
Covered by the same skies
Gazing at the same stars
Breathing the same air
We must learn to happily progress together
Or miserably perish together,
For man can live individually,
But can survive only collectively*

Throughout the ages, India has continued to hold to the belief that every way of life has its own contribution to make to human welfare. It is this positive approach to other views and groups and communities, that enabled India to accept the Jews, the Christians, the Buddhists, the Zoroastrians and the Muslims as parts of their own culture. These groups continue to flourish in India with the same vigour and vitality that they had at the time of their creation. This tradition has continued till today, with the constitution of free India declaring secularism as one of its primary ideals. Why we say this is unique to Indian culture is obvious when one sees the largely Christian cultures of the west or the strictly fundamental Islamic cultures of the Middle East. Application of the principles of charity and trust has continued to be a distinct feature of Indian culture, for while we are firm in our own faith, we continue to approach other faiths and beliefs with an open mind. While this has granted a noble aspect to Indian culture, on the other hand it has also enriched our own culture and added to the variety of our lives. The Hindu religion provides perhaps the best example of this fact. While the basic tenets and forms of this religion have remained the same through many centuries, the forces generated by the toleration of other religions has

led to constant re-adjustments of its approach towards the problems of life and a constant re-interpretation of its doctrines.

Co-existence of various ages

The India which we live in today is a strange concoction of sorts - the tribal forests of Madhya Pradesh and the North East (pre modern), the small industrial towns like Kanpur (modern) and the highly advanced Internet cultures of metros like Delhi and Bombay (the post modern) exist side by side . Such a mix is hard to find in any other culture, making it unique to India and constituting the Indianness talked about earlier. This becomes a unique example of cultural relativism across *both time and space*, and where both versions - weak as well as strong come into the picture. Though India a land of great area, such variety exists even in neighbouring colonies in cities like Delhi. So it is not just the large size that accounts for this feature - such a phenomenon is an integral part of our culture. Ways of living apart even the technologies that we have exhibit this diversity, from stone cutters to steel smelters to laptops.

The respect for the individual

There exists a strong belief in India that the individual has a worth unequalled by any social organization or community. A very common tenet of Hinduism states that every human being has in him a reflection of the divine that God resides in our souls. It has also been claimed that by right conduct and knowledge, one can truly attain Godhead. Such a belief that divinity can be attained by a process of spiritual evolution exists in Buddhism also. This obviously limits the absolutism of external forces. The individual is not merely an insignificant unit of the larger whole, whether that larger whole is the community, the church or the state. The functioning of the government as a democracy, Indira Gandhi's whopping defeat after the emergency, the opposition to forces like communism all point to only one fact - that the individual has a very important place in Indian culture, and can never be over-ridden by the state.

The open attitude to Science

Discounting the dark ages from about 1300 AD till our independence, in general India has maintained a very open and receptive attitude towards scientific discovery and new technologies. In spite of the distorted European view that Indians are totally

oblivious to facts and figures (Macaulay, done in class), immune to scientific development and that they look upon the world as Maya and Illusion, it has been the primary aim of ancient as well as modern India to explore, to find out more about the world we live in. Though there are references to kings 100 ft tall and oceans of milk and honey, there is not a single Indian who actually believes in the physical existence of these things. Whereas it took more than a century for Europeans to believe that the earth is not the centre of the universe, such an observation was made by Aryabhatta more than a thousand years before Copernicus, without causing the hulla-bulloo that such a discovery faced in Europe. As an example, the following facts shows how advanced Vedic science and technology were:

VEDIC SCIENCE

How much do we know?

Srimad Bhagvatam (part of the Upanishads) says: “The material manifestations’ ultimate particle, which is invisible and formed into a body, is called the atom. It exists always as an invisible identity, even after the dissolution of all material forms. The material body is but a combination of such atoms, but the common man misunderstands it. One can estimate time by measuring the movement of atomic combination of bodies. Atomic time is measured according to its covering a particular atomic space.”

*It is interesting to note that modern scientists measure time according to the caesium atomic vibrations!
Incidentally, Sri Vyasadeva compiled Srimad Bhagvatam more than 5,000 years ago!*

Srimad Bhagvatam also gives a clear integration of time and space. Thus, according to the Srimad Bhagvatam, in their unmanifest state, the atoms exist in the subtle form, much akin to the wave like description that modern physics gives for the atom. This explains how mass (gross matter) and material energy (subtle matter) may be inter-related in a non-quantifiable manner. The famous $E=mc^2$ appears to be a special case of the Vedic description.

The Bhagavad-Gita describes earth (solid), water (liquid), fire (plasma), air (gas), and akasha (space) as gross material elements.

Mendeleev came up with the idea of elements found in nature. Since the introduction of his periodic table, it has seen many revisions over the course of years. The Sankhya Yoga system given in the Srimad Bhagvatam also gives a classification of material elements. However, this system is much more tenacious than its modern counterpart, and has not been changed since time immemorial.

Vedic view of the Universe

Higher Dimensional Space

Let us understand the idea of higher dimensional space that may help us understand the ideas about space implicit in the Vedic literature. The term higher - dimensional is borrowed from modern mathematics, it does not appear in Vedic literature. It is part of an attempt to bridge the conceptual gap between modern thinking and Vedic worldview. Naturally, since the traditional followers of Vedic culture have not been confronted with such a gap, they have not been motivated to introduce ideas to bridge it.

The most fundamental feature of the Vedic idea of space is that many more things can be brought closer together than the geometric rules of three-dimensional space allow. Since the higher dimensional spaces of mathematics also permit distances to be shortened, the term higher - dimensional can be used to refer to this feature of Vedic view of reality. However, it should be added that the mathematical idea of higher dimensions is merely a convenient abstraction, which can only be perceived in the mind of the mathematician. However, the Vedic idea of higher dimensions is not merely an abstraction. There are higher levels of concrete reality associated with higher levels of conscious perception. In this sense, there is certainly much more to the Vedic “higher dimensions” in comparison with its counterpart in modern mathematics. We might think crudely in terms of extra number of parameters required to describe and consciously perceive such higher levels of reality.

The above discussion is just a tiny glimpse into the depth of the knowledge found in the Vedas and it could very well turn out that

Modern Science subject to imperfect speculations of the scientists may be a tiny subset of the Vedic knowledge!!!

Glimpses of Technology through the ages

Technology in Pre-modern India

The earliest traces of human existence in India, so far discovered, go back to the period between 400,000 and 200,000 BC. This is suggested by the large number of primitive stone tools found in the Soan Valley and South India.

From 8000 BC, the **Mesolithic** age began and continued upto 4000 BC in India. During this time, **sharp and pointed tools** were used for killing fast-moving animals. The beginning of **plant cultivation** also appeared. So technology had already made an appearance on the Indian scene.

Indus Valley and Harappan Culture

Around the beginning of the third millennium BC, a culture appeared to the south east of Baluchistan, which evolved into what is now known as the **Indus Valley** or Harappan civilization. The cities were far more advanced than their counterparts in prehistoric Egypt, Mesopotamia or anywhere else in Western Asia. This civilisation had developed technologies like the plough, and smelting of metals like copper and bronze. Technology played an important part in their lives. In fact it sustained them.

Then came the age of the Aryans, the age of the Vedas.

Grant Duff, a British historian has said the following of the Vedic times:

"Many of the advances in the science and technology that we consider today to have been made in Europe were in fact made in India centuries ago."

Herein lies a unique controversy. There does exist a notion, as is mentioned earlier in this text, that people mentioned in the great epics already knew all we know today from science and will eventually find out. In the Ramayana, we have the Pushpak Vimana, which clearly establishes the existence of helicopters and aeroplanes. What better example exists of a laser-guided missile than the Shakti with which Karna killed Ghatotkacha in the Mahabharata? And the instant beaming of a living body across vast distances that you see in the futuristic Star Trek was routinely practised by our devas and rishis.

However, it is not sufficient to refer to descriptions of the epics and puranas. Though absorbing and imaginative, they are a far cry from what constitutes a technical manual. Imagine that thousands of years later our descendants recover a cassette of Star Trek from an archaeological excavation and manage to view it. Are they justified in concluding on the basis of what they see that we ourselves were in possession of the kind of technology shown there?

However, this is only one side of the coin. There also exist Vedic works and evidences, which show that India at around this time was as advanced if not more than all the contemporary civilisations of the world. Technology was clearly evident in all walks of life - from shipbuilding and invention of the Machcha-yantra, the ancient Indian sailor's compass, to glass works and the synthesis of perfumes, pigments and dyes. All this was not done with bare hands, technology used cannot even be considered as that of handicrafts. The techniques used in making sugar, glass, jewellery, metal sheets, oils, etc., presumed the existence of physical apparatus of some degree of sophistication and to fabricate that physical apparatus a knowledge of mechanics and mechanical engineering was a pre-requisite.

From the smelting of almost all metals known to the world at that time to the processing of Agro-based products, and exquisite cloth, technology had indeed come a long way.

The Decline

It was after this that the decline in the technical field began. Technology was reduced to developing new systems for war, as the small states in India at this time were continually engaged in conflicts. Public welfare and the development of technology took a backseat and these trends continued till the coming of the British.

The British brought with them the technology developed in the West. Trains were started, the steam engine became the centre of Industry, and electricity first appeared on the Indian scene. Several

technologies developed in Europe at this time were used by the British to keep the Indians under subjugation and were introduced only to consolidate their own rule. It was in such a situation that Gandhi's sharp critique of machinery appeared in the form of Hind Swaraj. English technology was a symbol of imperialism, of subjugation. At this point of time in the history of India, technology had a prominent role to play in all that happened. However, it was not looked upon as we think of it today - primarily because of its use to curb the nationalist forces and to prolong the British rule. When America rose to superpower status because of its wealth and technology, India was still coming to terms with the damage inflicted on its path to progress by the British. Though a few engineers and scientists from India were known all over the world, the masses had very restricted, if any access to technology.

Post Independence - The Modern Era

After Independence, India has had a lot to struggle with other than how to get on to the technology bandwagon. Problems like over population, poverty and communalism raised their ugly heads, and though an important part of our culture, technology still remained confined. Nehru, in his effort to bring India at par with the other technologically advanced nations of the world, was the first to start a process of setting up institutions and industries which had an important role to play in increasing the prominence of technology in our daily lives. The five-year plans had quite a lot to say about how to advance in this field, and successive governments have placed technological advance high in their agendas. Today India is a 'third world nation' but Indian minds are considered to be amongst the best in the world when it comes to their application to technology. We take loans from the World Bank to set up technological projects but then, the initiative is our own. Today India can claim to have one of the best space programmes in the world, and though extremely controversial, nuclear capability is again one of India's strengths on the technological field. The 'cutting edge' is here - as consumers, we have the latest technological innovations - cell -phones, Laser Disk players, Pentium III 600s, and free access to Internet. Multinationals are launching their products in India at the same time as in the 'rich' countries -an indication of the changed scenarios in the Indian market. Names of Indian tech-wizards like Azim Premji and Sabeer Bhatia feature almost daily in world magazines. Indian software products are valued all over the world and are competing with global giants like Microsoft. And in keeping with the change from the pre-modern era, technology has detached itself from art and has become a part of science. It is science today that leads technology in modern India as in other contemporary cultures. Where technology was used to create exquisite seals, glasswork and structures like the

Taj Mahal, today technology has attached itself exclusively to the realm of science.

This modern magic has created many millionaires still in their 20s, and promises to make many more. We as Indians are trying hard to propel ourselves forward after the era of subjugation - both economic and political. But what we feel should also be done is that technology should be used to drive away illiteracy and impoverishment, and should not serve the sole purpose of entertainment and convenience for the elite, which is seems to be doing now. We need to further the goals laid out in our constitution instead of trying to make insignificant changes to it. We have to put in the initiative that such a task requires, and be able to face any obstacles that come in the way. Only then we will be able to say that technology has truly become a positive aspect of our culture, and India has become an advanced nation in the true sense.

The Post Modern Scenario

The Construction Deconstruction Paradox In Technology

In the foregoing discussion, we showed the position of technology in Indian culture and that we are not alien to proper usage of science and technology. But is technology always good? Or in other words, is there some criteria for using technology and how does quality of life depend on it? These are some of nagging questions that haunt us in the post - modern culture. Scientists even speculate about robot societies, and technology penetrating every aspect of human life. Today these issues are of paramount importance, as the illusion of a “technological utopia” is widespread and the masses are taking to it without any judgement on their part and this may eventually lead to a major catastrophe in the long run.

The main reason that may lead to a technological breakdown is that the use of technology has become an end in itself. No longer is technology thought of as an aid in performing one’s duty. People use technology just for the sake of using it and to get a “technological high” and a sense of pride. This attitude is the most prevalent one today and is increasing exponentially by leaps and bounds and one day it may lead the human race to “**A TECHNOLOGICAL SUICIDE**”.

Some few points which immediately spring up due to this attitude are:

- Technological Dependence
- Alienation of Values
- Unemployment
- Makes people unnecessarily proud
- Leading to Comfort or Stress?

The above points lead to the paradox. There may be some advantages in using a particular technology but its unforeseen

disadvantages may outweigh its benefits. Hence the Construction – Deconstruction Paradox.

Blind technological globalisation is aiding the above purpose, and if we don't develop a deeper insight into these matters, we may eventually be lost in the race for technological supremacy and reach the point of no return. A more unbiased view is required from the present leaders of our culture and they should participate in the globalisation process with insight rather than "Everyone does it so I will do it" attitude. Talking of technological globalisation, let us discuss globalisation and its effects in further detail. This is exactly what the next section does.

Globalisation: The Role and Effect of Technology

To discuss the effects of Globalisation on our culture, first of all we must be familiar with the term globalisation. Globalisation is the current buzzword for the 'shrinking' of our planet. Some historians of the 21st century consider the crumbling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 - the symbol for the break-up of the Soviet empire - a milestone along the road to globalisation. The most widely recognised symbol of the globalisation system is the World Wide Web, which unites everyone. It is impossible to talk of the 21st century without recognising the backdrop of the phenomenon of globalisation. The term 'globalisation' is also used to denote 'global economic integration', which despite all its problems, contradictions and criticism, now appears to be inevitable, built as it is on the backs of an irreversible '**technological globalisation process**' and an integrated global communications systems.(the WWW mentioned earlier + satellite communication) This process will increase world trade and, hopefully, global wealth, too. Globalisation, then, is a slow and relatively consistent process, which requires permanent structural change.

America as the leader of Globalisation...and Culture:

Sneakers, blue jeans, burgers, Hollywood blockbusters - cultural icons of our times? Or, cultural imperialism? It is the fault line that is characteristic of the globalisation of world culture. To many, globalisation is synonymous with Nike, Levi's and MTV. It crowns the United States the king of pop culture. It pits the United States against foreign cultures. Or for that matter Hollywood Inc. & Madison Ave. vs. The World.

There is a fundamental difference of view in India and the U.S. as to what culture is and how important culture is to any individual country. We think the real problem lies in the fact that they don't have to worry about their identity being overwhelmed by anybody else in the world. Nobody else is big enough to overwhelm them, the Americans, the big Uncle SAM.

But the real dilemma remains. At its core the debate is about cultural policy, how countries individually and as an international community view the importance of cultural diversity and how they develop the

means to nurture an independent identity in our brave new world of globalisation. It is about how to ensure that globalisation doesn't lead to a loss of cultural diversity, a loss of independent identity. Even President Bill Clinton acknowledged that globalisation "ain't worth it if we lose the human face of the international community."

Although the United States, a nation the size of a continent, is the most powerful state on earth, it is far from being the most sophisticated culturally. Often described as a melting pot, the specific identities of its different ethnic groups (Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, Irish, Italian, Hispanic, Jewish, Asian, African American, Native American, etc) remain pronounced.

Where does Technology come into all this?

Technology has been the main reasons for popularising the trend of "Globalisation". Indeed, modern inventions like the Internet and the WWW are widely attributed as the primary agents in making this world a smaller place and leading to the coinage of such terms as "Global Village". It is technology that serves as an asset when it comes to endowing a specific culture with universal appeal. But that appeal may be totally superficial. As an example, let us take the case of the US, which has the undeniable edge of American media translation. So far, electronic translation has proved unable to capture the richness of language. All the more so with the growing dependence on digital programming which, to one extent or another, limits the ability to reproduce the underlying nuances of language. By reducing the connotations of words to their apparent meaning, electronic translation has only superficially and artificially bridged the differences between cultures.

Examining the effects

While all this interconnected fabric of tissue, electrons, metal, fibre-optics, words and energy has mammoth potential for improving the human condition, it also can disrupt the lives of innocent people.

Cultures in poor countries are under siege from the forces of global economic integration. Today's flow of culture is unbalanced, heavily weighted in one direction, from rich countries to poor. People's lives are being linked more deeply, intensely and immediately than ever before as distance, time and borders diminish. The "unevenness" of globalisation and open markets are contributing to cultural insecurity in poorer nations like ours, which have removed barriers against imports of art and entertainment from the West. Which is why every now and then we have an Ashok Singhal and a VHP raising its head. At the same time, culture has become a commodity to be sold in the form of handicrafts, music, books, films and tourism. Although the

spread of ideas and images enriches the world, there is a risk of reducing cultural concerns to protecting what can be bought and sold, neglecting community, custom and tradition that has prevailed for centuries.

Globalisation and entertainment

At the core of the entertainment industry in India and other countries - film, music and television - there is a growing dominance of US products, and many countries are seeing their local industries wither. The single largest export industry for the United States is entertainment - not aircraft or automobiles - In 1997 alone, Hollywood films generated gross profits of more than 30 billion dollars worldwide and the blockbuster, 'Titanic', grossed more than 1.8 billion dollars. The expansion of global media networks and satellite communications technologies give rise to a powerful new medium with a global reach. Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) have infiltrated most developing nations, at times beaming programmes 24 hours a day. The same networks that open Third World homes to CNN and BBC news programming also have brought Hollywood to an increasing number of otherwise remote villages in India. Furthermore, the spread of global brands - Nike, Sony - is setting new social standards from New Delhi to Tokyo.

Such onslaughts of foreign culture, can put cultural diversity at risk and make people fear a loss of identity. What is needed is support for indigenous and national cultures - to let them flourish alongside foreign cultures. But probably this is too much to ask for.

The phenomenon of globalisation brings up many opportunities to learn from each other, and to benefit from a wider range of choices, but it also seems very threatening. Parents find their children attracted by products and role models from alien cultures just as workers find their jobs rendered obsolete by imported technology and foreign competition. Instead of widening our choices, globalisation can seem to be forcing us all into the same shallow, consumerist culture - giving us the same appetites but leaving us more than ever unequal in our ability to satisfy them.

The Traps of Media: effects of media globalisation on our culture.

- Representing truth?
- Degradation of cultural values (and their origin)
- Media Today (information from all sides - The Post Modern Dilemma) - print , audio , video , Internet , ads of all kind -> WWW -> Wine , Women , Wealth

As discussed earlier, the entertainment industry and other forms of media if scrutinised closely raise many deep questions and issues. It is impossible to imagine a world without presence of media. It has penetrated our lives in every respect and one is constantly bombarded by useful (?), useless and degrading information. One may even not want to be involved with media, but it hardly matters. Media is not a carpet which only the rich tread, but is also accessible in (at least in one of its many forms) to “the less fortunate ones” and no one lies outside its influence. Which is why globalisation (read westernisation) of media has a very deep impact on our age old cultural traditions.

A majority of the media products are stuffed with answers, as if it is their task to inform people and then tell them how to act. This position that the media takes is a top-down one, and belittles the wisdom and knowledge that people possess and their understanding of things. Also, the media which we are exposed to in the present day scenario is governed by influences of a largely different culture. This primarily has an effect of presenting before us foreign cultural values that are in direct conflict with our values and ethics. The law of entropy (a natural tendency towards disorder) applies quite well in our case, and most of the population follows the easier path of adopting less moral stances leading to the blind aping of the west.

The power of the media

Let us examine why media is so influential. Statistics show that we spend about 65,000 of our 100,000 waking hours involved in solitary activities and in direct informal relationships with family and friends, and these activities play a major role in the development and maintenance of important personal memories. We spend about 35,000 of our waking hours with our larger culture in formal and informal metaphoric/symbolic activities -- about 12,000 hours in school, *and about twice that much with various forms of mass media (e.g., TV, computers, films, music, sports, non-school print media, churches, museums)*. Global media thus plays a major role in the development and maintenance of important culture memories. So tinkering with media and influencing what it presents before us directly influences our culture. In fact, one would not be joking when one said that the mass media are so powerful that they can 'inject' their messages into the audience, or that, like a magic bullet, they can be precisely targeted at an audience, who irresistibly fall down when hit by the bullet. In brief, it is the idea that the makers of media messages can get us to do whatever they want us to do. And it is often the case that the effects of media are not very obvious as they are in principle long term effects.

Another minus-loss of cultural diversity

One of all such effects is a homogenization of our culture and the loss of cultural diversity, which India is so proud of. If the country shares the same media perspective, the same viewpoint, if we are all looking through the same lens out towards the world, a 'global village' may have been formed at a price. That price is homogenization. There is undoubtedly evidence to suggest such a trend. A child fanatically collecting American sports cards in Delhi and Madras, Rajasthanis, Punjabis, Malayalis and the Jaintias discarding their local beverages for Coca Cola. Women deciding not to breast-feed their babies due to baby food formula advertising. On top of all this the power of the media to represent and construct the world rests in the hands of a few western corporate interests. All these social and cultural forces of the media have the ability to change cultural and political values in a totalitarian fashion.

Toying with our emotions

Emotion drives attention, which drives learning, memory, and behaviour, so global media often insert strong primal emotional elements into their

programming to increase attention. Since violence and sexuality in media trigger primal emotions, most young people confront thousands of violent acts and heavy doses of sexuality during their childhood media interactions. This comes at the expense, alas, of other more positive and normative experiences with human behaviours and interactions. Global media tend to show us how to be sexy not sexual, how to be powerful not peaceful.

Does the media increase our sense of belonging...?

One can also argue that media acts in an opposite way by increasing our sense of belonging to a particular place. When we hear on the news that the French are resuming nuclear tests in the Pacific the media makes us more aware of our sense of place and difference as Indians. When we almost instantly witness a terrorist attack in Oklahoma, we become more aware of the difference between India and America's social problems. In this way the media possibly contributes to our sense of place by bringing the world into our homes. But this is only a weak point against the many degrading qualities of media globalisation. Further, such an observation stands true generally in the presence of a local rather than global media. And really how much localised is our media today? On the other hand, how Americanised is it today? The following text discusses this issue:

THE US INFLUENCE

One of the major influences on our media is Uncle Sam. People get enthralled by the idea of a post-modern society following a “land of the free” paradigm in which one is not bound by moral or ethical social constraints. Let us see what Uncle Sam really has up his sleeve.

In the United States, in the grocery shops, to minimise waiting time, items are priced electronically by the cashier, and a voice system announces the prices to keep the customer informed. In the United States, practically every household has two automobiles, a television and phone connections in every room. You just turn a knob for cold or hot air/water in your home. This is getting boring. No?

But in the US, every three minutes an automobile is stolen. Every year forty million cows are slaughtered. More than 60% percent of the marriages end up in divorce within five years. Many old parents reside in sanatoriums visited once a year (or not at all) by their “ever - busy” offspring. In the US, if your daughter is 15, you are lucky if she has not had sex at least once. Perhaps an abortion is due. Perhaps you should tell

her about condoms. In the US, schools are places of drug - trafficking. Then again you can never tell, if your ward will return home without being shot dead by someone crazy. Yes, these days even kids carry guns to school in the US.

Whatever yardstick we choose, aren't basic contentment and peace of mind the primary ingredients of good quality life which all cultures strive to achieve? We find that people at large are more tense and less content these days than a generation ago and the media has a large contribution in making this "American Dream ver 2.0 " come true.

The Role of the Indian engineer in Technological Globalisation

Talking of the American Dream, another effect of the globalisation of media has been to nurture Indian minds towards attaining the original version of it. Media and rapid advances in the field of Internet have provided a way to young, inventive minds to develop moneymaking strategies and in a way have added to the 'brain drain' factor. The globalisation of Indian media and the Internet have created a new class of Indian culture, possibly the fifth Varna - the techies or the Indian IT professionals in the US.

Their home country is a place where seven out of 10 people still work the land. But here they are known for toiling over computer code, and they are fast becoming leaders in the virtual terrain of the Internet. Indian immigrants to Silicon Valley have launched prominent Web firms such as Hotmail, Exodus Communications and Junglee. They also make up the bulk of skilled workers snapped up by tech firms through the H-1B visa program.

The tens of thousands of Indians now living in the Bay Area not only create computer companies, but have carved out a cultural niche that includes Hindu temples, Hindi movie houses and schools for learning Indian dance and music. What's more, Indian techies here have set up professional support groups to help each other launch the next Hotmail.

Back in India, meanwhile, a burgeoning software industry boasts 50 percent annual growth over the past three years. Why does such tech talent flow from Bangalore and Bombay? Access to global media and education, together with their own talent accounts for part of Indians' Internet success.

Indian techies are part of a broader pattern of highly skilled immigrants making a big difference in Silicon Valley. A June 1999 study by UC-Berkeley professor Anna Lee Saxenian found that immigrants made up 32 percent of the region's scientific and engineering workforce in 1990, and the number has likely increased

thanks to higher immigration limits this decade. What's more, Saxenian discovered Chinese and Indian engineers were senior executives at about one-quarter of Silicon Valley's new technology businesses in 1998—businesses that together accounted for more than \$16.8 billion in sales and 58,282 jobs.

The Role of Indian Culture in shaping the Engineers

The culture of connectedness may be one reason why Indians have shown a knack for Internet firms, says Rajeev Motwani, a Stanford University computer science professor. Motwani has advised several former Indian students as they launch Internet firms.

"The Internet is something that ties people together," Motwani says. "The Indian culture tends to be a web of interrelations amongst your family and your neighbors."

Indians have a long history of excelling in abstract thinking useful in writing computer code. The concept of zero was developed by Indians, he notes. "Indians are naturals for software."

Another factor in the South Asian success story is the tendency for Indian parents to stress science or technological careers. Indian engineers and doctors often make 10 times what teachers make. The preferred career used to be a doctor, but that has shifted in recent years toward computer engineering.

Indians focus on improving their education more than Americans. That's partly because Indians haven't had enough disposable income to buy luxury items, and generally invest their money in future skills.

Technology in the Next 10 Years

No one can really predict whether information technologies will dominate the first 10 years of the next millennium, or whether some new revolutionary business trend like biotech applications will prevail. The only sure thing is the persistent shrinkage of our planet as the trend of globalisation continues.

Conclusion

Nagging questions

While the field of culture is obviously not the field of information, the achievements of the information age are now determining the parameters of culture. The globalisation of information provides channels of communication and interaction between cultures. The latest such channel is the Internet, the global network of electronic communication which, by cancelling distances of time and space, has contracted the planet and accelerated history, with all the implications this carries for culture.

One implication is the need for a universal idiom that can overcome language barriers, whether by adopting an existing language (English) or by inventing a new language for this purpose. Technology has now created the possibility and even the likelihood of a global culture. The Internet, fax machines, satellites, and cable TV have swept away the old national cultural boundaries. Global entertainment companies shape understandings and dreams of ordinary citizens, wherever they live. Will our culture, then, inevitably fall victim to a global "consumer" culture? Will English eradicate all our languages? Will consumer values overwhelm Indians' sense of community and social solidarity? Or, more optimistically, will a common culture lead the way to greater shared values and political unity?

The road ahead – what India can and should do

Conscious of the composite and fragile nature of its own cultural identity, India must today show exemplary responsibility where its own cultural heritage is concerned, and with regards to its present-day and future cultural life. This responsibility must involve a greater sensitivity in its contacts with other cultures. Inescapably bound up in permanent exchanges with other evolving cultures, the dynamics of Indian culture can only be impoverished and compromised by misguided protectionism.

If public authorities in India leave the field open to the economic interests of the "global players" in the vital sectors of information and communication, they must, in the interests of preserving our societies' cultural identity, establish norms that will ensure the

beneficial use of new technologies. In order to prevent an irreversible impoverishment of Indian culture, the control of content and of its communication cannot be left to the sole ambitions of the industrial and commercial parties.

Yet, at the same time, faced with the enormous initiatives launched by the United States we also feel deep concern regarding the preservation of cultural expressions and identities in India. Waiting for the wave of multimedia products to unfurl, products of more or less limited value, designed, fabricated and homogenised to be easily sold on the world market, this concern anticipates the threat of a profound upheaval in the Indian media landscape; thanks to the powerful instrument which the information highways represent, this landscape could be submerged by an ocean of images of which only the smallest proportion has any valuable content.

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