Society, Media and Technology Relationship: An Overview

Vijai Pratap

Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. E-mail: vijairesearch@gmail.com

Abstract

The relationship of human and technology have been found in every civilizations phase. Technology has given a pace to the modernizations of society. As human civilization has moved and developed, means of communication have grown together. Communication started through pictures in caves. Symbols and pictures were the media to express thoughts, notions and activities of that period. People begin developing technology from the objects they use in their daily life. After the origin of the state, a new communication medium has made it realizes its existence. This paper examines how the invention of media technology changes the shape of state formation and social systems.

Keywords: Media, Technology, Society, State, Communication

Introduction

The relationship between society and technology is as much as old as human existence. Uses of stone during the Stone Age and later the uses of bronze and iron (during the bronze and iron civilization) tied the human being with its civilization process. Before 700 BC, the proof of using iron instead of copper could be found at the north bank of Ganga. (Shrimali, 2011, p.1) The invention of copper and iron was an essential and first step of revolution in the history of human civilization. It made them learned to clean the forest and get settled in a living place. And later, several tools of iron played a vital role to develop human civilization. People started using iron as a tool for agricultural purposes, leading to an increase in production capacity. Iron started to be used for other purposes. The surplus production has led to putting the base for the concept of state and classified the communities.

As human civilization has moved and developed, means of communication have developed together. People first started with speech, and literacy was being followed later by few groups of people. The existence of Homo sapiens has been considered for 30000-50000 BC.

The first script which has been found is deemed to be 6000 years old (Ong, 2002, p.2). Almost nearer to 30,000 BC, people started to use the symbol. Then, communication started through pictures in caves. Symbols and pictures were the media to express thoughts, notions and activities of that period. After the origin of the state, a new communication medium has made it realizes its existence. It means coins, signet, jewels, pyramids, pillars of Sumerian, Egyptians, Mesopotamia and Harappan cultures were not only expresses the existence of state but the technique of communication also. Herold Innis's book 'Empire and communication' has established the relationship between a communication medium and power structure development. Innis found that the permeation of communication medium in ancient Egyptian civilization had changed the nature of state power. The use of stone as a communication medium has led to putting base for autocracy in the first two royal dynasties, whereas papyrus uses led to the emergence of the democratic organization (Innis 1950, p. 17, 29). After papyrus came, a new authority of 'scribes' emerged who were nearer to state, and the status they followed was equally to

Priest. These were similar to the administrative officer as they were responsible for maintaining economic accountants. Innis explained that papyrus has made it easy to permeate communication; otherwise, it wasn't possible through the stone, expanding the empire. Similarly, complicated writing has provided the base for religious or military power, but it challenged the monopoly of religion after the emergence of the words.

During *Vedic* era in India, Knowledge was being monopolized by Brahmins only. Reading and writings were limited to them only. "A wide gap between administration and lower strata of society has provided space for the propagation of Buddhism. Brahmins monopolized on the knowledge of *Veda* and emphasized using these kinds of medium so that lower strata of society will be get connected with it. Buddhism ideology and its writing had challenged the oral tradition controlled by *purohits*." (Innis, p.98)

Ashoka (304-232 BC) inscribe the *dhamma* edict on stone to propagate its teachings. "As per the pillar edicts 6, teachings given by *dhamma* had been circulated after the 13 years of Ashoka *abhishek*. Although very few people had known with the skills of reading and writing. This was the reason that *dhamma* inscribed in stone has been ordered for oral reading. And even later, officers were recruited for this oral reading. " (Singh, 2009 p. 352)

Technology and its social relation

Every society develops the required minimum technology by itself. Technology is vital to maintain the dynamics of society. People start developing technology from the objects they use in their daily life. Thomas Hughes has assumed technology as a system. He said that system has several parts, and all are interrelated. In the same way, technology is also interlinked and dependent on the other part of society. The technology uses the physical, intellectual and symbolic sources of society which is continuously interrelated with society. (Hughes 1983, p.7) In a similar way, Hughes has found that technological development is dependent on its other contemporary

technologies. As he said that technology does not evolve suddenly, it evolves with a gradual process which includes the development of existing technology of the period. For example, television has developed with a systematic process of several technological developments, including the development of Bain's electric wire for transmitting pictures(1842), copying the telegraph of Blakewell (1862), electric eye invention of Carey's in 1875, scanning system of Nipkow's (1884), Photoelectric cells of Elster and Geitel's (1890), Braun's cathode-ray tube(1897), cathode ray receiver of Rosing(1907), and Campbell Swinton's electronic camera proposal in (1911). (Williams 1974, p10)

Technological development for surplus production is affected by the social-political and economic structure. But this is controlled by the decision makers of social, political and economic structures. The power that controls the social system also holds the development of technology as per its own requirement and even promotes it. This is why technology has generally been developed in the European countries as their societies realize the requirement of technologies as per their societal needs or the needs of controlling the structure of society. Several societal systems get backwards in technological development only because they wanted to maintain their society's status quo. If India could not contribute to developing any technology, then the biggest reason is its socio-economic controlling structure. India could not invent the washing machine only because the power structure controlling here do not need it. If it would have designed the washing machine, then the *dhobi's* (a washerman) responsibility would have been finished. Then definitely, the tendency for breaking caste structure would have been developed. But it does not mean Indian society does not have any knowledge about technologies. Indian culture does have tried to discover technologies as per its requirement. Take the *Dhobi*, for example; before using chemical mix washing powder, they were using *Reh* (Alkali soil) to wash the clothes. If a flood comes in the area of Assam, then people use the Banana's stem

or bamboo's to create rafts and make themselves secure from the flood. Every society has technical knowledge, but it has been used in a limited way. When the technologies used in daily life are used for increasing production, it becomes a form of machine.

Even in those European countries where all these machines have been invented, there is also social division on the basis of inequality. But machines were perceived there as a profitable object. As Marx says, a machine performs its operation exactly as a worker does with its tool. The machine simply saves the labour-time, and the left time could be used for some other works which could produce surplus value. Marx thinks that the bourgeois cannot sustain without revolutionizing the production machine, and this relates with the capacity of production and then automatically co-relates with the society. (Marx, 1887 p.225)

Marx thinks that technology and especially production technology impact and change the human social relation or the organizational structure. Finally, the social relations and cultural practices are being followed on that technical and economic basis given in society.

Such as the circulation of communication technology in India has changed the social relation of here's society. Newspaper or Radio has broken the monopoly of higher caste on information, TV has brought structural changes in the family, and the internet has attacked taboos of Indian society.

Relationship between media and society

The one aspect of the invention of communication medium is related to the means of knowledge, expression or conversation. The other aspect is associated with the domination of socio-cultural practices through these mediums. Suppose we see the history of communication medium. In that case, we will find that ordinary people have started to use only those communication medium which the dominated community has left for the sake of adopting new technology or communication medium. Initially, when the word knowledge came in England, the working class was introduced with the reading text only to at

least read the notices. It is similar to feudal Indian society, deprived *Dalits* of the rights of education. The right to study was limited to those people who were having a higher status in the society.

In the same way invention of the printing press was a revolutionary step. But initially, when it started to publish books, papers were not primarily used for ordinary people. During the 15-16th century, the press was used by politically, economically, religiously dominated sections of society. If we see the social history of the communication medium such as telegraph, telephone, radio, cinema, TV or Internet,, we will find that all these mediums were initially used by authorities in power who controlled all social institutions. But there is also a second aspect of these mediums. The invention of these mediums had provided a tool for expression, acquiring knowledge and entertainment for people, and this had empowered them more than its earlier situation. The invention of communication medium has brought changes in the characteristics of power institutions. Every medium has given more and more space to express than its earlier position.

Freedom of expression which delivered to communication medium comes under individual freedom. Today's media institution comes under private industry. But media does not impact individually; it impacts collectively and socially. This is the reason that even after being a private industry, it affects the whole society. This was the reason, the printing press has brought under licensing category. Even at the initial stage for taking telephone, radio and TV, license criteria have been adopted to regulate it. Presently, for the regulation of the internet and social media, laws are being made. There are several incidents to control the mediums of media in democratic countries. The power institution afraid of media only when it seems that media permeates some notion to influence the status-quo of the system. Media is simply not being controlled only through law and order. In a capitalist society, media kept open for supporting the favourable ideology. All the developed countries that want to expand their economy are the biggest supporter of media

freedom. Marxist theoreticians have seen media as a weapon of the state, which establishes and expand the supportive ideology of state among people. Theodore Adorno, who sees media as a cultural industry, explains it as a danger for imposing it as cultural imperialism (Adorno, 1991). Noam Chomsky realizes that monopoly of few corporations (American) has developed the threat of propaganda through its content (Chomsky, 2002). Experts have drawn attention to the changes occurring in people's behaviour because of the impact of media.

Conclusion

Any society develops the technology as per its requirement. There is not any technology that considers being perfect. Technology left its impact as per the socio-political environment of its time. This is why when we analyze the relationship

between media technology and human society, it becomes necessary to enquire about the socio-political-economical environment of that period when technology is being made to function then only we could reach any conclusion. Society uses technology in two ways, one for consumption and the second for surplus. When these technologies are being used as a surplus, then their impact get changes. When used as a surplus, media technology started to be function according to the controlling power (capitalist or state) and starts to permeate the favourable ideology in society. Thus, this is how a state power (capitalist or state) expands its empire through technology, and tries to promote and circulate new technologies to maintain their impact. Permeating a technology serves more to them who control it rather than those who uses it. And to keep control in society, this process continues to be move on.

References

1. Shrimali, Krishna Mohan (2011). *The age of iron and the religious revolution c.700-c.350 BC*, New Delhi: Tulika Books
2. Ibid, p.21
3. Ong, Walter J. (2002). *Orality and Literacy*, New York: Routledge p.2
4. Innis, Herald. (1950). *Empire and communication*, London: Oxford Press p. 17,19
5. Ibid, p.98
6. Singh, Uprider. (2009), *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*, New Delhi: Pearson India p.352
7. Hughes, Thomas P. (1983), *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society*, London and Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press p.6
8. Williams, Raymod. (1977), *Television and Cultural Form*, New York: Routledge, p10
9. Marx, Karl. (1887), *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume I*, Moscow: Progressive Publisher p.262
10. Marx, Karl. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* Ed. David McLellan. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977.
11. Chomsky, Noam., Herman, Edward S. (2002), *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*, New York: Pantheon Books
12. Adorno, Theodor W. (1991), *The cultural industry: selected essays on mass culture*, New York, London: Routledge