

Globalization – In Search of Monotony

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A close friend of mine, whenever she wrote a letter, would send a small bird's feather in the envelop, because we both loved to lay feathers shed by birds on our palms for a long time. Every time I touched the feather sent by her, I would be moved by a deep emotion. I would read the letter in private, slowly, in my own special way. We used to count feathers to see who was lagging behind in sending letters. I used to find a friend of mine from abroad quite unique because I could sense in his letters the touch of a distinct mind. He would begin every letter with two colorful brush-strokes. I had never seen him use the same colour twice. His handwriting was beautiful. Once the postman himself could not help saying, 'Sir' that beautiful letter has arrived'. My friend would also use different kinds of stamps, bearing in mind my likes and dislikes. I used to wait for his letters eagerly.

The last letter sent in this manner by my artist friend arrived at the beginning of last year. After that, the envelop and the brush strokes disappeared in the whirling of technological progress. He still writes to me, but through e-mail. These letters begin with a few dots and some simple gibberish, followed by wavy lines and they consist of well-woven words in familiar moulds- the same format for everyone. These letters conclude with generic endings, a deliberate strategy to conceal one's own individuality. Everyone's letter is identical. The lines separating official from personal, or very private letters, have disappeared. Thanks to e-mail, the number of letters from my close friend has increased. Her letters are full of questions about my daily activities- no different from others. The feathers are still there, but they are pictures painted by unknown hands and already loaded on the computer. She has often asked me how I like the feathers; I have never replied. All letters, letters from anyone, are the anyone, are the same. There is no difference- the letter from the Head of the Department, the news of a relative who has passed away, the chidings of the doctor, government directives, and friends' letters all have the same mould, formatted in the same way. Who knows, perhaps this kind of identity-less flawless existence is the prime contribution of technological progress.

Palash was my classmate. He used to make innumerable spelling mistakes and could not write a single line of correct English. Our English teacher Jagannathbabu would often call Palash's guardian. He used to read out the English writing of our first boy, Ardhendu, and exclaim, 'this is what I call writing in English! Look at all the pages; there is not a single spelling mistake.' Then he would box Palash's Ears and say, 'you will never be able to learn English, you silly boy'.

Today, thanks to advancement in technology, curly lines appear under every spelling error on the screen of the computer. The Palashes of today correct the mistakes even before anyone comes to know about them-just a click of the cursor on the alphabet and bingo, success is achieved. Nowadays there is no distinction between Palash and the first boy, Ardhendu. Writing flawless English is merely a game played with the help of the computer. You only have to instruct the computer whose style of writing you would like to adopt. The machine will level everybody. The mind or the head is no longer necessary- it is just a game of tapping the finder. No difference between man and will remain in the area of scholarship. The more the money, the more the progress, hence, the more scholarship. There will be a whole lot of undistinguished people and their standard quota of knowledge. Nowadays all the big cities of the world seem somewhat similar- the same metro-rail, the same shops behind the same glass doors, the same kind of advertisements with no variety- the unattractive fluid marketing process which the eyes have gotten used to.

These days in all big cities of the world there is the practice of erecting a single tall tower in which is a revolving restaurant. One can sit in it and look at the city while going round and round. All around are innumerable closely built houses- a repository of tall slim boxes stuffed together. All these high-rises have the same construction. But if you noticed carefully, cities of the past were distinctive, in accordance with the countries to which they belonged. The competition was one of individualities feel that at present man has no idea what he will do. He cannot decide in which area he will enter into a competition with others, or establish his superiority over them.

It pains me to think that man is acceptance a uniform style of construction which lacks verity. The tall Tower in Toronto (CN Tower), Niagara's cities Skylon Tower, South Korea's Seoul Tower, all resemble one another. The difference is one of height. Once when I entered a plaza in New York City I almost forgot the name of the country in which I was, because in a similar plaza in Canada's Toronto I had seen the same shops selling expensive goods, the same manners and modes of functioning, the same blatant display technological progress. I found no difference between the shopping area of London's Victoria Station and that of Washington's Dupont Circle. I have not seen any distinction between the mode of attracting customers in McDonald's fast food centers in Cambridge or Oxford, and the one's in Amsterdam or Mumbai. The exchange of money and goods, the menu, the packaging and even the test are all similar. I don't know with what intention Mr. McDonald has built the same kind of shop all over the world. There are many retailers like McDonald's, who are busy making the cities look identical.

Actually we are engaged in transforming the entire world into a city or Ecumenopolis, by intensifying technological progress. The day this will be possible, there will be no such thing as a village. The universe will be a whole big metropolis. On that day men will merely drown themselves in the apparent pleasures of a heartless superfast life-style. Itosan, a Japanese friend of mine, joined a travelling group with me for eighteen days to walk along the banks of river Ajoy in eastern India. He wanted to see the real rural India, because in his country there is no such thing as a village due to technological advancement. The problem is that even if the people of that country grow tired of living in cities, they are compelled to live there. The people of Japan have started looking for a more Varied and interesting life. They are making plans to build villages in a new way; if at all any variety can be retrieved from life suffocated by technology.

A friend of mine returned to the country after a long time. Like his parents we were also excited and made many plans around his visit while driving with him from the Airport we chatted, but in that one hour journey my friend, formally asking my permission, made five or six calls on his cell phone. As far as I remember, four out of six of these calls were directly related to his work. Thus our conversation was constantly interrupted by the calls- it was a kind of fragmentary friendship. Later I was even more surprised when my friend, on entering his home, embarrassing his mother and smiling courteously at every one, went from room to room in search of a plug point. The moment he found one, he plugged on his laptop and sat with his head bowed over it for half an hour. Now this laptop is his closest relative; the old relationships have dimmed. One of the effects of technology is dulling the memory. The way he works is supposedly the routine process in the corporate world, however tedious it may be. This is the way you have to operate. You cannot delay for even an hour. This marks the end of one's own individual way of spending time.

A few days ago I went to a wedding. One of the groom's friends kept on interrupting the marriage chants by sticking the cell phone to the groom's ear. The *purohit* (priest) was silent, or rather stunned into silence. Later, this friend was exposed to a lot of sarcasm when, at the climactic moment of the groom and bride looking at one another (the ritual is called *shubhadristi*), he tried to push the cell phone towards the groom. Standing at a distance I wondered whether this eagerness to keep track of the latest news or the routine wishes for a happy future life was at all necessary. No one needs to know every scrap of news or be swamped by loads of fake good wishes. If the mockery of the whole incident could really affect people's minds then we could ourselves harness technologies advancement when necessary. We would then be able to keep our emotions untouched by anything mechanical.

With the wide –spread use of internet, this will obviously become the main medium of communication in offices and courts. Hence, everyone will not have to attend office- one will be able to work on the computer at home or any other place, and send the needful to the appropriate places through internet. Nowadays the marketing value of e-commerce is high. A day will come when man will sit at home and buy anything from any corner of the world. Even dresses will be made sitting at on the sofa at home. The question is, is there any need for giving so much extra time to mankind? By saving so much time what will technology gain? Will the need for human beings be lessened or will man, in search of variety, turn round and stops the unrestrained progress of technology?

Of late, while taking oral examinations in different universities, many examiners like me are facing a new problem. Students are preparing their field reports on the computer by downloading material from the internet. Hence, no paper can be distinguished from the other- this is the same problem of finding the difference between Ardhendu and Palash. All reports have a foreign touch, but are all devoid of individuality. I have discovered a clue to a solution to this problem in a research on South Korea where students of higher classes have to practice a few pages of handwriting every day.

Once a Lecturer of Zoology while teaching cloning in her class had observed, 'if everyone in this classes looked identical, I would not have had the desire to teach.' May that day never come. We find it worth teaching because there are different characteristics in different students.

With the help of genetic engineering man has started producing animals, vegetables and fruit. We have been told that with the help of technology, different parts of the human body have started being made and replaced. Thus the ugly will become beautiful, the short will become tall, curly hair will become straight, dark complexion will become fair. There will be no such level as Dravidian and Aryan. Homogeneity will rule. It will not be possible to distinguish any one on the basis of the behavior, physical structure, test or culture. The stamp of uniformity will be imprinted on the body, mind and desire of all mankind.

Recently, one of my research students was doing some research on the relationship among the movement of Rivers, the consequent land formation and land use in Bengal. He had expected to find some differences in the land use of landforms on both sides on the river's upper, middle and lower course. This difference should be characteristic feature of the nexus between man and nature. But the planting of high fertility paddy, the unrestricted use of the rivers ground water table and the expectation of instant profit-loving greedy farmers have led to the same condition everywhere. Now there is not much difference in character and from between extensive, commercial farming and intensive subsistence farming.

Man is busy leveling the high land formation of different phases of the rivers course and feeling up low-lying areas to give it all a uniform level- a simple plain land made ready for easy convenience. But why? Why cannot man utilize technology to mould land appropriately, So that it can retain the variety of the natural landscape? This is kind of work will have scope for intense scientific research. As a student when traveling by train or bus in different place in Bengal, I saw varied forms of landuse as well as diverse kind of colorful crops- in other words, a cultivated land full of variety. Nowadays the view from the train is monotonous – only paddy after paddy field-simple variation of green. Earlier in different seasons pieces of land would remain vacant for special crops to be grown. Nowadays, thanks to high fertility seeds, the land never gets a chance to breathe freely. *Nabanna* (the harvest festival) was special festival for farmers –all members of farming family would wait eagerly for it. Now there is *Nabanna* all the year round – there is no more waiting for the festival, will no one think what will happen after this? Production and profit are not the only concerns of progresses. Life has a special massage. Hence, sort of constraint is necessary for the natural movement of our daily lives.

In the beginning of civilization the practical knowledge which started with man's mastery over fire, skill is hunting and making tools became 'classic knowledge in the feudal age. Then, after the industrial evolution, that knowledge once again became oriented towards practical life. But the current progress towards technological global convergence (electric money, micro-genetics, et al) is radically distorting the perception of life, forcing it to take a uniform and crude direction. Human civilization cannot merely exist on material or practical knowledge. The neglect of non-material knowledge that is, ethical knowledge, Knowledge of the human psyche, philosophical truth will create a large vacuum like a 'black hole' in human civilization, which will never be rectified with the aid of technology.

In an essay I defined human religion as 'the ability to read other minds.' In order to understand the human mind no one needs a mechanical box. The biggest mistake is to ignore the mind indulge in imitating others- some think that we are all engaged in doing or being compelled to do know. I feel that we should first understand the main ingredient of human existence .The answer can be found if we think deeply, without taking the help of the commands of a computer. The answer is variety, the essence of life.

The question is why man is running after uniformity by clinging to technology like an addiction. Will man ponder in silence about what is right and what is wrong?