LEFT: TECHNOCRAT, RIGHT: DIGITAL PARIAH, HUMANITY IN THE MIDDLE

Imagine waking up one day and finding yourself devoid of all technology- no mobiles, no computers, no television or even your fridge. Can you think of a worse nightmare? It will be akin to being back in the Stone Ages. This is the state of dependence we have built up on all things technology in recent times. It is extremely difficult to imagine ourselves without any of what we consider as our basic necessities- our definition of the latter having changed drastically in the last century.

Technology- Double-edged Sword?

The advent of Internet and its varied uses marked a great revolution for man- as grand as the Industrial Revolution. The ambit of the Internet is shockingly high and ever increasing. It may be that the Terminator movies may not be very far off in their estimation wherein computers will ultimately start taking control of mankind.[1] This is not to say that technology is completely bad. There is always a flip side to everything as is the cliché. Advances in technology always occur because of some insurmountable and urgent problem. For example genetic engineering came into existence with the good intentions of helping those with inherited genetic problems. But it was not foreseen that 'designer babies' would be the result of such advancement. Therefore the uses to which technological innovations are used for is entirely in our hands and so are its implications.

So does it mean that we should leave aside all technology? This would simply be ludicrous not to mention a waste of time. Some of them are potentially life-saving and life-altering and so we would definitely have reasons to keep innovating.

Now that the rhetorical point of whether to continue innovating has been dealt with, the question of how best to manage and preserve ourselves using the technological enhancements must be answered. In pursuit of all things that make life easier, we must realise that we are somewhere losing the opportunity to find ourselves. As Martha Graham says- 'Fire is the test of gold; adversity, of strong men.'[2] If we are not given the space and chance to prove ourselves, we will never be able to understand ourselves. It is seen that no matter the

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[1] Sourced from   http://www.kansascity.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/lewis-diuguid/article5495310.html
[2] Sourced from   http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/marthagrah377129.html

power of observational learning, it is more deeply embedded when there is experiential learning[3]. It is not enough for us to make lists of our attributes which become meaningless if they are not proven. We must allow and provide for ourselves the opportunities to test them. That is when the accuracy of our claims can be checked. First let us understand the current state of one country that is being specifically referenced to through the essay.

The Indian Scenario

Let us look at a few crucial numbers in relation to India as it is in relation to technology. The most recent Census conducted here, the 2011 one reports that out of the total 250 million households in India, an average number of people who use phones is 58.2% (Both mobiles and landlines) and the ones who use Computers are 4.7% (with or without internet)[4]. These numbers by themselves are not very significant except to show that more than half the population have phones to communicate and have computers. But here are another set of numbers than we can compare against and why the numbers are significant. Approximately 32% of the population have access to treated tap water and 47% of the population have access to proper bathroom facilities.[4] We can clearly see the comparison that more people in India have access to phones and computers combined than drinking water which is clearly a basic necessity. It goes to show how much our priorities have changed. Yes, definitely economic conditions of the country and the resources available in the country will be factors that affect the numbers presented above but in sheer numbers, they show a mind-blowing trend that our perception of priorities have shifted. In fact in one recent survey, it was seen that India was the third largest Internet user around the world.[5]

In psychology, there is a theory of Hierarchy of Needs by Abraham Maslow (1943).[6] This theory explains how there are various level of needs wherein the ones at the lowest levels have to first be fulfilled before the ones higher up can be satisfied. This means that the most basic needs like food, water, sleep and so on are the bottom. The latest internet meme on the same posits that there are two other levels below the physiological needs mentioned

[3] Sourced from   http://ctl.utexas.edu/teaching/engagement/experiential-learning/defined
[4] Census of India 2011- Govt. Of India   http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-Common/NSDI/Houses_Household.pdf
[5] Sourced from   http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/technology/internet/india-is-now-worlds-third-largest-internet-user-after-us-china/article5053115.ece
[6] Sourced from   http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23902918

above. These two levels include that of 'wifi' and 'battery life.'[7] Internet joke that it may be, it has nevertheless managed to convey the perception regarding what is important. Though accessibility is definitely an issue in terms of technological advancements, as was seen with the advent of the mobile phone, it can definitely be spread across and can become as necessary as food or water to us- regardless of whether from a rural or an urban context which does become an important factor in India. Now we can look towards understanding how to retain our humanity in the face of so much technology around it in spite of becoming technocrats.

Knowledge v/s Wisdom

Peter Drucker, in an article in the Economist (2001)[8] discusses how the current generation will be a 'knowledge generation.' He writes about three main characteristics of this group-

- Being borderless because knowledge travels across boundaries effortlessly.
- There is upward mobility with increasing knowledge, acquired through formal education.
- There is potential for both success and failure.

It is the last characteristic that will make a difference. The utility value and potential consequences of the knowledge is what becomes the most important. This can be related to the earlier part of the essay in which it was discussed that the responsibility of using technology is solely in our hands. Either we can use the same to the fullest in the positive sense to mutual personal and social benefits or else can be put into the selfish use of one single person with bad ambition.

It is essential to mention from personal observation regarding how information is available to us from the stage of infancy itself. Children as young as one year are able to see the attractiveness and usefulness of mobile phones. Gone are the days when infants were exposed to the environment and allowed to gradually develop and learn to filter appropriate information at the appropriate ages. Now, the entire world is available to them courtesy technology. This makes it vital for the right kind of lessons to be given by parents or teachers. This quote by Peter Drucker rightly notifies us of the magnitude of teaching- 'Teaching is the

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[7] Sourced from http://thefinancialbrand.com/47308/the-not-so-new-hierarchy-of-needs-in-banking/

[8] Peter Drucker's 'The Next Society' (2001) sourced from http://economist.com/node/770819

only major occupation of man for which we have not yet developed tools that make an average person capable of competence and performance. In teaching we rely on the 'naturals', the ones who somehow know how to teach.' Thankfully, it has remained one profession where the 'human touch' is still preferred and this trend must be encouraged before technology engulfs the same.

Let us take an analogy to further explain how technology is being used these days. Consider all the issues that technology helps us with as a river that needs to be crossed before we can walk ahead. Next let us regard technology as a boat that will help us cross this river. We make use of this boat which will help us be safely delivered to the other side of the river. It has thus served our purpose and so must be left behind as it is of no use on dry land. Our dependence on technology is akin to carrying the boat along with us even on dry land just because it proved its effectiveness on water. This tendency must be curbed before we collapse under the weight of the boat.

So the first thing one must become aware of is whether we are becoming so reliant on technology that we can no longer function without it. This definitely involves introspection and a lot of determination to be able to pry ourselves away from technology. Technology is such a wonderful thing that we should definitely not ignore it but doesn't mean we should use it as a crutch on which we should lean all our weight on.

Communication-Technology Links

One of the first things we will need to start doing is what Peter Drucker keeps stressing on- the importance of communication. With the advent of technology, woefully communication begins and ends with digital devices or so it seems these days. 'The new information technology... Internet and e-mail... have practically eliminated the physical costs of communications' as put by Prof. Drucker.[9] One can see the ironical side of this statement. Physical costs have been extended to include lack of face-to-face communication or any form of communication beyond digital aided ones. It is not an uncommon sight to see a family at dinner- all engrossed in their own mobiles or tablets. This is creating an unbalance in social relationships everywhere. When you cannot value communication-which forms the basis of

[9] Sourced from   https://leadershipdynamics.wordpress.com/2012/03/29/more-leadership-insights-from-peter-drucker/

social bonds, what hope exists in for the relationships themselves? The fact that is most wonderful is that technology has enabled us to bring the world closer in terms of communication. We can perhaps think of the days of snail mail which used to take weeks to be delivered to the recipient. Email, video-calling and IMing has enabled one to reach anyone across the globe in a matter of seconds. Taking up the boat analogy, we can perhaps see how these techniques have encroached upon the time that must be spent with other important things. Also there is the loss of that personal, 'human' touch that characterized the days of letters- that feeling that someone has taken the effort to communicate something to us. This made us feel valued.

Coming to how communication can be used to help make our lives better, it is definitely easy enough. Through means of digitalization, there are enormous amounts of information available online. The skill of using this information judiciously is precisely what needs to be learnt and taught. Optimal use of this enables us to discover hitherto unknown and unchartered arenas. This is something that can aid in personal and professional terms.

Taking the above point further, let us first concentrate on how technology and communication can help us optimize our world personally. In Peter Drucker's essay 'Managing Oneself',[10] he speaks about the importance of discovering our strengths and working based on that. He further talks about the how we need to discern between being a 'reader' or a 'listener' which in psychology terms can be equivalent to learning styles. As mentioned above, we need to take opportunities to discover our strengths. Making use of technology can be highly effective in this sense. To give an example, to discover if you have an eye for details as is required for several careers, we can make use of computer programs that provide speed tests on copying and typing matching information. Results will be much more accurate and faster than doing it by hand and being liable to human errors. Next, in the understanding of whether we are readers or listeners- it can help with understanding as well as the use of digital means can aid in converting one form of stimuli to the desired one for better processing. Again to state an example, suppose one discovers that he/she is a reader and thus responds better to visual stimuli and that the only means available in an audio channel like say lectures. We have devices to record voices or audio stimuli and we have several programs on computers that can help transcribe the same into something that can be read-thus helping the reader. Thus we can use technology to cross quagmires and then

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[10] Sourced from
http://academic.udayton.edu/lawrenceulrich/LeaderArticles/Drucker%20Managing%20Oneself.pdf

remember that our problem is solved and move on leaving the means behind till it is required again. Another way we can use digitalization to develop ourselves personally as individuals. As an instance, sometimes we are deeply unsatisfied with the way we are forced to give in to several ideologies just because we perceive that we have no support for our own. With the world coming closer digitally, we no longer have to be persuaded to choose another ideology. I can not only discover support for my own ideology but I can find means to check for other ideologies as well. Apart from this, personal development can become quite easy as well. We can use technology to aid us with time management- even with something as simple as from keeping an alarm or reminder; it can help us keep ourselves organized through the day, save the effort of wasting time with mundane mechanical work and instead go ahead with things to do that are actually important to be a human-paradoxically as it may seem.

Not only can it help personally but it of great importance for our professional lives. In the essay, we will be discussing two perspectives regarding how technology can aid us.

The first is at the level of education and the second is in terms of jobs or careers. Let us consider the former first- education.

- There has been a great boost to the general level of education with the advent of digital tools like projectors which enables Audio-Visual learning. Going back to the previous point of being a reader or listener- this technology can cater to people from either category simultaneously.

- Secondly, consider the emergence of MOOCs- Massive Open Online Course in the past decade or so. It has enjoyed tremendous success since then with people from across the globe with varied interests have been able to enjoy the classes of their choice which may not have been available from where they are geographically located. With MOOCs , there are no barriers in regard to one's age or gender or indeed any limitations at all in taking up a course. This is highly very conducive to people's interests.

- So cumulatively education has been boosted by the use of technology from very small ways like using a calculator or computer to help mathematical problems to using computers to solve complex statistical problems. Not only that, but with the help of technology, the spark of creativity can be ignited in students. It is said that all children are born with the ability to be creative. The monotonous routine in schools dampens

this potential.[11] Technology will come to the aid of this aptitude. Suppose someone has the potential to be a wonderful designer. With software such as Adobe Photoshop or Corel Draw, it will become possible for that person to fulfil that potential.

With the advent of Smartphones especially, it is like having your entire life in the palm of your hand. There is a specific application for every little thing. The dangers do exist regarding overuse of this which has already been developed above. In this context, for instance, an excess of calculator usage will lead to one's unfulfilled potential to calculate mentally- which is a loss in terms of learning in a way. This must definitely be avoided.

The other professional arena where it can be used to peak one's potential is with careers. It is true that with the dawn of computers, there was a drastic reduction of need for human resources. So how can it be said that it is actually aiding careers? The answer to this comes from the fact that computers provides a lot of employment possibilities and in fact also widens the range of people who can work. Due to the fact that computers especially are quite mobile and that there are tools like video-conferencing and so on, people can even work from home. In a country like India- this is indeed a boon with a lot of women in especially rural areas who are able to go out daily for a regular nine to five job. This is especially liberating for them. This is just one instance of how technology helps makes professional life easier.

To conclude, the essay has outlined the dual nature in terms of usage of technology. In a sense, technology and digital media represent the world can be seen as utopia- where anything will be possible. This can be misleading to a large extent though. Granted that it is immensely helpful, to understate it. As mentioned above, becoming a 'digital pariah' is not the answer. It is essentially all about how we manage to retain our humanity while making the optimal use of technology. We cannot definitely say for sure what will happen next. So we will continue to use technology judiciously and keep our fingers crossed hoping to reach our evolved states successfully. As Peter Drucker states-'Trying to predict the future is like trying to drive down a country road at night with no lights while looking out the back window.'

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[11] Sourced from http://edtechreview.in/trends-insights/insights/750-how-can-technology-enhance-student-creativity

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