

Harmony between Technology and Indian Culture

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Abstract

India has a rich cultural heritage with varied traditions and religions. Our ethics bind us towards a set of righteousness by developing a work ethos of life which says that all work, physical mental, managerial or administrative have to be directed towards working for the good of others. The friction between technological development and the preservation of cultural values, in particular and the influence of the former upon the course of social and cultural changes have been a great source of controversy. Cultural values are a determining factor in the choice and impact of technology. Technology may even transform cultural values, then how can technology and culture as independent systems be co-ordinated? In this paper author wishes to discuss how the use of technology for English language acquisition could affect the cultural identity of India.

Keywords: Indian Ethos, Technology, Values, Impact, Language Learning

Introduction

The friction between technological development and the preservation of cultural values, in particular and the influence of the former upon the course of social and cultural changes have been a great source of controversy. Cultural values are a determining factor in the choice and impact of technology. Technology may even transform cultural values, then how can technology and culture as independent systems be co-ordinated? In this paper I wish to discuss how the use of technology for English language acquisition could affect the cultural identity of India.

Aim of the Study

In this paper I wish to discuss how the use of technology for English language acquisition could affect the cultural identity of India. The primary focus will be the Indian context.

India has a rich cultural heritage with varied traditions and religions. Indian culture is known for family values, societal bonding and respect for elders, India represents a colourful mosaic of a number of people with their own culture, traditions, customs, values, languages, religious beliefs and cuisines. It is a melting pot of different cultures and the concoction produced henceforth is more beautiful than the individual cultural ingredients. This has been made possible because of high level of tolerance among the people which in turn is taught and transferred through our culture. Indian value system welcomes cultures from all the directions and gives complete freedom to propagate them on the Indian soil. Indian cultural ethos believes in influencing other cultures and getting influenced at the same time by other cultures. Indians have laid high stress on values like peaceful co-existence, spirituality, family ties, respect towards elders etc. The present India is a synthesis of all good elements taken from everywhere which has the capability to influence and appeal to the logical and rational mind for peaceful existence. Individualism is more of a western value. Indian society has always focused more on paying your debt to society and being responsible for one's family rather than breaking away to pursue one's individual desires. Our ethics bind us towards a set of righteousness by developing a work ethos of life which says that all work, physical mental, managerial or administrative have to be directed towards working for the good of others. The transfer of technology can be effective in the progress and development of orient communities only when they are in harmony with the social and cultural conditions of such communities. Ladriere by referring to the vast place occupied by science and technology in the life of modern societies wrote: "the problem that arises is how



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cultures can accommodate them without going astray, how they can at one and the same time satisfy the requirement in regard to roots and having ultimate aims, and giving science and technology the full recognition due to them." We are faced with two questions: on the one hand we must consider under what conditions science and technology can be integrated into a culture without destroying its inner harmony, and on the other hand we must examine what is meant by the unity of a culture in the circumstances of the world today, epitomized as these are by science, technology and their attendant economic and political phenomena.

However, technology is still considered to be an alien entity in traditional societies. Importation of technology has not brought desirable results. These countries have yet to develop technology in conformity with their needs and cultural values. In fact by making proper use of technology we can bring about a fundamental change in the ways of people's thinking and generate literacy. We can make use of media and communication technologies for creating understanding among different ethnic groups.

We have come a long way from the ancient gurukuls where the pupils were given one to one teaching. Our ancient universities were great seats of learning. But this very learning suffered a great deal due to foreign invasions and social ills within our society. But gradually education became a part of our daily lives and has been practiced in myriad forms for the last few centuries. Since the constitution of the Education Commission (1964-66) it has been acknowledged that education is a powerful instrument of social transformation and nation building. Education is seen critical for poverty alleviation, reduction of inequalities, and promotion of social harmony and strengthening of national unity. Education is seen imperative for increasing productivity, consolidating democracy, modernizing the country and developing scientific, moral and spiritual values.

India has one of the biggest systems of education with enrolment of million students, in universities, colleges and schools. There are a number of open universities and distance education institutions; the rate of growth since Independence is quite high, coverage has increased, dropout rate has reduced, and the percentage of girl students in education is increasing.

The introduction of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in education reflects and responds to present and future needs of people functioning in an intensely changing and challenging intellectual environment. Since the advent of the computer, the internet and the web numerous changes have occurred. The presence of IT has actually transformed the teaching, learning and administrative environment in both primary and higher education and in order to keep pace with the rapidly changing landscapes it has become inevitable to implement technology integration. Technology Integration is the use of technology resources, that is, Computers, Internet, e-mail, Digital Cameras, CD-

ROMs, Software Applications, and Electronic Publications etc. in daily classroom practices, and in the management of a college. The vital question as to what role can technology play in the field of education has been often posed. Theoretically speaking, technology (1) helps change the student/teacher roles and relationships, (2) It cannot teach; only teacher can teach, (3) can enhance the teaching-learning process. But even technology is continuously changing. "The acceptance of change is a major requirement for technology integration. It is an ongoing process. It demands continual learning. Change is not always easy. The initial human reaction to change is resistance. Resistance makes for slow change, but change is inevitable. In the wake of all these developments technology integration becomes important. The following are the reasons for integrating technology in the field of education:

1. Technology has completely revolutionized the way we think, work and play;
2. Technology enables teachers to provide multiple representations of content (images, graphs, diagrams, tables etc.) and multiple options for expressions (multimedia);
3. Computer technology has changed the traditional classroom instructional techniques;
4. Computers enable students to process the information via multiple intelligences;
5. "Technology integration is the necessity of today's students to have 21st Century Skills which include Personal and social responsibility, planning critical thinking, reasoning and creativity, strong communication skills, both for interpersonal and presentation needs, visualizing and decision -making, knowing how and when to use technology and choosing the most appropriate tool for the task" as stated by George Lucas Educational Foundation.

These technologies have not only revolutionized data processing and administrative tasks but also created new forms of interpersonal communication. The opportunity to connect and be connected has forged new frontiers in the development and transference of knowledge. Additionally, the emergence of social media technologies has brought an exciting new wave of innovation and opportunity to educators and administrators across the university campus.

With the rapid development of technology, particularly multimedia technology and its application to teaching we find that it has contributed a great deal to the growth of English language as well. Its contents serve to cultivate students interest in the classroom, it promotes more communication capacity, it aids an insightful understanding of western culture and creates a context for language learning.

The Indian Context

However, the ideas of the Education Commission rooted in the development of the people, democratic decentralization, people's participation, and the bottom up approach have greater relevance in the Information Age. Common men in India still

have faith in good intentions and wisdom of their ancestors, who have contributed in developing the culture of India. Rajgopalachari has said, "If there is honesty in India today, any hospitality, any charity—any aversion to evil, any love to be good, it is due to whatever remains of the old faith and the old culture". Usually people argue that there have been revolutionary changes in circumstances and atmosphere of modern times. There were many things which the ancestors did not know like World Wars, nuclear weapons, technological advancements in the areas of media, transport, and communications or in the world of computers. With complete change especially after 1970's Information Technology revolution, old values and systems have become obsolete and useless. In recent past, traditional values have lost their sanctity and developed many distortions. With more people and crowded conditions, new technologies will be necessary to support and sustain us. But these tools should also be used to tell and protect our stories. Video, audio, images, and interactive features open doors to worlds and cultures that children could never learn in a book. It feels sad to see children glued to their computers, tabs and smart phones avoiding all kinds of company. There is a distinct estrangement for outdoor games which involve a group. Hence children are forgetting the values of togetherness, understanding, love and friendship. Virtual class may alienate them even further. Since the access to any educational program is possible from any nook and corner, the need for a traditional classroom may even become a thing of the past. The primary function of language is to communicate. Face to face communication will totally disappear and give way to virtual communication. Sign language and abbreviations will take over. Language of technology will predominate over language of culture.

This is the scenario of city life where unit families reside. The children are left alone as they have working parents. Technology is their savior as they are bereft of company. The situation in rural India is quite different. People live in joint families. There is a lot of potential for outdoor games with children within the family and neighbourhood appreciating the value of togetherness. There are close ties amongst the villagers, They often go to work together. Women spend a lot of time together. The elders uphold cultural values. They inculcate the same in the future generations through narrating stories from mythology and from their own experiences. This however, does not imply that they are averse to technology. Multimedia technology has found its way through many rural establishments. Satellite television, computers and smart phones are already in use. The number of students enrolling in higher educational institutions has increased considerably. But access to technology is still a far flung thing for them. Moreover, when they need to travel to make it to these institutions with little means of transport and often live far from home with limited means to survive. Owning laptops, tabs and smart phones is also not very easy.

Even if these are possible, we have to go a long way to ensure electricity and internet connection to make technology accessible to these students. Language may be an important factor in culture identity. The communication that comes with sharing a language promotes connections and roots to ancestors and cultural histories. My argument is that if indigenous languages are replaced by the language of technology, will there not be a loss of cultural identity? The sole answer lies in a sincere effort to incorporate the best of technology at the same time retain our cultural identity. An honest endeavour towards progress, towards digital India is the clarion call of the present but a blind pursuit is likely to affect the upholding of our distinct identity.

Conclusion

We need to find ways to blend technology with cultural values. We need to incorporate tech literacy in the methods of teaching along with personal interaction. Too much emphasis on technology may not be fruitful as the essential student-teacher interaction, with its advantage of adaptability and personalized attention to the various needs of the students are lacking in the technology based training mode. We need to allow for private spaces for confidential discussions and provide guides for tentative and eager participants. It is our duty as educators to guide students and other educators as they become innovative producers, teach them to become cautious consumers, and learn how they can use these tools to reach their fullest potential. Multimedia technology must not be overused. The need of the hour is to blend the technological innovations with traditional methods. We need to support the arts and artists and value each other's culture. Let's take these next few years to design digital ways to connect us not only to each other but to promote our values, to respect each other, and to encourage innovation as we develop a place for ourselves in the 21st century.

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