New Communication Technologies And Developing Society

By

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"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

Mahatma Gandhi

The quotation above truly reflects the concerns of the third world countries about communications. But with the advent of new communication technologies, the communication 'wind' is steadily taking the form of a storm, threatening to uproot national identities and obliterate cultural diversities. Of course, the protagonists of the new technologies are promising a revolution of abundance and diversity of information for all. One wonders how Mahatma Gandhi would have reacted to the present mind-boggling developments in the field of communications and responded to the needs of communication flows in today's world. Well, it is anybody's guess. Closing down, partially or fully, the windows, strengthening the foundations of our houses and helping the occupants to keep their feet firmly on the ground so that they not only can weather the communication-storm...
but actually make good use of the enormous opportunities it offers. There are no easy answers to the complex issues involved. Even so, it is worth our while to speculate and make some observations, however tentative these may be, based upon the available information and data so that we are able to plan our future communication strategies and programmes more meaningfully.

II

Let us first briefly examine the characteristics of the new communication technologies that have been fast changing the information environment in the latter part of the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, most of the so-called new communication technologies have been with us for the last couple of decades. What is relatively new is the convergence and integration of these technologies. Another feature of the present day situation in communications is the scale of operations, which the microprocessors and the 'chips' have not only made possible, but economically too. The results of these two processes, convergence and scale, are revolutionary.

The convergence of emerging telecommunication technologies and computers is transforming business
operations, broadcasting, telephone systems and human interactions in general. We are on the threshold of having a high-resolution two-way video and personal computers tied to networks, so that sitting at home or office, one can receive and send information from and to anywhere in the world, and engage in a two-way video conversation across the world.

There is no end to the opportunities opening up as a result of the revolution in communication technologies. These are transforming the communication information environment in such fundamental way that social scientists speak of the dawn of a new era - "the information age". Many of the western societies are already changing from being industrially advanced societies to "information societies" in which computer technologies, networking, and other enhanced form of interpersonal and institutional communications are a major force.

Using 1967 data, it was calculated that in the United States, the information activities engaged more than 46 per cent of the work force, which earned over 53 per cent of all labour income, claiming that the U.S. has already become an information society" (Porat, 1978).
Today, this claim would be all the more valid. The vision of communication abundance has been made possible because of the extraordinary decline in costs. It is estimated that the cost of microprocessors is falling 22 per cent annually, computer memories cost is down by 40 per cent per year and communication equipment price falls 11 per cent per annum. By the year 2000, the cost of a computerized home-system should be about the same as that of an automobile today, thereby coming within the reach of the common man in developed countries (Pool, 1980).

At the back of this communications abundance are fierce economic activities and competition. Within the developed societies, it is expected that communication technologies and the equipments market will experience tremendous growth in the near future. For instance, installed data communication equipment in United States alone at the end of 1973 was valued at about $3 billion. This is expected to be $8 billion by the end of 1983. This is a compound growth rate of approximately 21 per cent a year. Further, data communications revenues grew from $1.5 billion in the mid 1960's to $4 billion in 1973.
and $5.5 billion in 1975, and are expected to reach $22 billion by 1985 (Ganley, 1982).

Naturally there are high economic stakes in the new communication technologies. The worldwide pitched battles are ahead over computers, their software, data processing and services markets.

More is at stake than the ability to send messages and exchange information. The transborder data flows (TDF) and piracy of satellite TV programmes are already causing concerns. It is estimated that nearly "sixty thousand enterprising individuals have set up small backyard data antennas in order to pirate TV programmes transmitted via satellite and meant only for those who pay for them" (Roger, 1983). The issue of TDF is a concern of national security and privacy of individuals. As the world shifts to a service-oriented economy vast amount of money, goods and services, and jobs are being circulated as well. In the past few years breakthrough in satellites and high-speed computing have given leading users a tremendous economic advantage over those who have not kept up (Roche and Dell, 1983).
The stakes of new communication technologies are global. Already many of the operations are outside the framework of nation states. However, for the foreseeable future, the responsibility, if not power, to plan and decide about communications will continue to rest with the nation states. The industrially advanced nations are making all possible efforts to surge ahead in communication technologies, each with a view to establish and maintain economic and political leadership in the world of nations. Mr. Sarah Goodard Power, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and Social Affairs spells out forthrightly the American stand on the issues. While addressing the Economic Club of Detroit on 5 December 1980, on the theme of communication challenges before the United States, Mr. Power stated, "the adequacy of our response to the communications revolution will go a long way to determine our place in the world – our economic advantage, political power, and social and cultural influence – over the next half century. The incentives for understanding and shaping the communications revolution are compelling. --- It is not in the interests of any abstract notions of noblesse oblige that we must shape the communications revolution but a necessity for our national well-being". (Power, 1981).
What does the revolution in communications, which is being widely debated, analysed and planned by the developed West, hold for the developing societies? Will it mean communications abundance universally? Or will it mean not only the continuation but further strengthening as well, of the present dependence of the Third World countries upon the western developed nations in matters of communications? Will the new communications technologies help the third world countries to truly 'liberate' themselves? Or will the communication revolution assist the forces of the so-called neocolonialism which is subtle and even more difficult to shake off?

The third world countries have been raising their voice in international fora against the imbalances and distortions in communications and demanding new world information and communication order. The western countries clearly dominate the global flow of communications through television, film, radio and wire-services. The third world, in a series of international conferences, has complained
that the flow of information is one way, and the flood of western media constitute a modern form of cultural imperialism. The cultural domination of the powerful modern mass media, controlled and directed by the ex-colonial powers represents neocolonialism.

Since early seventies, the developing countries have been raising their voice in international fora against western media domination. Also they have been planning their strategies and taking some concrete steps to correct the imbalances and distortions and work toward a new world information communication order. It was in 1973 at Algiers that the Heads of the Non-Aligned countries called for a concerted action in the field of mass communication, as a part of the Action Programme for Economic Cooperation. The label of "new information order" was first applied to information in the Non-aligned Symposium on Communication held in Tunis in 1976. The Tunis declaration stated: "Since information in the world shows a dis-equilibrium favouring some and ignoring others, it is the duty of the non-aligned countries to change this
situation and obtain the decolonization of information and initiate a new international order in information".

The concept of 'new information order' propounded by the non-aligned movement triggered intense political activities and debate between its proponents and opponents internationally. The western countries took full note of its implications and mobilized their resources to oppose it. 'Free flow of information' and the UNESCO's draft declaration approved in December 1975 at an inter-governmental meeting in Paris, particularly the controversial Article XI, Article XII, which recognized the nation states responsible for the activities in the international sphere of all mass media under their jurisdiction, became the rallying symbols for the contending forces. Many of the international conferences and meetings at various levels witnessed stormy debates and rhetorics. The debate about NIIO also led to systematic study and analysis of the communication problems the world over by the MacBride Commission appointed by the UNESCO. Beside this, the debate generated a number of other systematic research studies by individual, academic and international institutions and organizations.
All this generated a lot of heat, but some light also. Now, the concept of NIIO initiated by the non-aligned countries in 1973 at Algiers, finds wider acceptance by all nations, including the West, though only grudgingly.

Some progress, however tardy, has also been made. The non-aligned news pool and a number of other regional cooperative efforts to reduce dependence for news upon the 'big' western wire-services, and to know more about each other are some of the significant developments towards the objectives of NIIO. In addition, the UNESCO has launched an International Programme for Development of Communication (IPDC) to help the developing nations to strengthen their communication infrastructures. The UNESCO has played a significant role in negotiations and in getting the concept and objectives of NIIO accepted by all the member states. But even today, the confrontation between the western developed countries led by the United States and the developing countries has not come to an end. The 4th Extraordinary Session of the General Conference of UNESCO held in Paris from Nov. 23 to Dec. 5, 1983, to consider the UNESCO mid-term plan for 1984-89, witnessed stormy debates, particularly on the Programmes III, which concerned with communications.
Despite broad appreciation and agreement in analysis of the world problems amongst the delegates, there were sharp differences on specific programmes and strategies dealing with communications. The division between western developed countries and the third world developing countries was particularly marked on the issues of 'free flow of information' and 'new world information order'. However, a consensus was reached in the Commission dealing with the Programme III, 'Communication in the Service of Man', which was finally adopted by the plenary on December 3, 1982.

Following the adoption of the resolution on the programme, the Director-General Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow expressed satisfaction but reacted sharply to statements made by certain delegates. He declared, "I think that the explanations of vote and the declarations made following the adoption of the draft resolution of Major Programme III clearly shows the importance of communication issue in the contemporary world, and the divergences of opinion which are apparent between one country and another".

IV

Now let us briefly examine the characteristics of the third world societies. The new communication
technologies, which are likely to influence and transform these societies and cultures, do not work in a vacuum. Even at the risk of over simplification, the following features distinguish the third world developing societies from the developed countries:

Colonial Past

Most of the third world societies have experienced colonial rule for varying periods. They became independent only 30-40 years ago, some even more recently. The colonial rule had far reaching impact on the subject societies. Although it all began as exploration of trade, it invariably led to political hegemony and imperialist rule. What triggered the process that made some of the European countries the colonial powers is a subject of controversy among historians and social scientists. But, this much is certain that the process was facilitated by the invention of steam engine, gun powder and Macaulay's education. The railways and the steam ships made movement of goods possible. The raw material from the colonies was hauled in bulk to be processed in factories in Europe and the finished products were taken back to colonies for sale. In the process, trade and commerce links, enormously advantageous to
the colonial powers, were established which served also as conduits for 'western influences', having far reaching consequences for the 'native' cultures and societies.

We need not recount all these influences, nor it is possible to do so in a paper like this. It will be sufficient to say that the railway networks made movement of goods and men easy and faster, the gun powder silenced any opposition on the part of the natives, and the alien education system produced subservient clerks to assist in the imperial administration. This resulted in stifling of local crafts and industries, emergence of educated urban middle classes and opening up of the so far largely isolated independent republics - the villages - to outside influences.

Along with the Empire came the Christian missionaries. They not only propagated Christianity but also recommended their own life-styles, customs and cultures. The actual penetration of alien western influences funneled through roads, railways, schools, missionaries and mediated by the new emerging middle class elites varied from country to country. However,
one common underlying factor in the penetration of western influences was the shattering, if not a total break down, of confidence of the natives in their own cultures, customs, histories and life-styles in general. So much so, they learnt to despise their own heritage and actively started imitating and or adopting the western values and life-styles.

It will be unfair not to take note of some positive contribution of the foreign rule. The colonial rulers 'hammered' nation-states out of the diverse 'principalities'. They provided the infrastructure and a bureaucracy to run the governments. The same missionary education, which undermined the value of local histories and cultures, opened up the door to Western philosophies and concepts like democracy and socialism. It is the western educated elite who spearheaded the freedom movement in most of the third world countries.

Although, the third world countries have been free for the last couple of decades, the conduits of western influence established during the colonial period are still operational. That is why the developing countries are demanding a new international economic
order and new world information and communication order to seek more just relationships.

Cultural Renaissance

As the penetration of western influences progressed, so the conflict between native and alien value systems and interests increased. Consequently, there emerged strong reactions against the foreign rule and all that went with it. There also emerged powerful movements to discard the alien culture and its symbols, and rediscover and re-establish the native heritage. The social and cultural revivalism became an integral part of freedom movements. In brief, by a curious combination of factors, the third world countries witnessed a kind of renaissance a couple of decades before their Independence, which continued to influence, at least to some extent, the post-independent years as well. However, unfortunately the renaissance period did not last long. Its fervour got diluted, even lost in many a cases, after some time in the post-independent era.

Rising Expectations

On the eve of Independence, the economies of
the third world countries were poor. The infrastructural facilities in terms of schools, roads, post offices, electricity, hospitals, dispensaries etc. were extremely inadequate, especially in the rural areas. The village life was generally impoverished. Both birth and death rates were high. The overwhelming majority of rural populations in these countries were victims of ignorance, disease and acute deprivation. The literacy was very low (in case of India it was about 16 per cent at the time of independence).

Most of these newly independent countries adopted some sort of democratic form of government, and a planned approach to development along western models of economic progress and growth. Also, these countries received foreign aid on bilateral basis and through international agencies. As a consequence, they witnessed a revolution of rising expectations.

Even after thirty to forty years of independence and the so-called planned development and foreign aids, the majority of the third world countries continue to be poor (of course hike in oil prices in 1970s made certain oil producing countries in third world fairly rich).
The infrastructure facilities, though improved, are still inadequate. Their populations have multiplied, the birth rate continues to be high. Seventy to ninety per cent of their people continue to live in villages and are engaged in agricultural work. Universal literacy is still a far cry in most of these countries. (In India, literacy rate is about 36 per cent now).

The hopes of economic and social well-being of all its people, generated during freedom struggle and in post-independent era, are far from being fulfilled. The result is what some social scientists call the 'revolution of rising frustrations'. Many of these countries are not able to cope up with the disillusionment amongst its people and have even opted for dictatorial and military regimes.

Disparities

One more striking feature of the third world countries is disparities. The middle class that emerged as a consequence of colonial rule and alien education system, has enormously expanded and consolidated its position by taking advantage of the new
opportunities of service, trade, commerce and industry, etc. in post-independent era. The existing and many new urban centres that emerged have swelled into large conglomerations through migration from the hinterland. Some of these have even become slums.

No doubt, there has been substantial growth and progress in various fields but it was not accompanied by fair distribution of fruits of development. The oft-repeated phrase, 'the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer' holds valid in almost all the developing societies.

There are sharp cleavages between urban and rural areas. In the urban areas, inhabited largely by the middle classes, there are reasonable infrastructural facilities and opportunities for education and progress for their children. In rural areas, the vast majority is one of relative and absolute poverty. They are dependent upon small landholdings and subsistence agricultures; they hardly have any surplus; their purchasing power is very limited; their children face bleak futures as compared to the children of the urban middle classes. But contact with the outside world and exposure to mass media, particularly the films,
have shown that many of the 'good things' in life are not only desirable but also possible to have as their urban brethren already have them. Such an awareness is likely to have a de-stabilising influence on the social and political systems at various levels. Some social scientists see some link between the incidence of repressive regimes that have replaced the democratic set-ups in some of the developing countries in recent years and the de-stabilising influences of mass media, particularly the television. However, this needs thorough study before any generalisation on this account can be made.

This is the broad scenario of the developing societies today.

Will the new communication technologies help in fighting illiteracy, disease, poverty and solving many other problems that are faced by the developing societies? Will it mean improvement in quality of life or further impoverishment? Will the new technologies narrow down or further widen the gap between haves and have-nots?
There are any number of enthusiasts who will tell that the new communication technologies will enable the developing societies to leap-frog directly into the twenty-first century without having to follow the long and arduous path, spanning a couple of centuries of painful development followed by the western developed countries. There are equally strong sceptical arguments, fearing neo-colonialism of information age with far reaching and dreadful consequences for the developing societies and cultures. In any case let us examine the issue.

There is no denying the enormous potential of mass media for development and change. So much so that the information and communications resources are well accepted as indices of development. Even UNESCO had suggested some years ago minimum norms for communication facilities for the developing societies. It is also true that the strong belief in powers of mass media influenced the decisions of the Governments and others in the developing societies to strengthen the communication infra-structures in support of development. So much so that each time a new communication technology is introduced or an expansion programme is
undertaken, the justification put forward invariably is that it will help the farmers, make literate those who are not, improve educational standards in schools and colleges, and in general stimulate development etc. One of the justifications for introducing colour television in India in 1981 was that the farmers would be able to see agriculture field in colour for better identification and effective communication. But have these objectives been served?

The answer would be 'Yes'. However, invariably any fair minded person would add immediately, yes, but 'not to the extent it was envisaged', rather much below expectation even after giving allowances for failures in other sectors. In practice, the mass media primarily serve entertainment functions and only incidently that of information, education and development. This will be substantiated by any number of empirical research studies and even by casual observation of the media scene in any of the developing societies.

Take the case of television in India. Marshall McLuhan has argued that television is the only genuine revolution in mankind's communication
environment since Guttenberg's invention of the printing press.

Television had a late start and very slow growth in India. The experimental television centre in Delhi was set up in 1959. Its range was 40 kms. around the capital city of Delhi. Its programmes were meant for schools and rural audiences. Six years later, encouraged by the success of the pilot programme, the experimental centre was expanded to provide regular TV transmission. For another seven years, Delhi television continued to be the only television centre in the country. In late 70s and early 80s, the expansion of television has been rapid.

But even today, television reaches only 20 per cent of the country's population spread over 6.7 per cent of its area. In terms of telecast receiving facilities of about 2 million TV sets in the country, only a couple of thousand are in rural areas. Even of the community sets the number is small, about eight thousand. Only about 10 per cent of the villages coming under telecast areas are estimated to have community viewing facilities.

However, there is a recent policy decision to expand television facilities in a big way to cover nearly
70 per cent of the population and also to provide a continuous telecast from seven in the morning to past midnight. In terms of programmes, all the television stations do have special programmes for rural audience. Be that it may, films and film based programmes are the most popular TV programmes in India. This has been substantiated by a recent official TV audience survey also.

What does the story of TV in India tell us? It was started on pilot basis for education and development purposes. Later it started regular transmission. Most TV sets are in metropolitan urban areas. The development programmes, the initial justification for starting and expanding the television service in India, have been relegated to the background, both by the programme producers and the audiences. The urban people who can afford television sets influence the programme pattern. This is natural also; they being the major TV audience, and having the necessary articulation and influence to 'demand' and get programmes of their liking.

The television, although started as an agent of change and development has come to be a medium of entertainment. It also serves the commercial interests. The films and film-based programmes promote values and
lifestyles that give fill-up to consumerism. The TV owners in urban areas serve as captive audience for advertising consumer goods and they also have the necessary purchasing power.

For many years commercial advertisements were not allowed on Indian television. It was only in 1976 that the commercial advertising was introduced on television. This was done on the plea of harnessing the commercial resources to improve the quality of television programmes. You see again how the entertainment and commercial interests of the microscopic, but articulate and dominant, urban population converge to promote knowingly and unknowingly their own class interests.

This is no criticism of Indian television as such. But the case history has been taken up just to identify the forces underlying the process of introduction and expansion of communication technologies.

VI

Another dimension of television may also be relevant here. Television is an ever hungry monster devouring programmes. It is not easy to meet its demands for programmes indigenously. Sooner or later, the
process of importing programmes from other sources begins. This has far reaching implications for the television system in any developing society.

To begin with, the foreign programmes have the initial advantage of commanding higher status in the eyes of local audiences. 'Whatever is foreign is good' is the widely held general belief. No doubt the technical quality of some of the imported television programmes is superior as compared to those locally produced. This is naturally so because of the greater resources and more experience that has gone into production of such foreign programmes. These might also be made available to the television networks in the third world countries pretty cheaply. The western developing countries are more than willing to dump their television programmes at minimal cost, or even almost free on asking.

They are not just being generous in doing so. Exporting television and other mass media material, even at throw-away prices to the developing societies, serves the larger interests of the developed nations. Such exportation stimulates demands for their goods. It also propagates the western values and life-styles. In pure economic terms also, the exporters of TV software
are not losers. All such programmes were made for their own local audiences and the producers have already earned their piece of profit from local screenings. Whatever they get now by exporting these old programmes, (some of these are 10-20 years old) is additional bonus.

Imported foreign TV programmes have yet another adverse effect. It creates taste and addiction for foreign programmes. Not only that, in the process it stifles the local talent to produce good TV programmes today and reduces such a possibility in future also. These mutually reinforcing factors lead to a permanent heavy dependence on foreign TV programmes, which is already a fact in case of many a countries.

The technical quality of imported foreign TV programmes may be high and the cost may also be low but their relevance to the local audience is questionable. Through so called popular TV serials, which many developing countries are importing in large numbers, the local audiences are exposed to the international demonstration effect to the consumption pattern and habits of the affluent countries. Such uncritical borrowing of television technology and software have
reduced television into a luxury of the upper and middle class in many developing countries. In the circumstances, TV helps in accentuating the hiatus between the elites and the masses. The fear is that the communication technologies, of which TV is only a front running symbol, will facilitate the spread of western consumerism globally, a value and habit not necessarily relevant and even desirable in the present state of development of many a third world countries. As Professor Schiller stated, "With electronic technology as it is presently structured and operating, what people will be receiving will be marketing messages" (Schiller, 1982).

VII

It is often argued by some that the present day ills of the media system will not be there once the new communications technologies takes their due place. Professor Ithiel de Sola Pool, the prominent champion of new communication technologies is confident that these will not only lead to information communication abundance truly and universally, but will contribute significantly to participant communication even in developing societies. With the help of new communication
technologies it would be possible to "provide voice to a village that it never had before through a different structure, perhaps by a telephone system, perhaps by simplified printing such as xerography, perhaps by a different way to producing audio material such as cassettes" (Pool, 1982).

It is true providing voice to a village that has never had before is a laudable objective, and one must strive for its achievement. But along with it, may be even prior to it, the basic needs like food, health and education of the villagers must also be provided for.

The television, satellite and video cassettes, hallmarks of the new communication technologies are perhaps not necessarily the best instruments for delivery of agricultural information and health messages to the rural people in the present state of development in most of the third world countries. No doubt, the scarcity of sufficiently trained teachers and health workers and lack of capital resources for investment in schools and dispensaries are major impediments to the spread of literacy, education and health etc. in the third world societies. But, is the uncritical import
of technologies and their softwares the answer?

As a matter of fact, some of the problems are not necessarily due to lack of information alone, but essentially arise out of under-development as such. For instance, in health, the major problems may be due to non-availability of safe, clean drinking water and other sanitation facilities in villages. Or these may be the results of malnutrition. The complex computer technology that is able to provide support for faster and efficient clinical diagnosis of diseases in well-equipped hospitals, is not likely to be of much help in solving the kind of health problems the people in villages face. These problems are basically societal and developmental in nature.

For agricultural extension, literacy and educational activities as well the modern communication technologies may not be the best answer. Most of the pilot projects carried out to test the validity and utility of the latest communication technology to perform these development function usually show encouraging results (e.g. introduction of TV in 1959 and SITE in 1975-76 in India). But subsequent expansion and regular services do not remain that committed to the development objectives.
which provided the initial justification for their introduction.

Once the new communication technology starts regular services, they are highjacked so to say, by those who control and/or own the technology and use it as an instrument of their entertainment and commercial interests.

Another claim made on behalf of new communication technology is that it can help in national integration. Yes, the new technologies can facilitate the process of national integration and enrichment. But like other claims, this is also fraught with difficulties. It may also contribute to imposition of dominant values and culture to obliterate the diversities and the richness for which most of the third world societies are well known. It may also lead to "cultural nihilism" as warns Professor P.C. Joshi, the noted Indian economist and Chairman of the Software Committee for Television in India. He calls for a national (India) cultural policy. "Battle for mind has become far more grimmer and highly subtle methods to manipulate mind are being adopted by powerful forces in world. The modern communication technology has given a new edge and urgency to the question of a cultural policy which deals effectively with the problems created by westernization in the realm..."
of culture" ('Joshi', 1983). The concern expressed in the Indian context by Professor Joshi is valid equally, if not more, for other third world countries as well.

VIII

Where does this analysis lead us? Closing the window to ward off the coming onslaught of new communications. Certainly not. Sorry, if that impression is conveyed in the presentation so far. The intention behind examining the issue critically was merely to identify the pitfalls in our path to adoption of new communications technologies. This certainly does not mean we stop moving on the path itself. Instead the pitfalls should serve us warning signals for safe and efficient negotiation of the path.

In any case let us face the fact that the coming of new communications technologies in third world societies is inevitable. Closing down our windows even if we decide to do so is no more a possibility. Both 'push' and 'pull' factors are forcefully operating. The industrially advanced countries have developed the new communication technologies in response to their
own concerns like defence, space exploration, energy and labour etc.

The electronics have revolutionised the production and trade of goods including information. Computers and other automation have made industrial production both labour and energy efficient, the twin problems of the developed societies. The labour has been their problem for quite some time, but the energy crisis developed in early 1970s when oil producing countries hiked the oil prices. With the new technologies, the dependence of the west for cheap labour and energy resources from the third world countries will be less in the future. With this, the west is again set on its ever rising trajectory of higher standards of living and consumptions which was temporarily threatened by the energy crisis during 1970s. And to this, export earnings make a valuable contribution. Hence, they will do everything to 'push' the new communications technologies in the third world societies to boost their foreign earnings.

The new communication technologies are now an integral part of the entire economic and social life. Shaping of communication revolution is a necessity for their (western countries) own national well-being.
As such, those who have developed and mastered the new technologies will do all that is possible to harness them to their own advantage. Exportation of new communication technologies and their attendant culture is part of this over-all design for consolidating and furthering their economic advantage, political power and social and cultural influence world-wide. There is nothing wrong about this as such. National interests dictate the policies of all nations. As such the developed nations will use subtle and not-so-subtle methods to achieve their objectives of making communication revolution a world-wide phenomenon.

Aid and loans through bilateral agreements and through international institutions and organizations, consultancy and advisory roles, and providing educational facilities to the people of developing societies are all contributory to the overall designs and strategies of battles for mind. Tourism, cultural exchanges and mass media material are also part of the same phenomenon. The former colonial powers had the initial advantage, as conduits of western influence were well laid during the colonial period. The post World War II period helped further consolidation. And now the new communications technologies are even further accentuating that advantage.
As a consequence of these influences largely from the western developed societies, powerful middle classes have emerged in most of the third world developing societies. The elites of these classes make economic and political decisions in their respective countries for the 'benefit' of the entire population. In largely traditional and backward looking third world societies, the middle classes though small in numbers as compared to the masses, constitute a well articulated and powerful sections of their population. The members of these classes are educated, forward looking and individualistic and mobile with strong achievement motivations. It is these people who have the purchasing powers and can afford the 'latest' and the 'best' of consumer goods. No government can easily afford to ignore their demands for such consumer goods. In a way, it is these people who assure markets for these goods. They constitute a powerful 'pull' force, facilitating penetration of western technologies, goods and cultures in the third world societies.

It will be wrong to run down the middle classes. They perform valuable role in running the Governments, planning and executing programmes of national development.
In brief, they are the agents of progress, development and change; paradoxically, these very middle classes are also the hopes for better and more equitable development within the third world developing countries.

In the circumstances, through 'push' and 'pull' factors the new communication technologies will make their headway in developing societies in any case. And we should not lament about it. Rather, I would like to state that we should welcome and work towards speedy and efficient introduction of the new technologies not only in communication but in all spheres of our life. These would help in solving many of the age old problems like illiteracy, health, over population, poor economies and under development in general. For instance the satellite and computers will help in better identification of mineral and other resources. We will be able to make more reliable weather forecasts. Of course telecommunication and TV communication will improve and enrich our lives.

IX

The purpose of the present paper was to examine the new communication technologies in a historical perspective with a view to identify and understand the
forces effecting communications in the context of developing societies. Such an understanding of communication technologies and processes will help in working out more meaningful strategies and programmes of harnessing new communication technologies for equitable and just development of the third world countries. The developing societies need not remain passive acceptors of technologies and cultures. Instead, they should critically examine all the parameters of the new communication technologies from their own national perspectives. What is needed is positive but critical attitude toward the new communication technologies and the western influences in general.

At the international level the concept and demand for New International Information and Communication Order (NIICO) put forward by the third world countries has already made progress. The alternate arrangements proposed are still in their infancy. But the NIICO concept as such has made some noticeable dent in the so far infallibility of the western media systems. The concern and unity of purpose of the third world countries on this issue have been well demonstrated in various international fora. The challenge of NIICO is how to improve, strengthen and
expand information institutions and structures in the third world so that the people of developing countries become beneficiaries and not victims of the information revolution. Efforts to achieve these objectives will be strengthened by actions at the national level and vice-versa.

Therefore, the developing societies need to have sound communication policies. A communication policy is not just a set of actions concerned mainly with media arrangements and actors on the media stage. The essence of communication policy is to integrate communications as a kind of tool, in our overall concern for the future, and in all actions flowing from that concern.

The above analysis suggests that for a meaningful communication policy there is a need for (a) more explicit concern for national culture and (b) radical structural changes in the social system. It is not merely a theoretical proposition. The cultural renaissance, though short lived, contributed substantially to the liberation movements in the third world against foreign rule. The resurgent culture would release creative energies of the people of the third world countries which would be contributory to the overall growth and progress of these developing societies.
The national cultural policy with vision will take into account regional diversities and would aim at creative synthesis and balance between national and regional, traditional and modern cultures enriching national cultures of the third world societies. This when applied on world stage will enrich both national and universal cultures. The third world societies, instead of being satisfied with inferior and limited version of western cultures, should strive, and can do so, to throw creative synthesis enriching both their respective national cultures as well as the universal culture.

Some people argue that the technologies by themselves are great solvent of social structures and value systems. History provides ample evidence for that. I am not denying the supremacy of technology in bringing about change in social structures. But in normal course, there is a lot of time lag between technologies available and evolution of new social structures.

The present day social structure often proves as an impediment in the development and growth. But with the introduction of radical reforms the social structures would facilitate introduction of technology and ensure speedy growth and development as such. The wheel of new
communication technologies is looming large and moving fast and threatening to overrun the developing societies and their cultures. The bringing of the wheel of national culture into picture through visionary national cultural policy and removing some, if not all, of the impediments in the path through radical social reforms will not only humanize the technology but will also facilitate the process of smooth adoption of new communications technologies. This alone can save the people of the developing societies from being passive victims of the onslaught of the new communications technologies and be active recipients and beneficiaries.

Last from the point of research these are only tentative observations and speculations. More systematic research into communication systems, policies and planning is called for in third world countries so that the communication research can provide the necessary input for effective utilization of the enormous challenge and opportunities that are being offered by the development of miracle chips, microprocessors, fiber optics, computers, telecommunications and all that goes with the new communication technologies.
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