From Gandhi to Gadgets: Unraveling India's Tech Narratives

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The present article looks at the persistent influence of modern technology on the daily lives of Indians and its integration into the fabric of society. The paper carefully explores the perspectives of prominent thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Swami Vivekananda, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Rabindranath Tagore, and Ram Manohar Lohia by examining their contributions to India's technological narratives. While Mahatma Gandhi advocated for a balance between technology and traditional values, Jawaharlal Nehru supported large-scale industries to address post-independence challenges. Swami Vivekananda envisioned a harmonious blend of Indian philosophy with Western technology. Ambedkar focused on the role of technology in social justice while Tagore expressed concerns about its impact on ethics and the environment. Lohia emphasized an approach to technology rooted in social welfare. The article concludes by reflecting on the complex interplay between modern technology, capitalism, and societal values in present-day India.

Keywords: Technology, Indian thinkers, Capitalists, Social Welfare, Modernization.

Introduction

How modern technology has permeated the everyday lives of Indians and become an inseparable part of humankind is an amazing tale. The insights of numerous scholars have played a crucial role in

the integration and implementation of science and technology into daily life. This paper aims to synthesize and unify the efforts and ideas of various distinguished thinkers concerning technological growth in a developing country like India. A central observation of this paper is that the viewpoints of these thinkers continue to exert influence on Indian society today in diverse forms. The concepts articulated by Indian scholars and thinkers address the nuanced issues of Indian society. The paper explores key perspectives of influential figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Swami Vivekananda, and Ram Manohar Lohia, drawing from their writings and speeches.

A Tale of the Basics

To begin with one of the widely known insights of our father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi whose perspectives were firmly grounded in his life principles. His views on technology serve as the foundation for the discussion on India's technological growth. Another prominent figure Jawaharlal Nehru must be remembered whenever we see big industries in India. Gandhi and Nehru held contrasting visions for India's development. One defended the cottage industry whereas the other emphasized Western technologies. Both were esteemed humanists and economists. Their visions for India's progress were shaped by their close connections with the people. Gandhi envisioned India achieving economic stability due to tools and techniques widely utilized by rural Indian communities.

Jawaharlal Nehru was significantly influenced by the Western Industrial Revolution and the global transformations it had ushered in. He believed that India could only progress with the assistance of large-scale industries capable of meeting the demands of the newly independent nation's vast population. At the time, India grappled with major challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, and unemployment. Gandhi and Nehru proposed distinct approaches to address these issues. Indian economic policy incorporated both Gandhian and Nehruvian views on development which encouraged people to engage in small and cottage industries to produce indigenous goods while simultaneously establishing large-scale industries.

Many thinkers and feminists viewed technology as a means of liberating women by empowering them to travel and earn money when advancements such as transportation, railways, buses, and advanced vehicles emerged. This progress provided new opportunities for oppressed people like women and Dalits by enabling them to earn a livelihood. The railways in India reformed transportation by creating job opportunities, fostering social mobility, and contributing significantly to economic development. Despite Gandhi's opposition to trains due to his philosophical and spiritual beliefs that limited his acceptance of Western technologies, Swami Vivekananda admired Western technological development and dreamed of bridging Indian philosophy and spiritual values with modern Western technology.

Today, India reflects a combination of various approaches that have advocated for the betterment of its people as many thinkers have shared their opinions on the issues related to science and technology. It is undeniable that indigenous products from Indian cottage industries may not always match the competitiveness of the global market but they have sometimes upheld global standards in numerous instances.

This paper aims to consolidate the perspectives of several influential thinkers regarding technological advancement in a developing nation like India. The central premise of this paper is that the viewpoints expressed by these thinkers persist in some form within Indian society today. The ideas put forth by Indian scholars look into the nuanced ins and outs of Indian society.

The Essence

Modern technology was not as advanced during Gandhi's lifetime. He presented various opinions on the integration of technology into Indian life. According to him, mere material progress did not equate to advancements in human values and ethics. His book, *Hind Swaraj,* extensively discusses these ideas, where he particularly critiques the impact of railways, which significantly transformed transportation technology. Gandhi advocated for maintaining a delicate equilibrium between technology and traditional values. He viewed technology as a potentially colonial force capable of eroding the deeply ingrained values within Indian society.

Gandhi considered technological advancements as mere material progress and actively resisted such developments. His life philosophy revolved around the advocacy of simplicity and the rejection of human greed. Key tenets of Gandhian philosophy included self-sufficiency, minimalism, and self-reliance. Gandhi believed that accumulating unnecessary material possessions diverted humanity from the spiritual path. Thus, he encouraged people to embrace minimalistic living and cautioned against excessive materialistic pursuits.

Gandhi's understanding of technology highlighted the importance of tailoring technologies to specific contexts by ensuring alignment with principles of social justice, equity, and sustainability. He advocated for locally suitable, environmentally friendly, and accessible technologies, especially for marginalized communities. Gandhi endorsed technologies that uplifted human beings had human-centric approaches and was aware of the challenges faced by Indians.

As we are aware, Gandhi strongly opposed violence and advocated for nonviolence or ahimsa in every aspect of human life. He expressed concerns that technologies like weaponry could encourage violence in society and criticized the excessive use of weapons in the West. Gandhi argued that any society, regardless of the nation, could not achieve peace if it prioritized technologies such as weapons. In today's world, where widespread use of guns, bombs, and terrorist activities is prevalent, Gandhi's views on weaponry remain relevant. Gandhi's perspectives on the ethical use of technology and the importance of human agency continue to hold significance in the present day amidst significant societal changes.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India cherished progressive and forward-looking ideas regarding India and its policies. He endeavored to convert his beliefs into action during his tenure as the Prime Minister. Nehru was deeply committed to fostering a scientific temper among the Indian population. He knew that scientific advancements were essential for the country's progress. He held the belief that scientific knowledge could encourage economic development and he recognized illiteracy and the absence of a scientific mindset as significant obstacles to progress.

With these considerations in mind, Nehru took practical measures to promote a scientific mindset through education. He advocated for the application of scientific knowledge and innovation to tackle society's challenges. Nehru firmly believed that large-scale industries held the key to resolving many issues faced by Indians. These industries not only provided employment opportunities but also enabled people to earn a living. India's economic condition was severely strained at the time of independence. Many poor individuals were unemployed and faced significant challenges in earning a livelihood. Nehru believed that these large-scale industries were essential in uplifting those lacking necessities such as food and shelter.

In his seminal work *Discovery of India,* Nehru articulates his visionary ideas and provides profound insights into the nation's past, present, and future. He not only elucidates his thoughts but also explores the rich tapestry of India's history, culture, and diversity. Nehru's exploration is not limited to a mere chronological account of India's journey but also deals with the nation's identity drawing from its ancient wisdom and contemporary challenges.

Throughout *Discovery of India* Nehru emphasizes the importance of unity in diversity which is a fundamental tenet of the Indian ethos. He recognizes that India's strength lies in its ability to go with various cultures, languages, and religions. Nehru's vision is one of a secular, inclusive, and progressive India that connects the potential of its diverse population. In addition, Nehru's book is also a testament to his conviction that scientific temper and education are vital for the nation's development. He envisions a future in which India leads in scientific research and technological advancements and therefore bridging the gap between the developed and developing world.

Furthermore, Nehru's book offers a glimpse into his socio-economic and political philosophies. He champions the cause of social justice and equitable distribution of resources. He also advocates for policies that uplift the disadvantaged and marginalized sections of society. His vision is one of a nation where large-scale industries not only spur economic growth but also serve as instruments for social welfare and empowerment.

In his visionary outlook, Nehru places significant emphasis on nurturing a scientific temperament within the nation. He envisions an India where scientific curiosity, rational thinking, and innovation are not only encouraged but also integral to the country's progress. Nehru firmly believes that fostering a scientific mindset among the population not only fuels technological advancements but also enhances critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Nehru's emphasis on scientific temperament stems from his understanding that a society well-versed in scientific knowledge is better equipped to address complex challenges. By promoting scientific education and research, he aims to empower individuals to contribute meaningfully to the nation's development. A scientifically literate population as he envisioned becomes the driving force behind innovation and economic growth and thereby achieves societal transformation.

Nehru observes scientific temperament as a tool for dismantling superstitions and outdated beliefs. He believed that scientific temperament is much needed for a more enlightened and progressive society. He aims to create a society that is not just technologically advanced but also intellectually vibrant and open-minded. Nehru's focus on scientific temperament represents his commitment to shaping India into a nation where reason and empirical knowledge compel the quest for excellence leading to a brighter and more prosperous future for all.

Interestingly, to make India self-reliant in the production of technology and reduce dependence on foreign technologies, Nehru established various science and research centers. These included institutions like IITs, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, and the Atomic Energy Commission, all of which played vital roles in gaining technological independence and scientific progress in India.

Nehru believed that nuclear energy could be used in India for peaceful purposes like electricity generation. He played a crucial role in establishing Bhabha Atomic Research Centre under the leadership of Homi J. Bhabha. Nehru initiated technology-driven programs in the fields of healthcare, agriculture, and education to bridge the rural-urban divide in India. His perspectives on technology were profoundly shaped by modern education and his strong passion for science and industrialization.

Swami Vivekananda, the renowned Indian philosopher, envisioned a future for India where modern technologies would uplift its people from impoverished living conditions. He emphasized the significance of spiritual and moral development and believed that technology could serve as a facilitator in this pursuit.

He emphasized the importance of maintaining a careful balance between scientific knowledge and spiritual growth for the advancement of humanity. According to his teachings, neither scientific progress nor technological advancements should hinder an individual's spiritual journey. Instead, he discouraged excessive reliance on materialism and advocated for an integrated approach that combines both material pursuits and spirituality to foster human progress. Swami Vivekananda urged people to exploit technology for societal improvement. He emphasized a human-centered approach in its implementation. As a respected saint, he strongly believed that leveraging technology carefully and ethically in India could uplift the marginalized sections of society. His profound insights on these matters are documented in his speeches and writings.

Another prominent figure of the twentieth century, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, was a profoundly educated individual who devoted his entire life to boosting the well-being of people through various campaigns and his significant contribution to drafting the Indian Constitution. He advocated for organizing people and endorsed collective efforts to secure equal rights in society. His perspectives on technology primarily revolved around empowering marginalized communities.

Similar to numerous other scholars, Ambedkar recognized the positive aspects of Western technologies that could free people from the chains of injustice. He believed that modern technology had the potential to obliterate social hierarchies and advance social justice. Through the use of modern technology, the oppressed and underprivileged individuals could emancipate themselves from the unequal systems deep-rooted in society. Ambedkar advocated for the utilization of technology to dismantle the traditional economic and social inequalities that held people back.

He advocated for the democratization of technology and promoted a system where technology is accessible and affordable for everyone. He believed that science and technology were essential tools for social progress and liberating marginalized communities in India. Ambedkar emphasized the importance of adapting science and technology to address the specific challenges faced by the country.

Ambedkar advocated for the promotion of scientific education and critical thinking, particularly among the Dalits and other oppressed communities. He believed that the education of science and technology could empower individuals by enabling them to participate meaningfully in society and contribute to the nation's development. He stressed the need for technology to be adapted to suit the Indian context. He was a strong proponent of industrialization and modernization in India but stressed that these processes should be guided by social justice and equality. He believed in the judicious use of technology to address the socio-economic disparities prevalent in Indian society.

Ambedkar's vision for technology in India was rooted in inclusion and equitable development. He encouraged the application of technology in agriculture, industries, and education to improve the living standards of the masses. His emphasis on the responsible use of technology is a sign of his concern for the welfare of the downtrodden and underprivileged sections of society. He believed in the transformative power of science and technology. He advocated for scientific education which develops critical thinking among students, and the responsible adaptation of technology to address the unique challenges faced by Indian people. His progressive views continue to influence India's approach to technology and social development.

Rabindranath Tagore, the renowned Indian poet and philosopher acknowledged the importance of scientific progress. He also expressed concerns about its potential impact on human society and the environment. Tagore appreciated the advancements in science and technology and recognized their potential to improve human lives. He believed that science could be a means to alleviate poverty and fulfill basic requirements like health and education. He was an admirer of scientific methods for he favored a scientific education system that encouraged creativity and critical thinking. Tagore also supported the

idea of using technology for rural development and agricultural improvement yet he was critical of the rampant pursuit of scientific progress without ethical and moral considerations. He feared that the relentless pursuit of technology might lead to dehumanization and a loss of spiritual and cultural values. Tagore focused on balancing scientific knowledge with a deep understanding of human ethics and the arts.

In his later years, Tagore became increasingly concerned about the environmental consequences of unchecked industrialization and technology-driven development. He warned against the exploitation of nature and called for a harmonious coexistence between humans and the natural world. His views on science and technology were many-sided. He recognized their potential for human welfare but also cautioned against their blind exploration without thoughtful consideration of cultural and environmental implications. His insights continue to be relevant in contemporary discussions about the responsible use of science and technology for the betterment of humanity.

Tagore wrote a play called *Muktadhara* in 1922. In this play, he depicts the subjugation of the freedom of oppressed people by imperialist rulers. The construction of the dam across the river Muktadhara is a symbolic representation of how dam technology is utilized to counteract nature by disrupting the natural flow of water. This technological intervention negatively impacts the residents of Shivterai village, resulting in water deprivation post-dam construction. The character Bibhuti, a royal engineer, and his dam construction expertise become tools manipulated by the king not only to regulate the water supply but also to exert control over the people of Shivterai. The play thus deals with the broader implications of technological interventions in the context of power dynamics and societal control.

Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, a notable Indian socialist leader and political thinker held a subtle perspective on science and technology within the Indian context. While recognizing the significance of scientific advancement, he voiced concerns about blindly adopting Western development models and instead called for a uniquely Indian approach to science and technology. Lohia stressed the need to strap

up science and technology to cater to the specific requirements of the Indian population, advocating for a decentralized and community-oriented technological framework. He gave importance to indigenous knowledge and skills and the creation of technologies suitable for rural India, particularly in the realms of agriculture and cottage industries.

Lohia was concerned about the social and economic inequalities that could be exacerbated by an uncritical adoption of Western-style industrialization. He emphasized the need to balance technological progress with social justice and equity. He also stressed to ensure that the benefits of development should reach all sections of society. Lohia's vision for science and technology in India was deeply rooted in the welfare of the common people. He advocated for a scientific approach that prioritized the well-being of the masses. His approach was to focus on improving their quality of life rather than pursuing abstract scientific goals. His ideas laid the foundation for discussions on appropriate technology and sustainable development in India.

Conclusion

After considering various insights from renowned figures, the researcher concludes that India took considerable time to hold modern technologies due to ongoing debates about whether these innovations could be adopted without neglecting the traditional science and technologies of the Indian subcontinent. However, the assimilation of modern technology has significantly benefited the Indian population despite its impact on traditional practices and cultural aspects. The Capitalists hidden behind the mask of modern technologies have not only grown extensively but are also supported by imperialist mindsets that exert influence over consumers. The values emphasized by Gandhi and Tagore appear to have been sidelined with indigenous industries now in constant competition with Western modern technologies. Whereas developments and modernity on the surface may seem to have improved daily life the reality is different. The capitalists aided by modern technologies have created a world where people are consistently subjected to various pressures.

The major industries once established are now controlled by capitalists who prioritize their interests over the welfare of the

country's inhabitants by considering the entire population simply as consumers. The shift from a people-centric adoption of technologies to a profit-centric approach has led to the manipulation and intimidation of people into purchasing specific technologies. Reflecting on large-scale developments facilitated by big industries, one acknowledges the beliefs of Jawaharlal Nehru and other advocates of Western technology.

In Mulk Raj Anand's significant work *The Untouchable*, the character of Bakha serves as a reflection of the challenges faced by a Dalit in India's caste-based society. One of the interesting facts towards the end is that Bakha is presented with three options to address his problems: embracing Christian missionary teachings, adopting the Gandhian Hindu sensitivity towards Harijans by considering Dalits as children of God, or choosing the modern innovation of the flush toilet by liberating him from the daily task of cleaning toilets. Bakha finds comfort in opting for the flush toilet. The positive and liberating aspects of modern technology demonstrate a benevolent nature that has the potential to assist humanity in its unique way.

The dark side of modern technology becomes increasingly complex when produced and mediated by profit-driven capitalists who prioritize their gains at the expense of people's money. Gandhian perspectives become relevant when we observe the extinction of cottage and small-scale industries losing their influence in society. In the present world, individuals navigate not just one reality but multiple ones—*virtual, augmented, and mixed*—due to the revolution in digital and communicative technologies. The latest developments enabling *extended reality* leave everyone astonished by representing the fruits of scientific progress. However, the privacy and freedom of individuals on these digital platforms are inevitably controlled by the capitalists who own and develop these technologies according to their preferences appears to be unsafe. The insights of Indian key thinkers on technological assimilation in the country are diverse yet crucial. A singular consideration in Indian economic policy does not align with and cannot accommodate the diversity inherent in the society.

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