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## **Cyber Space: A Site of Struggle and Release**

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### **Abstract:**

*Cyber Revolution today seems to have an edge over Cultural Revolution in myriad ways. Life without technology appears like a dreary desert devoid of energy and vibrancies. The slavish nature of cyber world has necessitated everyone to keep pace with the changing world, leading us to depend on (genetically modified food, mineral water, iodized salt, pesticide-bred vegetables, and adulterated sweets) various means of artificial life. While cyber world has added colours to life, it is fast approaching as an identity marker where fiction takes over fact especially with the younger generation. The change of entire cultural outfit of the world has also transformed the epistemic realities of the pragmatic order by overhauling the crest of power politics. It is time for all of us as stakeholders to realize how we can keep pace with the changing realities and balance the topsy-turvy of the world linguistically, psychologically, without discouraging the advancing wings of technology, which has become a living reality.*

*The present paper makes a threadbare analysis of cyber space and interrogates whether its various forms have enhanced the quality of life, human values and preferences. While it is time to realize that though technology governs the radical transformations of our ecologically driven environment, it also makes hollow inroads in our psyche. The paper discovers that what happens to the object in the technological sphere is essential, whereas what happens to it in the psychological or sociological sphere of needs and practices is inessential. It is of paramount importance to situate development and inclusive growth alongside and at par with all sections of society to be represented equally. Cyber space with its dual poles of struggle and release can provide sustenance in life but release has to be for greater common good, which is not possible without sustainable development.*

**Key words:** *Cyber revolution, Cultural Revolution, Pragmatic order, Development, Inclusive growth, Sustenance.*

### **Cyber Space: A Site of Struggle and Release**

The advent of postmodernism with technological revolution has brought an unprecedented change in all walks of human existence by leaving all cultural concerns far behind. Changes brought in by the technological inventions, are phenomenologically apparent in various spheres of the postmodernist life style. Technological advances have affected our lives to an extent that living without technology appears like living in a world devoid of energy and vibrancies. We depend so much on technology that most of our actions appear to be guided and controlled by this force. Since technology has become a storehouse of all sorts of information, we have become enslaved. We live in a cyber world where **mail ids but not names, cabins but not open spaces have become our identity markers.** Geographical

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spaces have started shrinking and cyber space instead has expanded. Cyber space, once the virtual world has become a real world of simulation and hyper reality where the difference between the private and public blend singularly in one word ‘cyber’ itself.

The word "cyberspace", is derived from *cybernetics* and *space*. It was first coined by science fiction novelist and seminal cyberpunk author William Gibson in one of his stories named "Burning Chrome". It was later popularized by Gibson’s novel *Neuromancer* (1984). The portion of *Neuromancer* cited in this respect is usually the following:

Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding.

What Gibson wrote in his science fiction has today become a reality. Cyber space has become the real space which comprises room for computers, i-pads, smart phones, tablets and data cards. Time has come to evaluate the progress that we have made because of the cyber space. Cyber space today is seen as a great blessing and facilitator in a variety of ways. Life has become faster than ever, even better in terms of information flow, better and cheaper communication, if compared with older ways of snail mail. It is an electronic age where e-mail, e-commerce, e-services, etc. have become popular. But it is the high time to ask ourselves **whether such facilities have enhanced the quality of life, human values and preferences**. Moreover, excessive dependence on technology has posed serious threats to our lives, which according to Indian beliefs are granted to us after much penance. It has further raised debates as how to survive and sustain in this fast-changing world, which many of us prefer to call developed. We have to understand the difference between growth and development.

The lexeme ‘Cyber’ connotes the technological plane in its abstraction: in ordinary life we are practically unconscious of the technological reality of objects. Yet this abstraction is profoundly real: **it is what governs the radical transformations of our ecologically driven environment**. It is even the most concrete aspects of the objects for technological development is synonymous with objective structural evolution. In the strictest sense, **what happens to the object in the technological sphere is essential, whereas what happens to it**

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**in the psychological or sociological sphere of needs and practices is inessential.** The discourse of psychology or sociology continually refers to the object as apprehended at a more consistent level, a level unrelated to any individual or collective discourse, namely the supposed level of technological language. It is starting from this language, from this consistency of the technical model, that we can reach an understanding of what happens to objects by virtue of their being produced and consumed, possessed and personalized which with all complicity entail deeply upon the construction of ideology and identity.

Technology has bettered our lives, no doubt, but the need is to understand whether we are conscientiously using these facilities. Change has always been welcomed in all ages. But we cannot deny the fact that while ways of communication have become faster, comprehension and intelligibility have become cumbersome. **The craze for fastness has enabled everyone to keep pace with the changing world, leading us to depend on genetically modified food, mineral water, iodized salt, pesticide-bred vegetables, adulterated sweets and various means of artificial life.** What many of us call development is simply a sort of transformation of older ways. None of us will disagree that various facilities like electronic mail, short message service, chats are simply the advanced versions of telegraphic language. In earlier days while the mention of the arrival of telegram used to create fear and tension, **we have been able to accommodate nowadays with fear, tension and joy with equanimity, thanks to the cyber age.**

People of Cyber age have become conscious of their cyber identity to a level that their day breaks with technology and most of them prefer to check their mails even before going to bed. This is much, in addition to their being on cyber space throughout the day. While for jobs related to data entry and online transactions, being chipped in with the computers seems relevant, other jobs which can be performed manually too are not an exception to this necessity. The growing popularity of cyber cafes as of telephone booths till a few years back attests to people's longing for cyber space. Workplaces have become cozier, colorful, musical and vibrant and attendances and presence of employees too have increased drastically. People seem to be multi-purpose and multi-coloured. Distances have shortened because of humans' presence on cyber space from any corner of the world. Workaholic professionals are seen carrying their laptops or tablet PCs even on their holidays and on board too. Modes of transport also witness over-enthusiastic people engrossed in charting out online business

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transactions and many with necks taut either in watching movies or children playing online games throughout the journey. All such activities may appear disturbance to puritans while for netizens or cyber citizens, these are the new ways of life.

Cyber space has facilitated life to an extent where the **fast communication betrays the standards of language wherein meaning lies more in sender's ideation than in the receiver's comprehension**. This happens because of the **differing backgrounds and lack of exposure** of the two parties concerned. Cyber space has gained immense popularity among school and college students who consider it Elysium where manna seems to drop in every moment. The mushrooming growth of professional institutes with lucrative admission offers-- providing free laptops and a Wi-Fi campus network have tempted the young minds to an extent that they not only have started living in a virtual world but have also started thinking virtually. These youngsters get puffed up with a new superciliousness to conquer the new world with innumerable friends. Driven with uncontrollable desire, they continue to chat, post, upload photos, and download movies. While copying and posting have become ordinary affairs, approaching even distinguished people for getting a favour of one kind or the other too doesn't seem inappropriate or unbecoming.

Cyber space today **symbolizes identity**. It is not an exaggeration to call cyber space a sort of **social security cover**, which covers and uncovers everything. It unveils all sorts of secrets, cries and offers consolations and suggestions in gratis. Many of us, though familiar with electronic mail, chats and sms, as discussed earlier are often considered outdated in case we do not have a Google talk, Skype or most popular Face book account. But having an account alone doesn't serve the purpose unless one has numberless friends to post as many messages as possible, upload umpteen number of photographs and also keep on accepting or rejecting endless number of friend requests. The sites in question are called **social networking sites**, which have substituted friendship by networking. Sanctity of any sort seems to be a matter of far cry since fake ids and smiley icons are bent upon humbugging even the bright and mighty ones. Is it not a matter of surprise to surmise a host of friends who befriend many and also beguile and abandon them with the same pace? Friendship, as called a sheltering tree by a famous romantic poet, has become quite obsolete. Friends made on cyber space occupy no space in real lives since it is impossible for humans to have hundreds and thousands of friends and to remain loyal to all of them not only in letters but also in spirits.

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The craze for Cyber space has given rise to unnecessary competitions especially among youngsters who often mistake their Face book account as face value account. As such sites do not have any entry or registration fee, every individual devoid of his age or status has a crush for online friends. While many entrants to cyber world find plethora of fun and entertainment in the beginning, they get weary after some months. As time passes, considerate ones often become disillusioned while the young and amateurs continue to be fascinated by this magical device. The youngsters tend to consider Face book as their personal bulletin boards and try to promote most of their hidden talents through it. Some of them start treating it as their diaries and jot down their aggrieved and injured feelings. Cases of many loves longed for and lost forever on cyber space are quite common. The smiley icons most often disappear from cyber space the moment identity gets investigated. Youngsters also tend to develop rivalry and jealousy against many of their online friends. While the seeds of discontent and jealousy are deep-rooted in humans, the role of cyber space in **promoting and propagating their minds** cannot be ruled out. The aforementioned discourse underlies the fact that the virtual or the cyber space entails deeply upon almost all aspects of human existence. It does not only alter reality and its modes of representation in the form of ‘simulacrum’ but also does underline the features of virtue and morality.

There is no wonder to find netizens arriving at immature statements which are neither syllogistic nor pragmatic. Communications on Cyber space do not follow the ‘validity claims’ as has been propounded by Habermas. Habermas in his book *On the Pragmatics of Communication* is of the view that anyone acting communicatively must raise the following validity claims:

- a. Uttering something intelligibly
- b. Giving(the hearer) something to understand
- c. Making herself thereby understandable, and
- d. Coming to understanding with another person

If we analyze the way people most often communicate on the tools of cyber space, we find that **the sender and the receiver most of the time fail to reach understanding because of their non-conforming to validity claims**. It has also been discovered that many novice users on Face book, Orkut, Skype or other sites often try to create pity or sympathy by uploading the pictures of the deprived or the destitute. True, we might have become callous or



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indifferent towards our responsibilities to the rejects of the society but to say that those who most often try to initiate such humanitarian drives are compassionate, is often doubtful.

Spreading consciousness through cyber space may bring rich dividends in elite societies but not in rural populace where darkness reigns supreme. For people in such areas, it would perhaps take many more decades to get relieved from heat during summer and longing for blowers and heaters during winter. While providing facilities require resources, the longings even of rural people cannot be written off. Ambition makes inroads in everyone's hearts. Portraying the pictures of such deprived people on cyber space then seems to be a big joke which these victims do not deserve. Newspapers reports about the murder of parents by their children simply for a cell phone, do not thus, seem hyperbolic. These are rather the results of the suppressed desire crushed by acute poverty and lack of opportunity. But taken as a whole, such cases represent **identity at stake because of the victim's maladjustment in a cyber space.**

Cyber space has led to a greater divide among people. Society seems to be divided and we have not been able to bridge the gap between the have and the have-nots. **The need is to find out how can we think of development and inclusive growth when all sections of society are not represented equally.** The **growing imbalance** has resulted because of man's excessive desire to have all amenities at his command. As a result, many of us resort to adopting shorter ways to attain greater goals. Who will understand the anxiety of the helpless parents unable to provide children with advanced technical gadgets to compete in the rat race? We will also have to ensure that the cyber world doesn't interfere with the environment around us. Doubtless to say that the cyber world will create a paperless office and hence green world, but have we really devised methods to get rid off the electronic waste. Changing cells, computers, pagers, laptops and other gadgets have become the ways of everyday life. Everyone is cognizant of the fact that cassettes, floppy disks, CDs, which once were once so popular, appear discarded by developed gadgets.

The startling growth in technological inventions has not only **changed the entire cultural outfit of the world but it has also transformed the epistemic realities of the pragmatic order by overhauling the crest of power politics.** Cyber space, a form of technological gizmos, on prima facie, represents **a domain of liberation and emancipation** which may delineate the underlying principles of secularism and democracy, which has also been espoused by Walter Benjamin, a Frankfurt School of Philosopher, but a close examination of

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the form, nature, and function of the technological revolution in the form of cybernetics exemplifies the fact that **it perpetuates the complex process of power politics, hegemony, and class struggle**, as propounded by Habermas. Cyber space, thus, represents a chimera and a dialectics which can further be explained by its relationship with sustainable development, a popular cliché of the contemporary reality. The synchronic realities of development reveal the condition of mere economic and technological advancement through liberalization, privatization, and globalization which have fundamentally focused upon the condition of economic growth. The condition of class struggle has not only shaken the foundation of the economic realities but it has also affected the social and cultural rubric of the present day order. All aspects of culture from thoughts to things and from sign to signification have gone under an uncontrollable change with the arrival of the postmodernist –cyber space reality. Similarly, the ecological and climatic conditions have also experienced remarkable shifts, which are indeed hostile, uncondusive and contentious. Hence, sustainable development is inextricably intertwined with the complex texture of social, economic, cultural and political realities of the glocal contemporary order. Further, it is amply clear that the phenomenon of cyber space represents an axis of unresolved paradoxes and dialectics which do not have any propositional reconciliation.

Cyber space has benefitted users to try their hands at various literary genres. One can find various links to literary websites where one can upload one's creations. This has given rise to innumerable poets and creative writers practising their talents without any restriction. Of course, we have become accustomed to living in a paradise where all of us are poets, philosophers and thinkers. Creativity seems to be on the rise, no doubt, but the evaluation of creativity is doubtful. While many of us seek satisfaction with our self-made world where the writer and the reader dwell in one, there are others who display their creativity by hacking and cracking for their vested interests. They know that the cyber world has all sorts of remedies---it not only creates worms, viruses, spams but also supplies anti-viruses just to ensure that no new knowledge comes free.

E-mails, which, many of us consider to be an informal medium of communication, is growing at such a speed that many organizations prefer it to printed documents. While its frequent use for official purposes may help in providing a sustainable development by discarding the use of paper, many Orthodox companies still stick to paper principle. The flexible salutation, inadequate closing and less official language of e-mail infuriates many since they consider

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the treatment of such medium as impolite and informal. They attach due importance to the subtlety of language and not to communication. But majority of people consider e-mail to faster, safer and eco-friendly medium of communication. It is quite significant to quote Hale and Scanlon who say: “A well-written electronic missive gets to the point quickly, with evocative words, short graphs, and plenty of white space. Spelling and punctuation are loose and playful. (No one reads e-mails with red pen in hand).”

Likewise, the chatting facility on web encourages people to converse with friends or relatives online from any corner of the world. But at times it also creates hassles. Chat users often feel free to break all boundaries of language, of time and also of ethics. One of my friends narrated an incident how he sent adverse remarks against his boss under the impression that he was unburdening himself before his friend. Actually while he was chatting with his friend, his boss also became online and wanted certain clarification about somebody. In course of entertaining both his friend and his boss, the texts got over-lapped. The message intended for his friend went to his boss and this created a ruckus for him. Since chat is an informal medium, any communication (even official) may get affected and afflict us forever. Amateurs are often seen entering chat rooms to find kindred hearts longing for outlet of one kind or the other.

Our infatuation with cyber world has made us believe that living without it is accursed. But there are psychological advantages and disadvantages involved in it as well. Many people, who are either, shy or introvert by nature can get extremely influenced by cyber world’s facility of photo-albums, user’s profile and many other temptations. They always find someone or the other on cyber world to share their solitariness and drive away their drabness by becoming friends and offering them pastures. Majority of cyber citizens find Cyber space a platform to open up and unveil their feelings. They develop camaraderie, dissipate too but in the long run get disillusioned because of the flippant nature of online friends. It is no wonder to find many crazy hearts often ending up in disheartened, defeated and dejected lovers. Such experiences often enable them to post their frustrations on cyber space. While this may provide them with a cathartic effect, it hangs on others like Damocles’ sword. The dejected lot often takes to unscrupulous ways and at times takes extreme steps too. Cyber space, being unrestricted and uncontrolled impels these despair- driven techno-familiar fellows to create fake identities and harass their once favourite friends or partners and poison their lives. While strangers on cyberspace often ask about age, location, gender and other



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things, it is rather difficult to believe what the other party says. In fact, many online chatters are most often false and their being on cyber space is just a game for fun and entertainment where speaking lie is a part of the game. David Crystal quotes Patricia Wallace who says: ‘The fact that it is easy to lie and get away with it--- as long as we can live with our own deceptions and the harm they may cause others ---is a significant feature of the internet’. On occasions, cases of unwarranted acts in the forms of tampered photos or distorted images have also been noticed on cyber space. While such hasty and undesirable acts are results of impatience, there seems to be no respite and recuperation or damage control since cyber world keeps record of all our activities. In addition, cyber laws can prove to be disastrous to offenders too.

Cyber space, because of its multi-purpose function in the form of fast delivery of communication joining us to the World Wide Web has made the tasks of business world easier, provided the users maintain a certain amount of caution and control. While it can prove to be an asset to cultural unification, it at times creates conflict because of the user’s tendency of ethnocentricity. The flexible and informal nature of e-documents poses impediments at times. In our effort to send information fast, most often compromises in the name of grammar and lexicon are being made. Words are often mis-spelt not because of user’s ignorance but because of his hurried response. At times, because of the lack of awareness, replies are sent to unintended destinations too. Many people often forward the same greetings or quotes to various destinations, even without bothering about the effect it will have on the recipients. While on festive occasions, one greeting (if forwarded) may suit everyone’s requirement, it cannot work on all occasions. On the other hand, it also may be considered as our lethargic and callous attitude. Cyber space, along with its advantages has brought many disadvantages as well.

There is no denying the fact that cyber space because of its requirement of communicating more through signs, symbols, acronyms and clippings allows inventiveness, it has made language use very cumbersome and clumsy. There seems no harm in being innovative but it poses problems to new users whose temptations towards this once- forbidden fruit prove sour. Actually, the proliferation of technical gadgets at times generates a new curiosity even among those who are often resistant to change. As individuals with the license and liberty to invent believe in new coinages, their penchant often lands others in trouble. This happens because of the lack of consensus and validity claims among users of cyber space as regards their implied

connotations to a particular coinage. David Crystal makes a mention of words such as spoofing, trolling, lurking, spamming, flaming etc. A spoof is a message whose authenticity is doubtful. Trolling is an act of sending messages to others just to irritate people. Lurking is a refusal to communicate. Lurkers most often become online just to read messages and get amused. Such people seem to be guided by some emptiness or they rather suffer from some inferiority complex. Spamming is the sending of unwanted message usually of big size. Flaming, as the name suggests, is a sort of aggressive behaviour while chatting but it is a verbal dueling.

Cyber space, as many scholars observe, has made the world a global village. But it would perhaps be too early to say that the world has been united. David Crystal rightly asks if the world has become a global village, the dialect too should be common. He asks: ‘What are the shared features of a language which give the world community of users their sense of identity?’ And, if we cannot discern any unifying dialect or language, or a trend towards such a unity, we need to ask ourselves if this global village is more than media fiction.’ The use of cyber space by majority of people has led to a linguistic revolution. While it has popularized many new acronyms being considered words, it may pose problem to new users because of their lack of awareness and their own ways of interpretation. The damage being posed by the inventiveness of Netspeak is being caused to the world of writing where variant spellings and acronyms, most often known only to the user create havoc to the receivers. We can have a look at some of the innovative acronyms longing for acceptability among users:

<b>Acronyms</b>	<b>User’s intended meaning</b>	<b>Receiver’s interpretation</b>
sms:	short message service	see me soon
cul:	call you later	see you later
cut:	see you tonight	see you tonight/today/tomorrow
Btm:	bye till morning	before tomorrow morning
2dayz news:	today	two days’ news
btn:	between	beaten
b <sup>4</sup> dinner:	Before dinner	be for the dinner
btbt:	been there, done that	bye till dinner tonight
f2t:	free to talk	feel to talk
mmyt:	mail me your thoughts	make me your type

These are only a few examples. Our young brigade, because of their spending unlimited time is bent on coining new words with their inventive and innovative spelling every day. While expressions such as gr8(great), asap ( as soon as please), nite(night), ur(your), hru( how are

you), lolol( laughing out loudly etc. have become common usage, their appearance in examination papers and other forms of writing most often seems challenging. Many youngsters find it difficult to draft a good letter / application because of their indulgence in cyber world and their over stay on cyber space. Salutations in e-mails, chats and other forms seem to subtly substitute the earlier courtesies and abruptness appears to be a part of life.

Thus, we find that cyber space has become a reality. Living without cyber space is a sort of existential crisis. But we have to understand that freedom of choice cannot ensure the authenticity of choice for everyone. We have to find alternative ways to live and to learn but not to unlearn. As stakeholders in the present day global world, we have our responsibilities galore to discharge. It has to be accepted that we cannot live without technology and cyber space. But as cybercitizens, we have to follow certain cyber ethics. While children are found more adaptable to any situation, they have to be trained properly to use cyber space and also to follow certain guidelines. Students can be encouraged to visit websites which can enrich their knowledge of philosophy, religion, culture in addition to advances in science and technology. The maximum use of Cyber space can be made fruitful by learning things relevant to their career growth and enhancement of skills. There is no dearth of websites that provide trainings and tips for interviews, oral presentation and also life skills. Visiting cyber rooms and experimenting with language is not the only use of Internet. It has to be understood that language has a variety of purposes apart from communication and hence it must be employed and exercised according to the context as has been propagated by poststructuralists. The difference between formality versus informality, dynamic versus frozen along with some cultural aspects, needs to be addressed with discernality and linguistic unequivocality. Cyber space, as it has become a living reality; need not be confused with the real space or the real world. The experimentation in terms of language and culture cannot be validated unless the linguists have developed a cyber dictionary and cultural critics approved of new canons making inroads in human lives. We have also to evolve alternative ways to live in a mutually coherent and sustainable world so that our coming generations do not tread us down and remind us of what T.S.Eliot in his masterpiece *The Waste Land* (1922) hinted at;

Here is no water but only rock  
Rock and no water and the sandy road  
The road winding above among the mountains  
Which are mountains of rock without water. (331-34)

What Eliot anticipated in 1922 is still haunting mankind like an exorcist. The famous Booker Prize winner, Aravind Adiga, too has portrayed the same panorama of futility and anarchy resulting from the cut-throat, crass-commercial contemporary world in both *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*. *The White Tiger* laments the corrosive world order where the victim becomes the master by rebutting the established order, which indeed, divulges Hegelian schema of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Moreover, *Last Man in Tower* delineates the uncanny fact about the nature and function of power politics and the construction of an order or a structure. Further, Adiga stands in opposition to the myopic form of development because it creates differences and divisions in society. He, however, believes that it is the harmonious order that may create a sustainable and livable world. Sustenance in life, after all, hinges on the poles of struggle and release but release has to be for greater common good, which is not possible without sustainable development.

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