

PRIVACY IN THE DIGITAL ERA: MYTHS AND REALITIES

A few months ago, an analytics firm Cambridge Analytica made headlines for being accused of harvesting facebook data of close to a million users in USA for use by election campaigns of a political party. The incident shocked the world out of the deceptive idea of privacy in a digital world. It showed how precarious the idea of privacy has become in a digital world.

In the foregoing pages, we will discuss the emergence of idea of privacy, the pervasiveness of digital technology in our lives and how the technology changes the notion of privacy. Further, it would also be discussed how there is divergence between the reality and prevalent ideas (myths) about privacy in today's tech-hungry world. The impact

of such realities would be analyzed thus.

The 'modern age' that was ushered in, by Industrial revolution, French revolution and Enlightenment in Europe had given new ideas about human life. The ideals of humanism, reason, progress replaced the earlier ~~norms~~ dogmas of middle ages. These ideals were sought to be attained by vesting in humans, certain rights viz - life, liberty and property. These natural rights have become the sine qua non for any modern democratic state.

Privacy as an inalienable human right derives from the right to life and liberty as was propounded by Supreme Court of India a while ago. This is because, a dignified life means right to self-possession. Self-possession can manifest in right to have control over one's body, action,

or even in information concerning oneself. Privacy is related to this idea of self-possession

Privacy can simply be described as a right to be left alone. This means one's personal information, personal preferences, relations with other individuals, one's religion or faith, sexual preferences, bodily information (finger prints) is one's own concern. No other individual or state can force one to share these data.

Privacy as a human right is completely modern concern. The medieval times had no notion of human rights or privacy as a right for everyone. Today, it has become a hot potato for discussions on human rights, identity, state power etc. This has to be seen in the context of the digital revolution of recent decades.

Digital Revolution has invaded almost every thinkable aspect of our

lives. Our identity is partly defined by the presence on social media. Our interactions are becoming digital. The services we seek in everyday life are becoming digital be it, buying a dress, booking a taxi, doctor's appointment, banking services, entertainment and so on. Digital world is not just a representation of our experiences. DIGITAL world is EXPERIENCE ITSELF.

The idea of privacy without digital world would be much simpler. The digital revolution has complicated it. While on the one hand Internet seems to be providing anonymity, on the other hand it has the potential to invade our private spaces. This is the reason why sometimes, ~~the~~ digital technologies deceive us into ~~the~~ believing that they enhance our private and independent space.

BEHIND THE SMOKE SCREEN: MYTH VS REALITY

Digital media allows people to communicate without revealing their true identity. The anonymity offered is unprecedented. ~~is~~ This anonymity creates a myth of increased private space and expansion of freedom to express. This private space is actually only a bubble because digital presence is bound to leave footprints. In a scenario of weak data protection, digital firms can profile us in myriad ways using the things we buy, the videos we watch, people we connect with. Digital profiling seems harmless at first but it has both ethical and material issues. e-commerce companies through profiling can expand this market. Governments can intrude into private lives. The Cambridge analytica case is typical example where a few seemingly harmless questions asked were used to find people's personality and then influence them through the social media.

If we combine digital media with technologies like face recognition, voice recognition which have now matured enough, there are real possibilities of real time identification of people at public places. Such technologies can be misused by those in power.

~~The anonymity~~
Another myth that prevails regarding privacy is that it can somehow be absolutely protected. In a digital era, technologies work on the basis of data. Therefore there is no such thing as a complete privacy in digital world. Firstly, the networks, servers through which our data pass/stored are not immune to cyber crime. The incidents like leakage hacking of iCloud have shown that privacy is dangerously placed. Second, what needs to be understood is that users of digital media cannot escape, sharing data while accessing online services. Digital era has brought

unprecedented efficiency, speed and convincance to businesses, users and governments. Therefore, Right to privacy should be about balancing the gains of digital revolution with the rights of citizens.

Given the push being given to Artificial Intelligence and big data world over, we need to come to terms with the fact that these technologies breathe data. They will inevitably compromise privacy. ~~The myths of This~~ privacy thus is an irreversible development ~~the~~ ~~across~~ all the sectors, from healthcare to insurance, from finance to agriculture, ~~from~~ and even government will be using these data hungry technologies. They hold potential for unprecedented growth and productivity.

Thus we need to be pragmatic. Data protection laws need to be formulated. Recently EU has unveiled its data protection law that makes companies change the

way they collect and process user data. Informed consent and limited use have been made part of the law. India has also taken initial steps by forming a committee under B.N. Srikrishna which recently released a white paper on the same

while we may be tempted to see an eternal fight between goals of privacy and digital innovation, but the reality is not so. The two are mutually dependent. Digital Innovation cannot be sustainable if users are not able to trust companies with their data. The better we are able to ensure reasonable data protection, the better would be future of digital innovation.

Apart from this, the state has to act as protector of the fundamental right to privacy. But we have to come to terms with the reality that state

itself is going to ~~to a~~ ~~to~~ collect and process data of citizens. Thus projects like Aadhar would have to be carried out keeping privacy considerations in mind. People should not be profiled based on the transactions they carry out using Aadhar.

Finally, some criminal elements may misuse the anonymity offered by digital media. This misuse should not be conflated with right to privacy.

Recently it was found out that Bitcoin was used for financial transactions by Russian officials to meddle in US elections. This shows the threat to national security from such technologies. Bitcoin has been used for drug trafficking, fraud etc. Thus privacy has to be balanced with considerations of national security.

In conclusion, we can say that, consciousness of right to privacy increasing

is a part of the process of digital revolution. With digital media invading our private spaces, we have been made aware of the value of privacy. Individuals, communities, businesses and governments should come together to respect and protect privacy even while realising the realities of privacy in a digital era.

What will it take to make gender equality the norm, not the exception?

Jairam, an all woman crew circumnavigated the globe.... India got first full time ~~is~~ female defence minister.... New Zealand PM gives birth while in office... the stories of Rani ~~the~~ Lakshmi Bai.... of Shilpa Lai Holkar... of Razi Sultana....

These events make news because they are EXCEPTIONS. The more normal ones.... of female foeticide, of gender wage gaps... of acid attacks... of rape culture, no longer catch the eye because we have been DESENSITIZED to these events.

Gender Inequality has proved to be most stubborn of all inequalities. It has persisted across time and space. From hunting and gathering bands to today's information age. ~~From~~ The reason why it has

proved so difficult to overcome is because it often uses BIOLOGY AS A DEFENCE to justify the difference in power, prestige, wealth between men and women. But the biology argument stands on weak ground. Had physical strength been only a reason for giving low status to women, ~~what~~ how do we explain the exclusion of women from fields of politics, intellectual pursuits for centuries? Today, it stands has been established that gender inequality is more about cultural interpretations rather than biological differences.

In spite of some spectacular transformations in terms of rights and entitlements for women, over the last century, gender the war against gender inequality ~~has~~ is still to be won. It has to be won, not just because of intrinsic value of equality but also because

of its impact on economy, society, polity of the world. We need to make ~~it~~ ^{so} gender equality the norm rather than exception by striking at the core of this problem instead of superficial solutions

A SURVEY OF CURRENT STATE OF GENDER INEQUALITY

For centuries women were relegated to private sphere of life through rigidly defined gender roles whereby men took care of production while women were for reproduction and childcare. Today women are venturing out for paid work in increasing numbers. But it has been observed that they ~~of~~ face gender inequality even in employment. According to Pew research, the gender wage gap still stand at 18% in USA. A part of wage gap is explained by lack of adequate education, and segregation

of women in low paying jobs. But there is still an unexplained part of wage gap which unfortunately has to be attributed to gender discrimination at workplace.

Women also face challenge of double work i.e. paid work along with house work. Though gender roles are changing, but housework is still seen as concern of women only. Additionally this work is unpaid and devalued. At workplace women face challenge of sexual violence. The Hollywood sexual harassment scandals have shown how gender inequality is affecting even women with higher status, in liberal societies like USA.

Another area of discrimination is health and education: Female children have to lesser survival rates in societies like India due to sex selective abortions & neglect during childhood.

In India child sex ratio has declined from 927 in 2001 to 919 in 2011. The education literacy levels are 65% among women and 82% among men. Child marriages affect girl children by destroying their opportunities of good health, education, employment. Women don't even have control over their reproductive choices due to son-preference,

The issue of agency is very crucial as highlighted by Amartya Sen. Women should have agency in taking decisions for themselves. Here, the structures of patriarchy complicates the matter. The culture socialises women from childhood to prioritise well-being of family, children over their own wishes. Our culture glorifies the values of chastity, loyalty to husband due to which women themselves become a party to their own oppression. They internalise the

patriarchy. This makes gender inequality very difficult to eradicate because women themselves devalue their own well-being. Internalisation of patriarchy manifests in son-preference. As Economic Survey 2018-19 says, son-preference is a cultural problem which cannot be solved by merely economic growth. ~~It needs~~

The culture and attitudes towards women have led to another problem of violence against women—both at home and in public places. ~~The~~ domestic violence, rape, acid attacks, child rape, all are a manifestation of the pervasive gender inequality which leads men to think they can exert ~~best~~ power over women as a right.

Gender Inequality has various consequences, which are only beginning to be understood.

THE COST OF GENDER INEQUALITY

The foremost impact of gender inequality is on the rights of dignified life of women. As Simon de Beauvoir had said women are relegated as THE SECOND SEX. The values of equality, justice, dignity of life which are trumpeted by liberal democracies RING HOLLOW when we realise the extent of inequality that still exists between men and women.

Gender inequality affects economy as the potential of women is not fully utilised and the society loses valuable human resource. It also indirectly affects men, because ~~issue~~ health of women translates to health of their children. According to a UN study, 44% of malnutrition in Indian children can be explained by factors related to mothers' health. It also affects their

education and overall development levels. Gender Inequality has spawned a whole bunch of crimes in society like rape, domestic violence etc.

Most importantly, gender inequality ~~is~~ REPRODUCES ITSELF. Thus we need to strike at the root of the problem and not just its manifest symptoms.

MAKING GENDER ~~IN~~EQUALITY A NORM

Sawn of modern era brought to us the new ideas of equality, liberty & justice. These ideas have been basis of demand for gender equality. Today democratic state have enforced equality of opportunity for men and women in various fields of life - education, health, employment, political participation and so on. Now specific Affirmative action has been initiated in countries like India in the form of initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Stand Up India, Nai Roshni, TREAS etc

But we have seen, ~~the~~ previously that these initiatives have only succeeded in creating exceptions, not a norm. We have seen that the reason gender inequality has been a norm lies in our social structures (family, gender-roles), our culture and our religion. These have prevented realisation of gender equality.

Until cultural attitudes towards working women do not improve, our female labour participation will go on decreasing with increasing wealth ^{income} of households. Until, our religion and culture continue to sanction double sexual standards for men and women, men will continue to control sexuality of women. Thus women's right to choose partner is hampered by moral sanctions of society. ~~the~~

Childcare should be a shared responsibility of husband and wife. ~~and~~ without this, women's participation in paid work is meaningless. For example maternity Benefits Act gives paid leave to mothers, but it will only adversely affect their chances of employment as employers would be reluctant to employ women. Such laws should be gender-neutral to encourage paternity leaves.

Our Education system should be appropriately structured to integrate values of gender equality. More mingling of students from opposite sex would inculcate empathy, understanding and respect rather than enforcing segregation of male and female students. The content of education can be changed to include specific education on gender relations.

Making gender equality a norm cannot be achieved at a

single stroke. It has to be done through patient and tedious process of ~~do~~ bringing attitudinal changes and changes in value systems. The initiatives of providing equal opportunities should continue, but we need to introspect and find deeper reasons for gender inequality. ~~dismantling~~ We have to ~~not~~ make every individual realise that gender equality is important not just for its intrinsic value but to overcome challenge of poverty, malnutrition, and sustainability.